

AN ANALYSIS OF LITERARY CANON FORMATION  
THROUGH THE CASE OF MANDATORY LITERARY READINGS SELECTION  
IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN  
MACEDONIA

by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **AN ANALYSIS OF LITERARY CANON FORMATION THROUGH THE CASE OF MANDATORY LITERARY READINGS SELECTION IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MACEDONIA**

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**Keywords:** literary canon, canon formation, literary sociology, literature education,  
curricular canon

This thesis tries to analyze the process of literary canon formation in terms of literary theoretical and sociological frameworks and factors through the study of the formation of the mandatory readings list for Macedonian primary and secondary schools' Macedonian literature courses. By looking at the various shifts in reading selection criteria qualitatively and chronologically, from 1947 Yugoslavia to present day Macedonia, I have tried to show that a variety of social, political, and intellectual factors influence the selection criteria and priorities that go into forming a literary canon.

## ÖZET

### MAKEDONYA'DA İLKÖĞRETİM OKULLARI VE LİSELERDE ZORUNLU EDEBİ OKUMA SEÇİMİ YOLUYLA EDEBİ KANUN OLUŞTURULMASI ANALİZİ

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**Anahtar Kelimeler:** edebi kanun, kanun oluşturma, edebi sosyoloji, edebiyat eğitimi,  
müfredat kanunu

Bu tez, edebi kanun oluşum sürecini, edebi teori ve sosyolojik çerçeveler ve etmenler açısından, Makedon ilköğretim okulları ve liselerde, Makedon edebiyatı derslerinin zorunlu okuma listelerini inceleyerek analiz etmeye çalışır. 1947 Yugoslavya'sından günümüz Makedonya'sına kadar, okuma seçim kriterlerinin niteliksel ve kronolojik değişimlerine bakarak çeşitli sosyal, politik ve entelektüel faktörlerin, edebi kanunu oluşturacak seçim kriterlerini ve öncelikleri etkilediğini göstermeye çalıştım.

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Thesis writing is not a very pleasant process. Despite the ‘academic curiosity’ that ideally would precede and surround the process, students lose hair, develop gastritis, flirt with depression... Thus it is very important to be surrounded by humans that make the process not only more bearable, but also fun; humans that help us to see the process as a challenge rather than a problem.

I was lucky to have been surrounded by such humans, and I would like to thank all of them at once: friends from my cohort, without whom the MA experience would have been incomparably more miserable, (especially the harbinger of the abyss, the sword of logic); friends from my extra-curricular life, whom I have shared deep connections and stories with, who put up with all my bitching about my curricular life, encouraged me to pursue academia on mornings on the Wissahiccon, and facilitated my thesis writing process (especially Tranko who helped me sleep well, and my Sufi sis, for years of being); my professors, and my jury in particular (prof. Sibel Irzik, my advisor, for always being kind, supportive, full of insights and ready to read something last minute; prof. Aleksandar Prokopiev, who not only supported and encouraged me in both my academic and creative production, but also came all the way from Macedonia to my thesis defense; and prof. Hulya Adak, for her positive energy and useful feedback throughout my MA); last and certainly not least, my family, who has always listened to and believed in me, and especially my Mother, for being a rock and, despite questioning the way I cut tomatoes, always supporting the big decisions I make in life. Additionally, I would like to thank Sumru Kucuka, who has been very kind and helpful in the nick of time.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The formation of literary canons has been the subject of active debate between and within literary circles. From Virgil Nemoianu's "almost mystical" description of the canon as an "ultimately unknown realm,"<sup>1</sup> to Bloom's somewhat humanistic definition of it as the "literary Art of Memory," and his technical definition as "a choice among texts struggling with one another for survival,"<sup>2</sup> the intrinsic fabric of the canon and its formation remain somewhat elusive. To speak of a canon in the first place requires clarification in terms of what canon one is referring to. There is a classical canon, there is a western canon, and there is a world literature canon which is one of the many sites where cultures and criteria compete for representation. One of the most debated topics surrounding the formation of literary canons is what criteria should be considered when selecting the included works.

The issue of selection criteria is rooted in the issue of representability – what should be included, and what should be excluded from the Canon, or *a* canon, a debate dubbed by Frese Witt as the "canon wars."<sup>3</sup> The importance of choosing selection criteria is in the idea that the criterion that 'wins' the canon wars would become the maxim for editing the canon. However, there is *of course* no agreement, and in fact, throughout this thesis, I hope to make it evident that no criterion alone is enough to account for the selection of the canon, or for normatively determining why people should read, or arguing what the purpose of literature is. In fact, as people read for many reasons, and the purpose of literature is as arguable as the purpose of anything else in this universe, so selecting a single criterion as superior or universal is unnecessarily restrictive and gives an incredibly enjoyable activity – reading – a rigid dimension in boxing it as a chore, that only gains value in relation to how it is executed.

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<sup>1</sup> Wendell V. Harris, "Aligning Curricular Canons with Academic Programs," *University of North Carolina Press* 24 (May 2000): 10.

<sup>2</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages*, 1st ed. (Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 17–20.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Ann Frese Witt, "Issues of the Canon: Introduction," *University of North Carolina Press* 24 (May 2000): 5.

When it comes to educational literary canons, the issue becomes further complicated. Assuming that on the university level literature departments are further specialized, primary and secondary school literature selection suffers the pressure of being the principal source for most students' introduction to literature. This means that schools are the principal spaces where students become acquainted with literature, where they accumulate cultural capital, and where they are supposed to develop their love for literature and roles as readers. Primary and secondary schools are assigned the role of disciplining and fashioning future adult human beings, or rather, in the context of a nation-state, future citizens.

The interest of this thesis is seeing how a literary canon is formulated, while reflecting how the passage of time, embedded with shifts in regimes and literary and intellectual currents, affects the formation and criteria for selection of the literary canon for primary and secondary schools. The particular case I will be paying attention to is the formation of literary canons, that is, the selection of mandatory literary readings, for primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Macedonia. Macedonia, except for being my home country, is an interesting choice for several reasons, including its turbulent political and social history of the last century, wherein national identities have shifted shapes to suit new state organizations, its ethnic diversity and multi-cultural character, as well as its dependency on external influences in curriculum formation. Firstly, I will be looking at the mutations of the assigned readings over the years. This means that I will be able to gain some perspective about how changes in governance and literary attitude have affected canon formation. My earliest document dates back to 1947, and my latest document is from 2008. At the same time, I have been given access to the currently underway revised reading list for primary schools; yet, this list is unofficial, and thus I was not authorized to openly discuss its content, but I may still allude to its general format, which I will do. This means that I will be able to compare Macedonia's literary curriculum in the context of Yugoslavia just after WWII, with Macedonia as a part of Yugoslavia in 1989, and in 1991 – the last published curriculum before Macedonia's declaration of independence. Followed by this are the revised curricula for secondary school enforced in 2001-2002, as well as the revised curricula for primary schools published in 2007-2008. Last is the aforementioned current revision of primary school mandatory readings (the high school list is not ready yet), which I will consider in terms of format and representability. What this variety means for my study is that I will be able to trace the varying intentions – from Marxist ideology and nation-building, to aesthetics

and individual development – throughout the regimes. While the Macedonian curriculum under Yugoslavia in 1947 included a great number of politically oriented texts (such as socialist content including the biographies of Tito, Lenin, and Stalin), works about national heroes, and a good deal of folk literature, the curriculum today has done away with most of these themes, and redirected its focus to a more national and Western curriculum. Through these lenses it becomes easier to speculate what a certain government at a given time, with varying global influences in the political and educational fields, opts to instill in its students.

To expand on the topic, I have divided the work into three chapters. The first chapter deals with defining the canon and discussing the various approaches to the criteria of its formation. This includes a theoretical discussion of both what academics in the field of literature have been debating – the criteria for selecting the canon – and a sociological overview based on Bourdieu’s *Distinction* of who determines the dominant literature in terms of social hierarchy. The first part of the chapter discusses the four most dominant rationales for canon formation – moral, traditional, aesthetic, and cultural – along with their proponents and criticisms, wherein I try to show that these four criteria are not mutually exclusive or uniquely sufficient for approaching canon formation or literature in general. I pay the most attention to the most popular criteria currently, the aesthetic and the cultural. Still, even when trying to make sure each criterion is defined as unique, the interconnections among the criteria keep resurfacing and showing their innate connections. For instance, while the proponents of the culturalist approach reject moralist reasoning for canon selection, one of the main goals of culturalist criteria is teaching inter-cultural tolerance, and tolerance in itself is a sort of moral virtue. The aesthetic approach, on the other hand, as presented by Bloom, selects books on the basis of a certain “strangeness” which has a universalizing effect in making the reader feel at home in a strange land, and a stranger at home.<sup>4</sup> The drive at the core of the culturalist approach, if we were to return to its conception by Goethe, is in fact very similar. Goethe’s notion of “Weltliteratur” is rooted in the belief that reading literature from different cultures would build the road for universal human unification, that readers would overcome their differences through the recognition of their similarities with other humans of the world.<sup>5</sup> So in this respect, the cultural criteria and the aesthetic criteria both aim at the selected works being endowed with a sort of universalizing characteristic, even though present

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<sup>4</sup> Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Frese Witt, "Art the Canon Wars Over? Rethinking Great Books," 59.

day culturalists are more focused on the specificity of representation of marginalized and underrepresented groups. My point in both cases is that although the proponents of the different criteria try to establish their individual merits, strict distinctions are not applicable.

Furthermore, the following chapters elucidate the fact that at least in terms of educational literary canons, no approach can be ignored, and that the approaches change as the priorities of educational institutions in the contexts of governments change. Additionally, the second chapter shows that when it comes to constructing curricula for these early educational phases, various aims and considerations go into what gets included in the literary canon. The school is considered not only the pupil's primary source for cultural capital and initial meeting point with literature, but also a secondary site of moral and social discipline (secondary to the family), and it is held accountable for the fashioning of qualified individuals and members of a society.

The second part of the first chapter which draws on Bourdieu's social analysis, aims at exploring the social and political dimension of intellectual hegemony within a given society. Matters such as who determines the standards for taste are explored, with reference to Bourdieu's attempt to prove that taste is almost entirely based on a person's *habitus*. This section also explores the question of how a certain culture becomes legitimate – does a culture become dominant because it is chosen by the dominant class, or is it chosen by the dominant class because it is legitimate? (A question on the possibility of the 'objective' value of aesthetic criteria.) Furthermore, the role of schools in maintaining the social hierarchy is explored in terms of Bourdieu's criticisms of how schools rather than being a space for evening out the playing field, reinforce real class differences by first, redirecting students' aspirations based on their social backgrounds, and second, by educating students in the culture of the dominant class.<sup>6</sup> In the later chapters, which explore the position of educational institutions in Yugoslavia and currently in Macedonia, it can be seen that schools there, perhaps due to the socialist tradition, at least in terms of goals emphasize the importance of the primary and secondary educational institutions in being a source for cultural capital for the students. In other words, schools in Macedonia, at least on paper, have maintained a focus on "culturing" their pupils as evenly as possible. Of course, the dominant culture changes – there is a huge shift between the readings in 1947, which are mainly folk or ideology-laden

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<sup>6</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 25-26

literature, to the focus on classics and aesthetics in the more recent curricula. Still, the system in Macedonia itself is quite merit-based – pupils from all classes generally attend public schools (there are only a few private ones); secondary schools select students entirely based on their academic success (there is a hierarchy in the quality of various public high schools). Of course, here it can be argued that social background or habitus have a role in influencing the success of a student. Additionally, a recently implemented change made it so that primary school pupils must attend schools within their neighborhood or municipality. So in this context, if a certain neighborhood is impoverished and if the education accordingly in that particular school is neglected by government organs, and if within the student body there is a lack of aspiration due to social background and circumstances, certainly it can be said that these students are at a disadvantage for secondary school placement.

The second chapter is an overview of the reading lists of the curricula dated over the last sixty years. This part can be qualified as partially quantitative, as the overview of the readings is presented in terms of the number of texts which are Macedonian, Yugoslav, or belong to world literature. Still, I do attempt to briefly distinguish the kinds of texts that are assigned, with an emphasis on texts with ideological qualities and undertones, all the while paying attention to certain patterns in the selection of world literature, such as a pronounced inclusion of Russian literature during the socialist regime. This chapter is the most useful in recognizing the changes in the educational canon rooted in both the different forms of government and the development of educational and intellectual currents. Some clear patterns in this area are a significant decrease over time of socialist readings, folk literature, and Yugoslav literature. Much of this is replaced by Western literature, and Macedonian (and until 1991, Yugoslav) literature is basically taught alongside the literary movements in Western chronology. Furthermore, world literature becomes more internationally representative with time, going beyond the previously common Russian samples. This, too, can be attributed to the socialist connection – Russia in terms of state ideology was the closest to Yugoslavia in 1947. As Yugoslavia ‘branched out’ and eventually Macedonia became an independent capitalist nation-state, so the representability changed.

The more qualitative part of this chapter is based around the operative goals stated in the various syllabi as to what the purpose of the literature course is. These goals vary from providing the pupils with a moral foundation for being good citizens and developing the capability of reading with Marxist interpretation under Yugoslavia, to developing

emotional, intellectual, and social maturity, the capability of reading with scientific interpretation, and developing an identity as a member of the Macedonian community under Macedonia as an independent republic. There is a clear shift in the operative goals from ideological, affective goals, to more individual, and cognitive goals. This is another useful marker for determining the degree to which politics affect canon formation. Another area of influence is the change in education currents to focus more on the aesthetic and cultural values of literature, rather than the moral ones. The practical value of studying literature is maintained throughout the syllabi in different capacities. This is one of the places where it is not difficult to see that once again, the strict division of criteria is neither practical nor realistic.

The third chapter begins by going over some of the criticism and issues concerning the mandatory reading lists for primary and secondary education in Macedonia emphasized by literature specialists in recent years. These include a call for revision of the reading lists, with consideration to certain literary criteria (aesthetic, culturally representative, age-appropriate, historically representative, and so on), while at the same time addressing and accepting the conditions surrounding the development of contemporary youth, such as the unprecedented early-age visual stimulation that has come with technological advancements. Further, the chapter summarizes the interviews I conducted with relevant persons in order to better understand the process of how the mandatory literary canon for primary and middle schools is formed, what criteria are employed, who is a part of the process, and how other parties affected by its content – a teacher, specifically – react to it. The first interview is with Marina Dimitrieva-Gjorgievska, an adviser at the Bureau for the Development of Education. The Bureau is an organ operating under the Ministry of Education which executes tasks assigned to it by the ministry. One of the tasks of the Bureau is formulating the course syllabi. The interview with Marina was very useful for understanding what goes into the formation of a reading list, in terms of demands by the ministry, the various actors (parties) involved, and the process itself. I was lucky to interview Marina on two separate occasions, as the second interview happened to take place at a time of final revisions for the list of mandatory readings for primary and secondary literature education. Thus I was able to acquire direct knowledge about the process and some details about the new reading list for primary schools.

The second person that I interviewed was Nikolina (Nina) Andonova-Shopova, who is a Macedonian language and literature teacher at an economics high school in

Skopje. This interview provided me with some criticisms and suggestions concerning the current literary canon from the point of view of a teacher. As Nina is in a position of direct interaction with both the readings and the students, her experience was crucial in understanding how the students interact with the literature and what concrete problems the current syllabus poses. As Nina is a young teacher, it was an additional benefit to see how someone “closer” to the current generations of high school students perceives and understands the obstacles they face in not only learning about, but also in establishing a lasting relationship with literature. A discussion of the developments in digital and media culture over the last couple of decades turned out to be one of the indicative signs of the necessity for a change in the syllabus. This prompted Nina to argue that new generations ought to be introduced to literature in a multi-media way, through, for instance, theatre and cinema. Additionally, she argued that one of the main issues of the syllabus is that literature is taught chronologically. Expecting students in second year to understand Dante’s *Divine Comedy* seems to be more than farfetched – the themes, influences, references and motifs are beyond the scope of most students’ world and knowledge. In order to understand the *Divine Comedy*, these students need to rely completely on the teacher’s lecture. Thus, rather than suggesting that such texts need to be removed, Nina simply argued that students need to be ‘roped into’ the world of literature more gently, and I agree. A sort of “backward reasoning” can be useful in teaching such classics – if students are more familiar with contemporary literature, and the literature of more recent centuries, understanding Dante may come significantly more easily. For a work to have meaning to someone, it needs to be relatable; i.e. the person needs to possess the means of relating to the work.

Luckily for me, the third interview, that is, chat, ended up being tightly connected to this issue of how best to introduce students to literature. The third person I spoke to was prof. Aleksandar Prokopiev, who is among other things, one of my jury members and adviser in Macedonia. During a routine conversation about the development of my thesis, I serendipitously learned that he was one of the three members in a committee from the Institute for Macedonian Literature engaged by the Bureau of Education to produce a revised mandatory reading list for primary and secondary schools. I learned that except aesthetic, cultural, and practical criteria, another important dimension in choosing readings for the new generations is based on accepting the conditions, in terms of new advanced technologies, in which children are raised. Due to the early exposure to potent visual stimulation, such as films, video games, and the Internet, it has become

increasingly challenging to maintain the attention of society's youngest members. Thus, Prof. Prokopiev informed me that sparking imagination and creativity through the selected works was one of the key criteria in selecting mandatory works. Prof. Prokopiev emphasized the role of early literature education as being the primary scene for making or breaking a reader – it is in these formative years that the school can spark a love for literature in the pupil, or conversely, develop an aversion to reading. Thus, in the latest revisions and selection process, the committee aimed at eliminating books with outdated topics, such as a focus on folk life or komiti or NOV (the National Liberation War), and instead choosing books that hook and inspire the young readers.

In the end, what the combination of literary theory and sociological analysis, analysis of the selected curricula from several periods of the last century, and interviews with people left me with, is a varied approach to how educational literary canons are formed, in terms of theory and practice. Strong intellectual, political, and social influences were embedded in each step – both chronologically, as I was noting the shifts in the syllabi, and methodologically, as approaches to canon formation changed. In this thesis, I try to give an overview of how different aspects are interconnected, and how, in the end, a myriad of variables goes into the process. Political ideology and intellectual currents seem inseparable, as do the varying, seemingly opposite but overlapping criteria.



**CHAPTER 2:**  
**FRAMEWORKS:**  
**LITERARY THEORIES AND SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSES ON CANON**  
**FORMATION**

**2.1 Introduction to the “Canon Wars”**

Mary Ann Frese Witt has declared a worldwide stalemate in what has dramatically been dubbed the “canon wars.”<sup>7</sup> The “canon wars” are ongoing debates in the academic community over what should be included or excluded from the canon. With the rise of a variety of ‘recent’ trends in the literary and cultural disciplines, including feminism, the queer movement, and (multi)culturalism, in terms of an increased interest in the output and production of culture by previously (and some, still) marginalized groups, the expansion, or destruction, or reconstruction of the canon has been instigated by members of these groups. Debating the canon is like pulling on a thread sticking out of a sweater sleeve – the longer you pull, the sleeve, and soon enough the whole sweater, begins to become undone. It is so because when debating the canon, it is not only the definition of the canon that calls for clarity, but also the criteria for selecting the canon, the purposes of reading and teaching literature, the roles of the author and the reader, the question of interpretation, and the sociological role that literature (and especially what is established as Canon) assumes in the broader sense of a society. In the context of this thesis, it is additionally crucial to discuss the role of educational institutions, namely primary and secondary schools in Macedonia, in teaching literature as a tool, if not for shaping, for influencing the youth. This cannot be done without discussing the role of governmental institutions as well, as it is the Ministry of Education and its apparatuses that determine the mandatory literary readings for high schools. Thus, I will do my best to explore the discussion from both a literary perspective, and then from a sociological point of view.

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Ann Frese Witt, “Issues of the Canon: Introduction,” *University of North Carolina Press* 24 (May 2000): 5.

A good place to start is to define what it means to say “canon.” Beyond the fact that there is not one single canon – as every country and culture has its own, even those under the auspice of the “Western Canon” – what the term “canon” usually refers to are the official, curricular, and critical canons, although the three often overlap. Wendell V. Harris defines the official canon in Alistair Fowler’s words as that which is “institutionalized through education, patronage, and journalism.” Harris categorizes the curricular canon as that which consists of “those works frequently taught in the classrooms (at any level).” The critical canon is “made up of the works repeatedly discussed in professional journals and books.”<sup>8</sup> His references to the official canon are in its broadest sense, following Lauter’s definition as “a set of literary works... accorded cultural weight within a society” and Fokkema’s as “a selection of well-known texts, which are considered valuable, are used in education, and serve as a framework of reference for literary critics.” Harris also quotes Virgil Nemoianu’s “almost mystical description” in order to emphasize that the “canon can never be reduced to a precise list:”

“The canon is invisible, undefined, flexible, with a continuous slow movement inside it: ultimately an unknown realm, perceptible but not precisely measurable, or difficult to capture exactly.”<sup>9</sup>

This description pertains more to the canon’s “character” than to its role, as the malleability of the canon is a result of its restructuring by trends and academics. I found Harris’ article to be quite resourceful in categorizing and outlining issues. In the light of defining the Canon (Bloom uses a capital C), Harold Bloom draws a historical line from the Canon, a word religious in origins, to the literary Canon (or Western Canon), through Dante’s work and Dante’s role as the inventor of the modern idea of the canonical. For Bloom, the Canon is the “literary Art of Memory;” it is “a choice among texts struggling with one another for survival.”<sup>10</sup> Bloom spends more pages characterizing canonicity, and what properties make a text canonical. This will be further discussed below, when examining the competing criteria for inclusion in the canon. Since my focus is on education, when I refer to the canon in later chapters, I will be referring to the curricular canon, unless stated otherwise (although as I mentioned, the three canons often overlap).

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<sup>8</sup> Wendell V. Harris, “Aligning Curricular Canons with Academic Programs,” *University of North Carolina Press* 24 (May 2000): 10.

<sup>9</sup> Nemoianu Virgil and Royal Robert, eds., *The Hospitable Canon: Essays on Literary Play, Scholarly, Choice, and Popular Pressures* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991), 222.

<sup>10</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages*, 1st ed. (Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 17–20.

Nemoianu juxtaposes “curricular choices” (what I call curricular canon) to “canons,” wherein the former are “heavily influenced by political institutional factors, particularly in interpretation, but sometimes even in selection,” and the latter are “shaped by deeper and less easily formalized categories: sensibilities, communitarian orientations, broad axiological decisions, tacit preferences, modes of behavior and being.”<sup>11</sup> “Canons” according to this approach are shaped by a mixture of ‘safe’ and ‘unsafely’ intuitive myriad of variables: “sensibilities” – an “unsafe” argument based on an innate sense of aesthetics, “communitarian orientations,” which I assume alludes to consensuses within reading communities, “broad axiological decisions,” which likely refers to some agreed upon selection criteria (an increasingly problematic area), “tacit preferences,” meaning “implicit” preferences, meaning works of such universal and evident value, that it cannot be questioned or argued, and “modes of behavior and being,” which I can only assume is a reference to the sociological dimension of taste, that is, the social construction that goes into the formation of taste (as will be discussed later via Bourdieu), as well as the dissemination of knowledge, information, and influences. As will become evident in the following chapter, which traces the changes of the literary reading lists in primary and secondary schools from the 1947 syllabus to the ones from the 2001-2008 revisions, “curricular choices” are indeed affected by political institutional factors; nonetheless, the struggle between criteria for survival for selecting *the* Canon are emblematic of the fact that the influence of politics in the world of literature is not limited to institutions.

The debates over what the canon should consist of are based on the discussion of what the purpose of reading literature is, or more precisely, what the educational role of literature is. Frese Witt divides the “implicit or explicit purposes for studying literature” that have “surfaced throughout the history of the institution in the West” into four categories: 1) moral, as a study makes readers better; 2) practical, as a study that makes the readers more literate, job-qualified, and increases their status via the value of literature as “cultural capital” a la Bourdieu; 3) aesthetic, as the beauty of literature is appreciated by the individual readers and elevates them spiritually (without necessarily having practical value); and 4) cultural, where the readers understand their own culture better, and become more aware and tolerant of other cultures.<sup>12</sup> I will briefly elaborate on some of the characterizations and issues of these four legitimations in the next section of this

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<sup>11</sup> Nemoianu and Royal, 222

<sup>12</sup> Mary Ann Frese Witt, “Are the Canon Wars Over? Rethinking Great Books,” *University of North Carolina Press* 24 (May 2000): 58.

chapter. As I discuss these four rationales, I hope to show that the rigidity of their categorization is arbitrary and false, as they are not mutually exclusive but overlapping and interdependent.

The last part will deal with the sociological implications of the canon through the analysis offered by Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. For Bourdieu, there is no such thing as universal taste, which stands in opposition to some literary critics' argument when trying to characterize the objective criteria for canonicity. Through the notion of cultural capital, Bourdieu argues that dominant culture and thus the establishment of the "legitimate canon" is a way of subduing the lower classes and distinguishing their culture from the dominant one. Although I will make use of Bourdieu's analysis, I will also point out where my study diverges from his (in terms of context, the issues of structuralism, and so on). The literary theory and sociological approach are included in this chapter with the aim of providing a richer, multi-faceted context of canon formation. Although the two approaches have different focuses and audiences, I hope to show that they are complementary and relevant to one another and the topic at hand.

## 2.2 The Literary Theoretical Approach

Let me begin with a brief historical overview, starting with early modern Europe, of the four competing purposes for studying literature as presented by Frese Witt. (For our purposes going, as far back as early modern Europe is sufficient.) The early 15<sup>th</sup> century humanist Renaissance tradition, which was for a long time the core of the European and American literary educational traditions, proponed the moral and practical legitimizations, as the proponents believed that studying Greek and Roman texts made men more virtuous and better at rhetoric, which would make them more successful at politics. The aesthetic legitimization followed later, its most notable formulation having been introduced by Winkelmann through his notions of "the noble, still harmony of Greek art" which prevailed until "Nietzsche exploded it with demonic subtext."<sup>13</sup> The implication of "good taste" in the aesthetic legitimization influenced the "high culture" of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, wherein a gentleman or a lady was marked by such refinement of taste in terms of aesthetics, as well as virtue and rhetoric acquired from

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<sup>13</sup> Frese Witt, "Art the Canon Wars Over? Rethinking Great Books," 59.

literature. (Although in that context, aestheticism was still for a practical purpose; i.e., in Victorian-type environments, this refinement of taste was not for the sake of what the aesthetic yields to the ‘spiritual’ development of the self, as the aesthetic argument would conclude, but rather a means of accumulating cultural capital – which is implicit in the branch of practical legitimization.) The cultural legitimization is in this context (that is to say, most recently) traced back to Goethe and his notion of “Weltliteratur” – or world literature. Goethe believed that reading literature from different cultures was key for the people of the world to overcome their differences and recognize the universality of humanity, and essentially – unite.<sup>14</sup> This view, in fact, combines aspects of what is now considered culturalist and aesthetic criteria: on the one hand, it contains representability and aims to create understanding across different cultures, and on the other hand, this quality of a piece of literature to create a feeling of familiarity or sameness in difference, is what Bloom, the primary aesthetic proponent, classifies as the quality of “strangeness” which is characteristic of Canon books.

Following decades of debates between proponents of the four different rationales, it can be roughly concluded that the moral and practical rationales are on the decline, while the aesthetic and cultural legitimizations continue to have contemporary proponents. The moral reasoning has become dormant since WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, with the general disillusionment following the period. The practical rationale still has defenders arguing that literate people are more employable. Still, as John Guillory argues, building on Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital in an eponymous book, contrary to the conditions of fifty years ago, the acquiring and maintenance of status for the current professional-managerial class is based on technical and not literary knowledge. As a logical conclusion to this state of affairs, proponents of the practical rationale are also on the decline.<sup>15</sup> Still, it is interesting to note that in terms of moral criteria, there have been concerns for the preservation of an aspect of it among intellectuals and employees in the educational government organs. For instance, my interview with an employee in the Bureau for the Development of Education revealed her lament at the fact that affective goals in education are no longer a part of the stated criteria for choosing mandatory readings. Affective goals in education, she specified for me, are ones concerning the upbringing and discipline required for the fashioning of an adult

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

individual. In the Yugoslavian stated criteria, the student becoming a good citizen (in a socialist context) is emphasized as one of the goals of their literary education.

I want to point out that this dimension of morality, self-development in a societal context, is not oppositional to aspects of the aesthetic or culturalist approaches. The aesthetic approach, as presented by Bloom, does include the individual growth of a person spurred by reading literature. And “no man is an island:” internally developed individuals make up a society of such individuals, indirectly or at least as a bi-product. Although maybe this cannot be categorized as morality in crude terms, in so far as morality is aimed at the successful cohabitation of individuals in a society, the two criteria overlap. The culturalist approach has already been criticized for being moralistic because of its focus on representability.<sup>16</sup> The argument is that a socio-cultural dimension in the criteria for choosing the canon is itself based on morality. Harris particularly specifies that if tolerance is considered a virtue, then culturalism is self-contradicting: while it is against the moral understanding of reading literature, tolerance itself is a moral value. My point is that the debate should be redirected from a focus on distinctions to the view that rather than showing apparent contradictions, these “criticisms” show that the criteria are intertwined and malleable conceptually.

Thus, although I will focus my attention on the currently prevailing currents, the aesthetic and the culturalist rationalizations, essentially all the different criteria, as well as criteria omitted in the popular canon debates, do not share firm boundaries, but pour into and draw from one another.

The principal contemporary defender of the aesthetic rationale is Harold Bloom. Harold Bloom’s stance on aesthetic criteria is established partially as a defense/reaction to the attacks of what he has lovingly dubbed “The School of Resentment” – academics<sup>17</sup> for whom the criteria of what should be included in the Canon is basically what I will refer to as culturalist (following Harris<sup>18</sup>). Bloom argues that these academics, who are proponents of representation of various cultural backgrounds in the Canon (more women,

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<sup>16</sup> Harris

<sup>17</sup> For Bloom, these academics, which include some Marxist, Feminist, and New Historicist scholars, under the guise of new multiculturalism, are in fact only proposing the “ancient polemic” against the aesthetic stemming from the traditions of Platonic moralism and Aristotelian social science. (Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages*, 18.)

<sup>18</sup> In Harris’ account, the movement to expand the Canon for it to include unrepresented or under-represented groups, started in the late 1970s initially with the focus of spreading recognition for women and black writers, and this movement has been referred to as “multiculturalism.” However, since the movement includes feminism, concern for socioeconomic class, and an emphasis on the general value (and possibly, relativity) of cultural norms, Harris suggests that “culturalist” is a better term, as it “more accurately suggests a concern for the total set of cultural influences acting on the writing of the text.” (Harris, 14)

queer writers, or writers from various ethnic/cultural backgrounds) wish to “overthrow the Canon in order to advance their supposed (and nonexistent) programs for social change.”<sup>19</sup> After qualifying the aesthetic merits a book needs to possess to enter the Canon, he once again finishes with “Whatever the Western Canon is, it is not a program for social salvation.”<sup>20</sup> Bloom argues that their criteria, rather than including “the best writers who happen to be women, African, Hispanic, or Asian” includes writers who “offer little but the resentment they have developed as part of their sense of identity.”<sup>21</sup> This accusation is problematic on multiple levels: are we talking about the authorial intention? Are we talking about what biographic and identity elements authors bring into their work? Are we trying to separate the author from her work? And so on. At this point I will not take this comment at face value (the criticisms are in later paragraphs), but rather emphasize that Bloom finds choosing a work to defend a certain politics instead of choosing it for its literary, aesthetic merits, problematic. What Bloom is complaining about is not the author’s personal ache that translates into writing, but the lack of aesthetic appeal (canonical properties) in some of the writings championed by the culturalists. What both Bloom and Harris have criticized, in a nutshell, is the politicization of the Canon. I would say that roughly put, they see the politicization of the Canon as a corruption of the Canon: they see using literature as a tool for ‘pushing’ any ideological or sociological message as dangerous. Therefore, the criteria for selecting the Canon must be different.

Bloom sets up various qualifications for determining the canonical, from the test for canonicity, to a special kind of aesthetic. Some of the tests for canonicity that he proposes at one point or another, include a specific aesthetic,<sup>22</sup> a work surviving two generations, and a work demanding a rereading. For Bloom, the type of aesthetic that makes a work canonical, or at least the common denominator of canonical works, in addition to beauty, is something he refers to as “strangeness.” He qualifies strangeness as a “mode of originality that either cannot be assimilated, or that so assimilates us that we cease to see it as strange.”<sup>23</sup> This strangeness involves uncanniness inspired by the reading of the work, which makes the reader feel at home in a strange land, and a stranger at home. This is in fact a part of the argument that canonical works paint the universality of

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<sup>19</sup> Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 29

<sup>21</sup> Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Bloom writes that aesthetic strength is an amalgam of the following criteria: “mastery of figurative language, originality, cognitive power, knowledge, exuberance of diction.” (Bloom, 29) More of the same, really.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 3

the human experience, a position held by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche over a century ago, so that reading the Canon is not a “relaxing” activity – “Canons are achieved anxieties.”<sup>24</sup> This illustrates not only the criteria for selecting the Canon, but also insinuates one of the answers to “why do we read?” In contrast to the culturalist or moral reasonings, this school emphasizes reading (for Bloom in particular, reading the Canon) for the sake of “augmenting one’s inner self.” In the universality of themes and topics (in terms of the human condition) of canonical works, one’s mind engages in a dialogue with itself in the solitary activity of reading, the outcome of which is not becoming a more moral, culturally aware, or useful citizen. As Bloom puts it: “All that the Western Canon can bring one is the proper use of one’s own solitude, that solitude whose final form is one’s confrontation with one’s own mortality.”<sup>25</sup> Mortality, in this case, symbolizes a universal human anxiety.

Bloom is harsh, strict, unrelenting, *rigid*. This rigidity makes it impossible to compress the totality of his theory into something applicable to my study. Yet, parts of it prove to maintain relevance throughout the research. This includes a focus on the aesthetic qualities of a text, as well as its integrity as a work of literature, the primary aim of which is not indoctrination or acting solely as a bearer of social causes. Still, I want to outline some of the greatest issues in his text, issues which render his work traditionalist, elitist, and reductionist. To begin with, his approach to readers is extremely exclusive. The test for canonicity being rereading is an example of this: it is a normative statement on reader behavior, as if readers and reading communities are not heterogenous, and they all consume (or rather, ought to consume) literature in the same fashion. Furthermore, there is a plethora of exclusory statements about “good” readers. Although he does not focus on high school literature education, in terms of literary education in universities, who may ‘fall prey’ (I am exaggerating because he likes exaggerating) to the politicized curriculum, he has the following to say:

“We need to teach more selectively, searching for the few who have the capacity to become highly individual readers and writers. The others, who are amenable to a politicized curriculum, can be abandoned to it.”<sup>26</sup>

On other occasions too, he asserts that a tendency to loving or appreciating ‘good’ literature is something innate; his discourse suggests that ‘good taste’ comes from a *sense*

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 38

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 30

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 17



that some people have, and other simply do not. “You cannot teach someone to love great poetry if they come to you without such love.”<sup>27</sup> Except for being exclusive, these claims are elitist and assume that an individual’s identity and character are based on an inherent essence. What about social constructivism, cultural shaping, what about the development of taste (in different *habitués*)? What about cultural relativity? Is a member of a culture based on oral storytelling responsible for having the sense to intuitively appreciate canonical works? In the following section on the sociological approach to the Canon, precisely these will be discussed. Bloom does argue that be it a new multiculturalist canon or the established Canon, all canons are elitist, but claims that the new multiculturalists want to expand the Canon because they feel elitist guilt. He also does accept that the Canon serves the dominant class’s social order, and that artists/authors have survived in the past through funding by patrons. Despite his repeated efforts to capitalize on the integrity of the quality of the text in spite of the social structure (or beyond it), Bloom does also say that powerful poets naturally gravitate towards the dominant classes. (Unhappily) following Hazlitt, he writes that “breaking the alliance” between wealth and culture, as did Blake, Whitman, or Beckett, results in the writers’ exclusion from the Canon, as their act is considered to be a mythologization of “[their] misreading of tradition”,<sup>28</sup> and in trying to place themselves outside of the traditional alliance, they end up going against the members of the already established Canon (such as Homer, Plato, or the Bible). This implies that literature outside this cannot be considered as being of high enough quality.<sup>29</sup> This is partially why his criticism of the culturalist criteria is problematic. To be a writer, especially a canonical writer, is a luxury. Accepting the relationship between the dominant class and the Canon, ends with an acceptance of the established hegemonic order, at the same time allowing the pleasure of a deep relationship with literature only to the elite. I believe, on the contrary, that schools’ literary curriculums should be the one place where an evening of the playing field, in one way or another, can be made possible.

Another issue with Bloom’s criticism of the “School of Resentment” is that minorities (women, African-Americans in the North American case, and so on) historically have not had an equal opportunity to have a productive role in any of the arts, including literature. This is partially where the resentment of the “School of Resentment”

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 519

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 33

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 33, 34

comes from – past injustice. It does not mean that the suggested texts for inclusion in the Canon are adequate, but that representability should be available to students in some capacity (according to what is generally established as the role of education). Of course, Bloom is not the only proponent of the aesthetic rationale, although he is the most audible. Still, Harris points out that Bloom’s arguments are “in themselves too vague to convince anyone not already in agreement.”<sup>30</sup>

The culturalist approach aims to expand the canon to include previously unrepresented and under-represented groups of individuals, along class, sexual (gender, sex, sexuality), and ethnic lines. Representability in this context translates into including texts that also carry a political statement, Harris argues.<sup>31</sup> As mentioned, this is the main criticism of the culturalist criteria. Still, this criticism is weak in light of several ideas surrounding the debate. First, supporting a cultural diversity of authors and topics in the schools’ curricula does not equate choosing texts based on that criteria alone. Certainly, a plethora of aesthetic and technical qualities would be considered. Once again, it is important to emphasize that none of these criteria can stand alone. Opponents to the culturalist approach overplay the details of selecting literature based on culturalist lines – Harris, for instance, goes over the problematics of further divisions within the culturalist movement, as there are too many subsections to account for.<sup>32</sup> Still, there are particular representations which could be present in the canons of the particular cultures, and more general representations, or more relatable representations, that could be included in the Canon. Secondly, as literature can and does have multiple purposes, serving to expose one to certain cultural and political ideas, *expose* rather than *indoctrinate*, should not be seen as problematic. The Western Classics are not without a political or cultural dimension; rather, over time, the focus has shifted on their aesthetic or “universal” quality. Thus, although the selection process must be meticulous, demanding a politic-less work to enter the canon is denying the politic-ness of the human as a social and political animal. Thirdly, some academics’ concern for the incomplete formulation of the culturalist claim does not point to a problem inherent to the movement itself, but rather points to the fact that more time is needed in the process of molding this – and any of the – criteria. With time, and the constant metamorphosis of values, any sort of criteria asks for further revision. Frese Witt argues that the current state of the culturalist claim is

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<sup>30</sup> Harris, “Aligning Curricular Canons with Academic Programs,” 21.

<sup>31</sup> Harris, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 15.

lacking in a Goethean dimension in terms of the aim of reading texts from different cultures. While for Goethe the aim was explicitly a unification of humanity, a recognition of similarities across different cultures, she argues that the current emphasis on diversity has no aspirations towards a common humanity and is only adding to the stalemate of the “canon wars.”<sup>33</sup> This can be reinterpreted to suggest that with a certain general synthesis, multiple criteria can be reconciled to ‘work together.’ For instance, I have already considered the similarity between Goethe’s notion of the purpose of World Literature and how it coincides with Bloom’s aesthetic notion of “strangeness.” In terms of limited criteria, Witt also points to the fact that be it due to embarrassment or jadedness, we do not think seriously of the moral rationale; and as I already pointed out, my interview with the representative in the Bureau for the Development of Education revealed a sense of necessity for remedying this lack. (At the same time, let us remember the criticisms against the culturalist rationale that with its focus on diversity, which carries tolerance as a moral value, the culturalist approach itself is moralist.) Furthermore, as will be revealed in the next chapter on the Macedonian case of primary and secondary school literary canon formation, there are new concerns and criteria that come into play with the developments of the contemporary world, which put into question any previous rigidity of canon building.

Still, Frese Witt also argues that using culturalist criteria of representability for choosing literature under the rationale of familiarity can be a successful way of introducing students to literature. An example she gives is that while a Latino student may initially find Borges “strange,” they may be better prepared to approach him after having read Chicano writers.<sup>34</sup> This example is also reflective of a problem that is present in many literary curricula, that is a devotion to chronology. Although better understanding and grasping of literary works is heavily based on being familiar with their tradition, when it comes to inducing new students to the world of literature, familiarity and relatability are indisputably primary to the chronological study of works. In the chapter on the Macedonian case, I will show how this reasoning has affected the criteria in selecting the primary and secondary school literary canon in its most recent revision.

Harris’ solution to the ‘problem’ of competing criteria, which has already partially been implemented in a variety of schools, is the division of the Literature and Cultural Studies departments. The former would focus on the traditional Canon and approaches to

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<sup>33</sup> Frese Witt, 60-61

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 62

studying literature, whereas the latter would apply a more inclusive approach in terms of culturalist representation on social, class, ethnic, or in a word, subaltern grounds. Of course, this solution is on the university level. When considering the particular case of canon formation in Macedonian primary and secondary schools, I hope to make a case of how these criteria are neither mutually exclusive nor the only criteria being considered in educational apparatuses.

### **2.3 The Problem of Defining Literature: Is There A “Universal” Literature?**

One last tangent I find necessary to address is the issue of defining what literature is in the first place. Damrosch, in explaining why he is not delving into firmly defining literature as such, emphasizes that it is “a question that really only has meaning within a given literary system.”<sup>35</sup> This is a similar issue with Bloom’s approach – how can culturally specific values be universalized?

“Any global perspective on literature must acknowledge the tremendous variability in what has counted as literature from one place to another and from one era to another; in this sense, literature can best be defined pragmatically as whatever texts a given community of readers *takes* as literature. Even within the Euro-American tradition, there has always been considerable variety in what counts as literature, including that foundationally canonical work the Bible.”<sup>36</sup> (*Italics* in original.)

When we look from a sociological point of view as well, in terms of taste as a socio-cultural construct in individuals within classes and cultures, this point is reinforced: defining literature in rigid terms will always have an exclusionary tendency. Therefore, Damrosch’s pragmatic advice seems feasible: accepting literature to be the texts that given communities take as literature. Still, within communities there are hegemonies and power structures that determine what is literature in that given context. Not only is language itself, in a Lacanian sense, alien, but it can also be utilized by the dominant groups as a means of subordinating others.

Additionally, the different proposed criteria for determining the Canon include the question of why we read. More often than not, the answers fall within the boundaries

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<sup>35</sup> David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), 14.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

of the same categorizations: for self-growth (spiritual growth in a non-religious sense), moral growth, raising social awareness, or familiarizing oneself with one's tradition. Still, how about purposes of reading outside these four? How about reading for entertainment? Reading for entertainment, it seems to me, at least within these debates is often overlooked as something not relevant or not academic enough to consider. Still, even scholars with strict boundaries between what is "good" and what is "bad" literature, what is "elite" and what is "popular," would never deny that entertainment is a crucial part of the reading experience. How many times have I read the words "the pleasure of reading?" I would not know where to begin referencing. Yet, entertainment is not much represented in these debates. Still, academically speaking, this can be ascribed to the fact that the role of schools does not exactly align with "entertainment."

## 2.4 A Sociological Dimension

As Damrosch defines literature as what has meaning within a certain literary system, Bourdieu points out that "most products only derive their social value from the social use that is made of them."<sup>37</sup> Although the particular context of that sentence is in relation to the varied taste in gastronomy across social classes, Bourdieu maintains this idea throughout his analysis of the socio-cultural construction of taste. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Bourdieu capitalizes on the importance of *habitus* in determining a group's or an individual's taste. According to the text, possessing the necessary codes to decipher cultural production, or possessing the necessary cultural competence, is what allows a work of art to have meaning.<sup>38</sup> For Bourdieu, cultural capital is a sort of currency with practical value in the social world. As I already mentioned, Guillory has made an argument that the value of different types of knowledge has shifted in the last fifty years since Bourdieu made the case for cultural capital. In the contemporary world, technical knowledge has more practical value than literary or cultural knowledge. Regardless, the sources and utilizations of cultural capital remain relevant to the contemporary world and particularly this study.

For Bourdieu, the primary sites for acquiring cultural capital are family and school.<sup>39</sup> Still, as his study is focused on the development, or social construction (rather

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<sup>37</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 21.

<sup>38</sup> Bourdieu, 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 85.

than innateness) of taste across social classes, Bourdieu capitalizes on the difference of cultural capital acquired in educational institutions and in the home; for instance, there are certain distinctive features stemming from a bourgeois upbringing which schools cannot teach, such as familiarity with extra-curricular cultural products.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, Bourdieu argues that schools, rather than evening the playing field, are guilty of reinforcing real class differences and classifying students accordingly in two ways. The first one is that schools manipulate the demands and aspirations of the students by channeling them to prestigious or devalued positions (in relation to their social origin).<sup>41</sup> The second way is through the educational canon, or the curriculum. The curriculum in educational institutions is based around whatever culture is considered legitimate, and legitimate culture is the culture of the dominant class.<sup>42</sup> “Through its value-inculcating and value-imposing operations, the school also helps...to form a general, transposable disposition towards legitimate culture...”<sup>43</sup> Items within the canon of the legitimate culture inter-legitimate each other; art within a canon is reproduced by its referral to other art within the same canon: thus, the canon of a legitimate culture is a closed system.<sup>44</sup> In fact, Bourdieu qualifies reading of the ‘classics,’ as a case of “social solidarity disguised as intellectual solidarity”<sup>45</sup> – meaning members of the dominant culture, by perpetuating its content perpetuate their own position in the social hierarchy.

There is, of course, the issue of the “actual” quality of the contents of the legitimate culture, something Bourdieu refers to as the “paradox of the imposition of legitimacy,” or the paradox of how certain cultural products become legitimate: does a thing become dominant (part of the dominant culture) because it possesses and thus defines the qualities of being noble and distinguished, or is it because it is dominant that it appears to be endowed with these qualities and is thus used as a reference point to define them?<sup>46</sup> In either case, for Bourdieu there is no such thing as innate taste per se, as taste is based on familiarity, and is a part of a set of cultural practices and objects within a *habitus* that go together.<sup>47</sup> The distinctions between high and low, elite and popular culture stem from the habituses that individuals originate from. For Bourdieu, also, the dominated culture always fashions itself as a response to or a rejection of the dominant culture; taste is

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 91,65

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 25, 26

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 23

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 52-53

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 73

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 92

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 14,16

asserted negatively, by a refusal and rejection of other tastes or lifestyles.<sup>48</sup> So the paradox of legitimate culture remains unanswered; however, Bourdieu shows a tendency, at least in practical terms, to taste as being socially constructed. Thus, whatever is argued to be objectively valuable, is nonetheless accepted or rejected based on social forces. In any case, accepting taste as something purely innate, as Bloom has done in a way, certainly is arbitrary and naturalizes social differences (i.e. can be used as an instrument to naturalize class differences). In criticizing the “the glorified ideology through the myth of the innocent eye,”<sup>49</sup> Bourdieu points out that the myth of the ‘naive’ eye that can recognize ‘real art,’ this “ideology of the natural taste... naturalizes real differences.”<sup>50</sup>

In light of my own study, I must be cautious in leaning on Bourdieu’s analysis. Firstly, the study was conducted almost forty years ago, and in France. The case of Macedonia is both geographically – and thus culturally – and temporally removed from the original context. Even looking at Yugoslavia contemporarily to the study, the differences in governance and social structure show that the results are not exactly adaptable. For instance, Bourdieu shows that government apparatuses try to maintain the role of the dominant class, and thus educational curricula are used as tools to perpetuate the dominant culture as well as direct the futures of pupils to professions within their social class. (Anyway, ascribing this degree of social conditioning to schools is a crude generalization.) Yugoslavia was a socialist state, and despite exceptions, the role of education (at least officially) was to provide equal educational opportunity to the pupils. Perhaps following the thread of socialist tradition, Macedonian high schools currently also assign themselves the role of a source of cultural capital for the students. Interestingly, in terms of educational institutions perpetuating the taste of the dominant class, the curriculum of Yugoslavia in 1947 was nearly entirely composed of folk literature, ideological texts, and national tales and histories. This still indeed does perpetuate the thought and culture of the dominant class, but the dominant class was the only class! The curriculum attempted to establish ties between the differently employed members of the proletariat, by familiarizing the students to workers and farmers textually, teaching folk literature, while including a small number of world literature texts (nearly exclusively Russian). Here, too, there is exclusionism in terms of not including world literature or literature without the same ideological basis or connotation. So, this

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 56

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 67

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 68

curriculum is also ‘victim’ to the government. With time, not only in Macedonia but also the Yugoslavia of 1989, many more readings from world literature were included in the primary and secondary school literary canons. Currently, there are very few folk literature readings or readings with clear ideological premises, and the canon is a steady balance between Macedonian national literature (which has been not considered nationalist), and a variety of works from world literature. Up until the last revisions (currently underway), most of the mandatory readings have been considered a part of a classical education, which, and now we have made full circle, include the texts of the Western canon which Bourdieu categorizes as belonging to the dominant class.

Although such mechanisms are inherent to any capitalist system, some markers of difference in Macedonia are that, firstly, high school education is *mandatory*, and the vast majority of high schools are government high schools, for which students qualify through their primary education grades;<sup>51</sup> secondly, my interview in the Bureau for the Development of Education revealed that even for the two-year technical high schools, special attention was paid in selecting the literary readings so as to maintain a good degree of representability of world and national literatures to be introduced to the students. Another criticism of Bourdieu’s analysis is rooted in his structuralist approach. The taste of an entire public cannot be explained with (reduced to) political domination. Although the canon is influenced by the dominant culture and established by the educated “elite,” academicians are not exactly the hegemonic class. Furthermore, in terms of cultures varying across social classes, perhaps “taste” is not enough to account for the differences, and an alternative or supplementary word may be “ritual.” There is a system, or a set of values ascribed to an art (of varying kind), and groups practice that art as a ritual. Examples are folk dances or oral traditions. Furthermore, we cannot neglect the power of words that categorize and delineate. For instance, if something is categorized as “high” or “elite” art, already in language it is being kept away from the lower classes. Additionally, ascribing taste completely to *habitus* results in a somewhat reductive conclusion. For instance, Bourdieu makes implications that art cannot be enjoyed without previous knowledge of it.<sup>52</sup> Another generalizing, and frankly, weird statement, is that while the bourgeois would walk for the sake of an exercise or as a “symbolic

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<sup>51</sup> Once again, I don’t mean to imply that the system is not rigged; social contexts and circumstances which repress the dominated classes prevail in Macedonian society as in any other, and the disadvantaged are as exploited as in any other 2<sup>nd</sup> world capitalist failure.

<sup>52</sup> Bourdieu, 26



appropriation of a world reduced to the status of a landscape,”<sup>53</sup> working class individuals would only ever walk with a purpose in mind. Assuming that a working-class person does not have the time, luxury, or culture to even consider taking a walk for walk’s sake, or for the sake of exercise or enjoying the scenery, seems to me baseless, and unsupported by reality.

Bourdieu categorizes popular art as being focused on function and ethics, while the high or elite art is form and aesthetics oriented. This echoes the distinction between the aesthetic and culturalist criteria; however, taking a look at Bourdieu’s mention of Virginia Woolf’s criticism of works that call for political action reveals, once again, that literature can be written and read with different purposes and results. Woolf criticizes the novels of Wells, Galsworthy, and Bennett for leaving the reader with a strange feeling of incompleteness and a call for social action, or at least, writing a cheque, whereas works such as *Tristram Shandy* or *Pride and Prejudice* are ‘self-contained’ and do not leave the reader with a desire to do anything, except read the book again, to understand it better.<sup>54</sup> It is easy to note that the former has a so-called culturalist attribute, in regards to possessing a social message (something generally attributed to the theatre), and the latter has an aesthetic strain, in the focus on rereading a work and its self-containment. But regardless of any of these criticisms, I believe it is not difficult to see that the distinctions posed, or any of criteria alone, are not enough to account for what should be read (or taught), and how educational literary canons ought to be formulated. In the following chapter, I will try to show how new emerging criteria, marked by changes of government and literary currents, have resulted in the change of mandatory literary readings. In the third chapter, I will also emphasize on new criteria which emerge with the change of the *zeitgeist* in terms of the developments in technology and the necessity to adapt to the needs and learning process of the new generations of pupils.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 55

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 35

**CHAPTER 3:**  
**THE TRAIL OF SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND INTELLECTUAL CURRENTS IN**  
**DOCUMENTS:**  
**SHIFTS IN MACEDONIAN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL**  
**SYLLABI OVER THE LAST CENTURY**

**3.1 Tracing the Shifts**

Looking at the formation of the literary canon for primary and secondary schools in Macedonia allows me to track the change in literary and educational currents through several different factors. Firstly, as I will be making comparisons between several curricula (syllabi) dating from 1947, through the 1990s, the early 2000s, all the way to present day, from a chronological perspective the change of the educational focus becomes evident. The period embodies lively transitions in intellectual analysis and method: the shifts from modernism to post-modernism, structuralism to post-structuralism, and post-colonialism, to begin with. Another marker of the transition from mid-20<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> century is the spread of individual-oriented rather than society-oriented thinking, which could be partly attributed to the spread of capitalist influence around the world (especially during and succeeding the Cold War). Particularly in Macedonia, there is a shift from it being a socialist federate state under Yugoslavia, to becoming an independent capitalist republic in 1991. It exactly this shift in politico-social arrangement and the shift in intellectual currents evident that I will focus on with regard to the change of criteria for selecting the canon. The change of criteria for selecting the canon becomes evident through two markers in the syllabi: the first one is a change in the stated goals which are presented within each syllabus, and as we will see, range from varying emphasis on the moral, social, intellectual, individual, and aesthetic growth of the pupil; the second one is a change in the assigned literary readings in the syllabi, which diverge vastly over the years in terms of proportions of ethnic-national-world literature, subject, and ideological (social) messages.

### 3.2 Changes in Educational Aims of Literature Courses

The first dimension of change in criteria in terms of stated goals reflects the shift from Yugoslavia to Macedonia, in terms of a transition from socialism to democracy (republic), from a federate state to an independent nation-state, and in terms of its intellectual context and influences from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Additionally, changes in intellectual currents have contributed to the changes of criteria for selecting the canon, some of which I went over in the previous chapter. In the case of the syllabi that I will present, not only will the changes in selection rationale become evident, but they will also help me trace out the variety of purposes attributed to literature and reading over the years and regimes. The stated goals of studying literature in each syllabus, the place and condition of which I will clarify in further detail, have shifted from including more society-oriented affective goals, such as developing the student's Marxist interpretation of the world, and their moral and social development as a good citizen,<sup>55</sup> to a smaller number of affective goals focusing on the student's individual intellectual development which would help them choose a career later in life (the later syllabi include a significantly lower number of affective goals, and focus more on technical knowledge).<sup>56</sup> Still, in both cases, literature pertains practical value: in the former, it is supposed to help educate the student in being a good citizen (comrade); in the case of the latter, it is supposed to help the student choose a vocation. Thus, after analyzing some differences which reflect the intellectual and socio-political shifts, I will also point out some similarities in the stated goals which may be considered residual, in terms of the already mentioned practical value attributed to literature (in multiple ways, including the disciplinary role of the school for helping develop the student's social consciousness and tolerance across ethnicities and cultures), and the emphasis on the role of schools as sites for the student's enrichment in terms of cultural capital.

The format of these government issued syllabi, or rather, teaching programs, is similar in the cases of 1989, 1991, and 2001-2009 (the last official revisions from primary to secondary school currently available). These syllabi include a portion which focuses on the assignments and aims of the Macedonian literature and language education, followed by general operative goals, and then goals individual to each grade and each

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<sup>55</sup> Macedonian Literature and History Syllabus 1947, Macedonian Literature Secondary School Syllabus 1989, Macedonian Literature Secondary School Syllabus 1991, Macedonian Literature Secondary School Syllabus 2001, Macedonian Literature Primary School Syllabus 2008.

<sup>56</sup> 2001

subsection – language/grammar, oral and written expression, and literature and mandatory readings. The 1947 syllabus does not follow such a format with direct statements of goals, and rather than a Macedonian language and literature course, it is a Macedonian language and history course. Despite neglecting literature from its title, the course does include literary readings, so it may be considered as a literature course. While in the case of the 1989, 1991, and 2001-2009 syllabi I will be able to directly refer to the stated goals of the courses, in the case of 1947 I will try to deduce them from the reasonings stated for the choices of the various readings, or rather the purpose stated in terms of what the pupil is expected to learn from a specific lesson or series of texts. Lastly, the documents I have in my arsenal include a 1947 syllabus which spans over seven years, of which several years are middle school and the rest is gymnasium (secondary, or high school), secondary education syllabi from 1989 and 1991 which span over four years, and primary and secondary education syllabi from 2001 to 2008, which span over thirteen years (nine years of primary and four years of secondary school; up until a recent implementation of nine-year primary school program, primary school lasted eight years).

### **3.2.1 1947**

The 1947 syllabus is focused around choosing ‘appropriate’ subjects for the pupil’s ideological and historically contextualized literary development. The language/literature part of the syllabus (preceding the historic portion) throughout secondary school is heavily focused on ethnically Yugoslavian, Slavic, and Macedonian literary heritage, while in terms of genre it is heavily focused on folk literature, including tales, songs, and sayings, and in subject it focuses on rebel and revolutionary literature, including the Macedonian revolutionary struggles against the rule of the Ottoman empire (the Komiti), the Partisan struggles against Axis occupation in WWII under the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the formation of the People’s Liberation Army of Macedonia, subsequently the People’s Liberation Battle of Macedonia (as part of Yugoslavia), and its success with the aid of the Red Army, as well as a focus on folk, workers’, and collectives’ worldview.<sup>57</sup>

The majority of works included are of nationalist, or rather nation-building (Macedonian or Yugoslavian) character, but this will be further elaborated in the next

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<sup>57</sup> 1947

section of this chapter. For now, it is important to note some of the purposes stated next to some of these readings. To begin with, fourth and fifth year lyrical poems are introduced through lyrical folk poems, that is songs. The purpose of these is for the students to become familiarized with the folk life reflected in those songs, as well as with collective work through songs (poems), music, and dance. The epic poems are presented through their relation to folk, that is, the people's struggles for freedom, as folk epic songs. This includes mythology, religious legends, feudal-heroic songs (an example is Krale Marko, a 14<sup>th</sup> century Macedonian-Serbian feudal lord, regarded as a hero and the last standing obstacle to Ottoman invasion of the region), komiti songs (anti-Ottoman movement), and songs from NOV/NOB (the People's Liberation Battle).<sup>58</sup> Fifth grade includes folk tales and folk sayings (adages) of Macedonian origin, but also of other Southern Slavic peoples.<sup>59</sup> Following folk prose, a section focused on the beginnings of the general Slavic literateness focuses on the development of the Cyrillic alphabet and Slavic languages, wherein the development of the languages is presented intertwined with their national significance to Macedonia and other Slavic nations, and the literature (authored by various Slavs) propagates a variety of national and Marxist values: St.'s Cyril and Methodius's contribution to Macedonian intellectual development; Ivan Gundulikj's literature as a cult to freedom, the motherland, and Slavic solidarity; Ivan Karadzikj, a 'fighter for the vulgar (folk) tongue', a reformer of the alphabet and writing, and collector of folk literature; folk life and people's battles reflected in Petar Njegosh's works; the joint battle of Montenegrins and Mulims against tyranny in Ivan Mazjuranikj's work; a variety of Slavic and Macedonian enlightenment figures; the struggle of the Miladinov brothers against panelitism, their writings, and their collection of folk works; the Slavonic ideas of Rajko Zhinzifov, and so on.<sup>60</sup>

What is basically reflected in this selection of works, based on what the syllabus states that pupils are *supposed* to learn from it, is an emphasis on folk, national, and Marxist ideology and ethics. Another significant marker of this characteristic is the fact that the language (and literature) course includes history. The history portion is divided into two: one portion indicates what should be taught in 4<sup>th</sup> grade primary school and 1-4<sup>th</sup> year secondary school (gymnasium), and the second portion is for the "higher grades of the gymnasium," which is 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> year in the contemporary system.<sup>61</sup> The history

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 12-15

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 16

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 16-17

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 25, 28

portion begins with the migration of the Southern Slavs on the Balkans and the beginnings of “state life.”<sup>62</sup> It goes over the people’s conversion to Christianity, the development of languages, the feudal and monarchic configurations of the region, and goes into the Ottoman occupation (with an emphasis, of course, on Krale Marko). Then it goes over the revolts against the Ottoman occupiers, the Bulgarian attempts to subject the Macedonian people through teachers and bishops, the establishment and rise of VMRO (IMRO- International Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) and its aims, the Ilinden revolution and its members, onto the Balkans War and WWI, and the establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (“Versajska Jugoslavija”). What follows is a devoted, in depth overview of the formation of SFRY (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) through WWII, national struggles (NOV), fascist (and especially Bulgarian) occupation, the significance of the Red Army’s help for the liberation of Yugoslavia, and the beginnings of Tito – “a national hero.”<sup>63</sup> Evidently, the syllabus is devoted to developing nationalist and Marxist sentiments through choice readings revolving around the people’s struggle for freedom and independence, as Macedonians, as Yugoslavians, and as Slavs.

### **3.2.2 1989**

The rest of the syllabi include a variety of technical goals – learning expression, interpretation, and so on. While the 1947 syllabus covers both primary and secondary education, the ones from 1989 and 1991 cover only secondary education (high school/gymnasium). Except for the technical goals, the aims of teaching include more nation and ideology-specific, as well as practical goals. In fact, a lot of the goals for learning literature in the 1989 and 1991 syllabi could fit within the practical and moral criteria – they are focused on impressing certain Marxist and nationalist ideologies and worldviews on future good socialist citizens. The 1989 and 1991 syllabus alike share three of the same goals – love for the Macedonian language, love for Macedonian literature and readings, and love for Yugoslavian and world literature. They diverge at one significant point: the 1989 syllabus states as a goal “creative and critical communication with literary works, with a direction to Marxist interpretation of literary history” and literary works and phenomena, in general.<sup>64</sup> The 1991 syllabus states as a goal not a Marxist

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 25

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 26

<sup>64</sup> 1989, 5

interpretation, but rather, a direction to “scientific interpretation of literary history” and literary phenomena in general.<sup>65</sup> I will expand on this in further detail in the section devoted to the 1991 syllabus. Other general aims of literary education in the 1989 syllabus include developing individual creativity which can be directed to the work, the development of a pupil’s capability to deal with and interpret content from various media sources (press, radio, TV, film, theatre), gaining a “correct attitude” towards other languages and various Macedonian dialects, teaching the pupils about the necessity of humane relations between people, genders, and towards society, as a whole, stirring up love and ability in the students for the protection and development of the living and working environments, and influencing the building and formation of a student’s consciousness in the spirit of the gains from NOV and the Revolution.<sup>66</sup>

Here, it is very visible how the aims of literary education are related to practical and moral criteria. Although there is the notion of developing love for literature, or literature for literature’s sake, the emphasis lies more heavily on instilling in the individual pupil nationalist and Marxist value systems. These goals, in line with being related to the practical and moralist criteria, can also be classified as affective goals in educational terminology – their purpose is to shape and discipline an individual, and internalize certain values, in character and thought alike. Further in the syllabus, there are additional operative goals stated for each year of high school and each subsection. I want to give a brief overview of notable practical goals (neglecting the literary analysis-oriented goals) and my interpretations of those goals for the course in general and in the various subsections. In first year, one of the goals of the “Language” subsection is undertaking and then talking about visits to different historical and cultural manifestations, institutions, sites and monuments.<sup>67</sup> This reflects the role assigned to educational institutions as sites for equipping the students with cultural capital. Another goal in the same subsection is “contributing to the Marxist and socialist future-disciplinary direction of the pupils, adequately matching the choice of topics with the aims and assignments of the Macedonian language and literature course.”<sup>68</sup> This is an example of the role of the school as a site for instilling Marxist and socialist values in the student through teaching expression. In the “Literature and Mandatory Readings” subsection, one of the goals is making the students conscious of the formation of literature

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<sup>65</sup> 1991, 1

<sup>66</sup> 1989, 5

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 6

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

through the histories and contexts of the people of Macedonia, Yugoslavia, and the world at large. Another goal is contributing to the students understanding the cultural rebirth (renaissance) of the Macedonian people as a part of the height of the process of “national awakenings.”<sup>69</sup> This not only points to creating a nation-building mindset, but also that the approach of the contemporary government toward nation-states was as if they were ancient sleeping beauties, waiting to be awakened with the birth of the modern nation-state.

Second year goals build on the same foundation. The “Language” subsection, which includes “Oral and Written Expression,” again emphasizes on the importance of building cultural capital, as one of the goals is “perfecting the culture of oral and written expression from the literature courses... from visits to the theatre and cinema, museums, historic sites, cultural monuments, as well as in terms of contemporary and current themes drawn from observation and experience.”<sup>70</sup> The “Literature and Mandatory Readings” goals and assignments follow similarly from the ones from first year, adding introducing the pupils with “literature inspired by the struggle of the proletariat for a socialist world order.”<sup>71</sup> This implies that the readings are not only aimed at familiarizing the students with the historical context of the socialist state, but developing appreciation for the struggle of the working class to obtain a ruling position, and the significance of this struggle for the arrangement of governments around the world. This approach openly frames socialism as a maxim, as a universally desirable form of government. The main development in third year goals under the “Language” subsection is “offering the students consciousness about the final solution of the Macedonian language question as one of the national markings.”<sup>72</sup> This shows a focus on nurturing and confirming a Macedonian identity as unique, despite the larger context of being a part of Yugoslavia. The “Literature and Mandatory Readings” subsection has two notable affective goals. One of them is fashioning a reader who will build a sense for fraternity, unity, community, and equality among the people and ethnicities (nationalities) of SFRY, based on works inspired by NOV. Additionally, there is a goal stated as familiarizing students with the tradition of NOV, and expand their “revolutionary consciousness” with literature inspired by NOV. Not only is there emphasis on revolutionary and leftist thinking, but also a focus on Macedonia (because NOV took place in Macedonia) in the context of a greater whole

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 10

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 11

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 14

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 16



(SFRY). Finally, there is also a goal concerning the students' capability to independently interpret and evaluate literary works on "critical-theoretical, historic, and aesthetic levels."<sup>73</sup> This purpose of my including the last goal here is to show that despite the affective goals, there are also cognitive goals that would fall in line with the approach of literature for literature's sake, or, within the rigid walls of the categorizations reproduced in the "canon wars," would fall under the aesthetic rationale – developing an individual's internal analytic monologue and modes of thinking. Fourth year expression section includes a goal about teaching topics that encourage students in school, extracurricular, and communal activities, as well as topics that would build a Marxist view of the world.<sup>74</sup> There is also an entire portion which familiarizes students with different media and the relations between media and different forms of expression. Thus, again ideological themes and equipping students with cultural capital remain at the forefront of the educational purposes of this socialist institution. The fourth year literature section is more of the same.

### 3.2.3 1991

1991 is an important year in the process of noting developments and differences in the curricula because in September 1991 Macedonia declared independence from Yugoslavia. The syllabus marks a significant reduction of goals related to socialism, Marxism, and SFRY, although the syllabus still includes common references to the unity and significance of SFRY, which indicates that the syllabus was completed and published before the Macedonian declaration of independence. Despite the significantly decreased accent on Marxist, socialist, and SFRY-oriented themes, the emphasis on the role of the school as a site for expanding the students' cultural capital remains. Many of the technical goals remain similar to the 1989 syllabus, although the 1991 syllabus marks a heavier shift towards scientific currents, that is, studying literature for what it is, rather than for social causes. To begin with, as I already mentioned, the general purposes of the course for all high school years at the beginning of the syllabi are approximately the same as the one from 1989, with a shift at the point where the 1989 syllabus aims to encourage a Marxist interpretation of literary history,<sup>75</sup> whereas the 1991 syllabus aims to encourage

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 18

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 18-19

<sup>75</sup> 1989, 5

a scientific interpretation of literary history.<sup>76</sup> The general aims oscillate between practical applications of the gained knowledge and intellectual growth through literature (which is arguably also practical on an individual level). Practical applications include the development of individual creativity and creativity in work (similar to 1989), developing the capability for proper expression, and enabling the students to “independently experience, evaluate and make use of the content of the press, radio, television, film and theatre art.”<sup>77</sup> The literary goals include perfecting literary reception and taste, building permanent readings habits in the pupils, gaining functional knowledge of literary theory and history for better understanding and studying of artistic texts, and developing a critical and research-oriented attitude towards literature. A goal which includes both practical application and focus on literature is “developing the humanistic and literary education on the basis of the best works of Macedonian, Yugoslavian, and world literature.”<sup>78</sup> This reflects the view that multi-purposeful application of literature is not only possible, but also necessary in an educational setting. The literature courses aim to not only develop literary understanding and taste, but also a humane attitude among the pupils.

The first year operative goals, once again, maintain a focus on cultural capital but do away with Marxism. The focus in the “Literature” subsection is on individual intellectual development: being introduced to literature as a form of art, understanding literary works as an artistic phenomenon in a historical, sociological, and aesthetic light; through historic context of Macedonian, Yugoslavian, and world literature understanding the social and historical relevance to literature. Furthermore, while there is a decrease on SFRY emphasis, emphasis on Macedonian identity and nationality remains: understanding the significance of the Macedonian cultural renaissance as a part of the process of national awakenings (same as in 1989); and developing “sense and criteria for understanding and objectively evaluating Macedonian literature in the period of cultural renaissance and the specific conditions in which it developed.”<sup>79</sup> As the technical goals and emphasis on cultural capital remain similar to the 1989 syllabus, one of the rare repetitions of socialist ideology in the 1991 syllabus is under the operative goals for second year, where students are to be “introduced to the literature inspired by the struggle

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<sup>76</sup> 1991, 1

<sup>77</sup> *ibid*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 7

of the proletariat for a socialist world order.”<sup>80</sup> A similar line is followed in the fourth year program, wherein the themes for “Oral and Written Expression” include art and culture (again, emphasis on cultural capital), but also visits to factories and various work organizations, student life, student organizations, and youth communities.<sup>81</sup> So far, I have noted a steady shift from 1947-1991 from ideology oriented to scientifically oriented approaches to literary education through the curricula. The shift will become even more evident with regard to the reading lists. One last stop before we delve into an overview of the shifts in the reading lists are the last revised syllabi for primary and secondary education in the Republic of Macedonia, dating from 2001 to 2008.

### **3.2.4 2001-2008**

The general aims in the syllabi constructed in these years are mainly cognitive and practical. The sections into which the syllabus is divided are “Language,” “Reading, Literature, and Mandatory Readings,” “Expression and Writing,” and “Media Culture.” The goals that I will outline belong either to the general aims of the course, or the literary aims of the course. Once again, while neglecting the theoretical goals and practical goals on the level of language (technical understanding of forms, writing and reading, success in oral and written expression, and so on), I will offer a brief overview of selected aims of primary and secondary education stated in the syllabi. First to third grade aims include developing a sense of belonging to the Republic of Macedonia through the Macedonian language and developing an interest to reading books.<sup>82</sup> An important aim for first grade, stated in bold, is students developing their fantasy through spoken expression.<sup>83</sup> This aim is a very important development that alludes to not only a change in criteria, but also attitude in education. While so far the goals have been more social and educational, this aim, the development of a pupil’s fantasy, enters new territory in terms of a focus on the various ways of individual development and – interestingly – care for the pupil’s enjoyment of literature. Second grade states as one of its goals the development of the student’s perception of media culture through newspapers, theatre plays, etc. Another one is the introduction to folk and art literature from the pupils’ own and other cultures.<sup>84</sup> In

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 11

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 16

<sup>82</sup> 2007, I, 4

<sup>83</sup> Ibid

<sup>84</sup> 2007, II

the goals so far, there is a noted focus still on the development of cultural capital, as well as sense of national identity, and a practical approach to media culture. Third grade goals repeat the previous grades' goals in terms of expression, cultures, and media. Additionally, it emphasizes field trip with the pupils to the theatre, as well as employing a critical and analytical approach to consuming media and Internet information.<sup>85</sup> Fourth grade builds on the emphasis of grasping multi-media and using books as sources of knowledge. It also includes an important affective aim: to promote tolerance, peace, and collaboration among people of different cultures.<sup>86</sup>

Fifth grade aims include introducing facts about the development of the Macedonian language, as well learning to identify patriotic, as well as humoristic and other elements in folk songs.<sup>87</sup> This implies a critical approach to recognizing themes. Seventh grade is mainly focused on the development of language, critical and creative approaches to texts, creative writing interpretation and evaluation of texts, and again, reliability across media culture.<sup>88</sup> Eighth and ninth grade follow along the same lines, although it is relevant to mention that ninth grade includes socialist poems/songs.<sup>89</sup>

The general goals in the high school curriculum are approximately the same for each year. In terms of individual development, stated goals include: to have the Macedonian language and literature, as well as world literature, serve as the basis for the future intellectual (now student); benefitting from the practical purposes of logical and analytical thinking developed by studying literature; and developing emotional and intellectual capabilities and maturity. In terms of development as a citizen, in a social and national context, the goals include: “adopting axiological (aesthetic) systems compatible with the fundamental values of a democratic society;” “developing and adopting socially acceptable characteristics and models of behavior (social maturity);” and having awareness of the Macedonian language as a basic, key element of a national identity, as well as to belonging to the Macedonian language community.<sup>90</sup> The second year stated goals includes applying the knowledge and methodology from studying literature to experiencing, understanding, and critically approaching media.<sup>91</sup> There are no noteworthy developments in the goals in third or fourth year. As can be seen, there is not much residue

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<sup>85</sup> 2007, III

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, IV

<sup>87</sup> 2007, V, 5, 11

<sup>88</sup> Feb 2008, VII

<sup>89</sup> Nov 2008, VIII, Sept 2008, IX

<sup>90</sup> May 2001, I, 3

<sup>91</sup> 2002, II

of socialist “indoctrination” in the syllabi; still, there remains a divided focus in terms of the affective aims (as few as they are) in terms of the individual as well as the social development of a pupil.

It is important to note that the revisions of secondary school (high school) curricula were last implemented in 2001-2002. The primary school (primary and middle school) revisions date from 2007-2008. Thus, while the primary school curricula include a heavily media-focused subsection, the secondary syllabi do not. Different governments, different syllabi. Interestingly enough, I learned through my interviews that new revisions of the mandatory readings are under way, for both primary and secondary school. These, as well as the teachers’ role in contemporary literature education in Macedonia, will be elaborated further in the next chapter.

### **3.3 Changes in Mandatory Literary Readings in Literature Courses**

The second dimension of change that I will go over are the modifications of assigned readings of the Macedonian literature courses. The changes in readings reflect changes in both socio-political contexts and in academic currents. In terms of socio-political context, there is a clear shift from socialist-Yugoslavian oriented literature, with an additional emphasis on Macedonian national and folk literature and movements, to world literature, and, by the time of the last revisions, a reduction in the amount of national identity related texts. In terms of academic currents, except for the changes of operative goals that I have outlined, the choice of texts also shows a divergence from choosing texts for ideological and practical purposes, to choosing texts for the development of a more scientific and analytic approach to literature. The assigned readings fall into two categories: the first one is works – as the course moves through the syllabus, students look at excerpts from works that exemplify a given period (like reading a passage from Dante to discuss the Renaissance)<sup>92</sup>; and the second one is mandatory readings – a list of books that each student must read in a given academic year. The number of mandatory readings varies. The schema is also not the same for each year. For instance, the 1947 syllabus does not include a division between selected works and mandatory readings, but rather, for each year, has a section of all the readings included in the textbook. The rest of the syllabi do contain such a division. My focus in evaluating

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<sup>92</sup> 2002, II, 14

the assigned readings will be firstly, the nationality of the authors, and secondly, the subjects and themes of the selected works.

### 3.3.1 1947

The 1947 syllabus includes at the beginning of each year until (and excluding) the fifth year, a list of texts that should be read from the “Selected Readings” textbook. The works are quite often folk literature (tales, songs/poems, and legends), or authored by Macedonian or Yugoslavian authors. Readings from world literature are scant: their number can fit the fingers on one hand, and almost all belong to Russian authors. The subjects and themes are largely about the motherland, folk and folk heritage, national(ist), both Macedonian and Yugoslavian, socialist, revolutionary, and war. Still, it is important to note that the Russian authors are Aleksey Nikolayevich Tolstoy, a Soviet science fiction author and supporter of Stalin, and Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy; thus, world literature is represented through both politically chosen texts, but also by classics – a literary choice beyond the political.

First year includes almost forty readings, approximately of which two are Greek legends, eighteen are Macedonian folk legends, tales, and songs, seven are works by Macedonian authors, three are authored by Tolstoy, one is a Czech folk tale, and four are by Yugoslavian authors. The folk literature is centered around village life, Partisan motifs, national heroes and freedom fighters, revolutionary and communal motifs. The works by Macedonian authors contain themes about Macedonia, the fatherland, and revolutionary struggle. The Yugoslavian works also possess folk themes.

Second year includes twenty-one works by Macedonian authors, eleven Macedonian folk legends, tales, and songs, three world literature works, of which two are Russian, three works are from Yugoslavian authors, and there are about five works, with and without stated authors, which are social and historical texts. The works by Macedonian authors, again, focus on national themes, the motherland, folk and national heroes, the Ilinden revolution, etc. The one non-Russian world literature piece is a chapter from Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*. The five scholarly texts include a text about Michurin, a Russian agriculturalist who developed hundreds of new crops, Tito (“Marshal Tito to the Youth”), Lenin (“Childhood and School Years of Lenin”), and one about reading hieroglyphs.

Third year includes almost sixty texts, of which the great majority are by Macedonian authors, and include a variety of historical, scholarly, and literary texts. There are also texts by Yugoslavian authors with similar subjects – mainly folk and socialist history, and the history of technological development. About four of these texts are focused on the development of the Macedonian and other Slavic languages through texts about Cyril and Methodius and Climent of Ohrid, texts about different cities and geographies (nature-fields, rivers, mountains) in Yugoslavia (mostly Macedonia), including Ohrid, Vojvodina, and so on; the texts about technological advancements, about five, focus on things such as the development of the train or the radio; and there are several songs and biographies about Tito, as well as excerpts from Stalin's biography. The themes of the Macedonian literary works are national revolutionary heroes and figures, recent historic events, and many folk tales.

Fourth year includes twenty-nine works of Macedonian and Yugoslavian origin, the significant majority of which are Macedonian. There is one work about the Macedonian language, and five folk works (four songs and one tale), of which two are about Krale Marko. There is one text from Evliya Celebi about the Skopje Bazaar in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and one single world literature piece by Moliere. The manifest from the 1903 Ilinden revolution is also included, as well as another revolutionary treatise. Some of the subjects of these readings are Tito and the socialist youth, the significance of the Soviet Union, and the soviet youth of Skopje, among a continuation of folk related themes.

Fifth to seventh year no longer include readings lists, although the themes that are to be taught throughout the course follow historic developments of the Slavic languages, which I already went over in the previous section concerning criteria changes according to stated aims. Fifth year begins with the origins of general Slavic literateness. Throughout sixth grade the focus remains on folk life, national heritage, and Macedonian and South Slavic heroes and motifs. There is an even greater increase on freedom cults, revolutionary wars, NOV, Partisan, socialist, and komiti literature in seventh year. The seventh year syllabus, approximately, begins with national literature, moves onto general Slavic literariness, onto Macedonian and Yugoslavian authors (where the aforementioned themes are reflected), continues with NOV literature and works about Tito, and ends with a list of six works by contemporary Macedonian authors.

### **3.3.2 1989**

1989 marks the beginning of syllabi which, as I mentioned, have a division between works and mandatory readings. The syllabus follows a chronological order, and follows the history of literature. (This issue will be discussed further in the next chapter – the challenges and problems of chronological teaching of literature). As it moves through literary movements, such as Humanism, Renaissance, Baroque, Enlightenment, Romanticism, and so on, there is a subsection for each, to include a few examples of world literature, more examples from Yugoslavian literature, and, where applicable, examples of Macedonian literature. The world literature portion is usually a steady mix of Western literature and Russian literature. (For instance, in first year, Romanticism is exemplified through Byron and Pushkin.) The chronology finishes with contemporary literature, and Macedonian post-war and NOV literature, which is divided into two parts for third and fourth year. If there are no compatible examples of Macedonian literature, rather than giving examples from the same literary current, there are examples from contemporary literary currents at or around that time in Macedonia. For instance, if there are not enough examples of Modernist literature in Macedonia, the category would be the Proletariat in literature, or Macedonian literature between the two world wars, post-war Macedonian literature, or Macedonian literature in NOV.

Other than the selected works, the mandatory readings in first year include six works of world literature, two Yugoslavian, and three Macedonian. Second year includes five works of world literature (three Russian, two western), five of Yugoslavian, and two of Macedonian literature. Third year includes two works of world literature, four of Yugoslavian literature, and three of Macedonian literature. Fourth year includes three works of world literature, two of Yugoslavian, and four of Macedonian, which include three different ethnic groups (Macedonian, Turkish, and Albanian). Completely unlike the 1947 syllabus, literature education no longer includes non-literary texts at this point, such as historical or social texts, biographies, or manifests.

### **3.3.3 1991**

The 1991 syllabus follows the same general chronology as the 1989 one, and has the same sample readings (“works” that exemplify a particular literary current) with slight expansions to add more world literature. The greatest shift is seen in the proportions



among the mandatory literary readings. In first year there are four works of world literature, one of Yugoslavian, and seven by Macedonian authors. Second year includes four works of world literature (two of which are Russian), two by Yugoslavian, and six by Macedonian authors. Third year has two works by world authors, three by Yugoslavian authors, and seven by Macedonian authors. Fourth year includes three works of world literature, three of Yugoslavian, and six of Macedonian literature. From the 1989 syllabus to the 1991 one of the most significant changes is the decrease in Yugoslavian authors and increase of Macedonian ones.

### **3.3.4 2001-2008**

Primary education mandatory readings begin in the second grade. (The list I acquired specifies that these are the compulsory mandatory readings, so it may be implied that there may be additions made by the teachers for each grade, which implies that the number would eventually increase from that which I have presented.) Second grade consists of one work of world literature, and three of Macedonian origin. Third grade has three works of world literature (two Russian, one Slavic folk), and two teacher's picks from Macedonian literature. Fourth grade consists of three works from Macedonian authors, two from two different ethnicities, and one teacher's pick. Fifth grade includes one work of world literature, and one Macedonian literature, teacher's pick. Sixth grade includes three Macedonian works and two works of world literature, as well as one teacher's pick from the latest contemporary publications. Seventh grade includes one work of world literature, one by a Yugoslav author, two by Macedonian authors, one poetry book by choice of the teacher, and another teacher's pick from the latest contemporary publications. Eighth grade includes four Macedonian novels, and a teacher's pick from the latest contemporary publications. Ninth grade includes one Macedonian novel, one collection of Macedonian poems, and one autobiography by a Macedonian author, two works of world literature, and one more teacher's pick from the latest contemporary publications.<sup>93</sup> Since I do not have samples of primary education from the previous years, I cannot make a comparison, but certainly the themes of the readings lost a good deal of any ideological streak.

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<sup>93</sup> List of Mandatory Readings, Bureau for the Development of Education, 2008

The selected works for secondary education include an even greater number of world literature samples than the 1991 syllabus. Other than that, the progression of works follows the same chronological outline. Space is no longer allocated to Yugoslav literature, and instead the space for Macedonian literature, and literary tradition and heritage is expanded. Except for the general historical literary currents, first year includes texts from the Macedonian geography from the middle ages, and texts by Macedonian and Slavic enlighteners, such as St. Clement of Ohrid . The second year curriculum includes the enlightenment in Macedonia, as well as Macedonian folk literature, in its various forms. Third year, except for an extensive world literature section on Romanticism and Realism, includes a section on Romanticism in Macedonian literature, as well as Macedonian poetry from the period, which remains immensely important to the formation of Macedonian national identity,<sup>94</sup> folk Macedonian literature, and Macedonian literature between the world wars, during NOV, and after WWII. As fourth year goes through realism and naturalism, modernism, existentialism, absurdism, and postmodernism, in terms of world literature (mostly European and North and South American), there is one example of Yugoslav literature (Ivo Andrić), and a lengthy overview of the works and genres of contemporary Macedonian literature. Although the chronological teaching method is similar to the two previous curricula, the main differences are in non-representation of Yugoslav literature, except in small amounts (as at this point Macedonia had been between a decade and seventeen years along in being an independent nation-state), a somewhat decreased focus on Russian literature as the main example of world literature, and ideological distancing evident in the selection of texts. The texts appear to be chosen for reasons other than social messages, as is clear also from the previous section on the selection criteria.

First year of secondary education (high school) includes five works of world literature and two of Macedonian origin (one is choice Macedonian poetry). Second year has two Macedonian works, of which two are choice novels, one is of Yugoslav origin, and two are works of world literature. Third year includes five works of world literature, one of Yugoslav origin, and two of Macedonian. Fourth year includes three works of world literature, and three of Macedonian origin, of which one is a choice work from contemporary works. Once again, Yugoslavia originated works are decreased, and the selected mandatory readings are either recognized world masterpieces, or Macedonian

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<sup>94</sup> An example is Kostantin Miladinov's "T'ga za Jug" ("Sorrow for the South")

works intended to familiarize the students with national literature and national literature within the context of national history.

### **3.3.5 Current Revisions**

My space to share information about the current revisions is, as I have noted, limited. Thus I want to give a brief overview of the new list in terms of national representability as well as variety of choices. Each grade, from first to ninth, has a set number of compulsory mandatory readings a set number of selected mandatory readings. In relation to the last syllabi, the compulsory mandatory readings have changed partially, and at the same time notably. About half of the readings are altered, and some books have been moved up to earlier grades. Second grade has a total of two compulsory readings, of which one is Macedonian and one is from world literature, and one choice reading, of which three are Macedonian and one is world literature. Third grade has four mandatory readings; two compulsory of which one Macedonian and one world literature, and two selected, of which four are Macedonian and three are world literature. Fourth grade has five mandatory readings; three compulsory of which the ratio is two to one (Macedonian to world); two selected, with ratio of six to two. Fifth grade has six mandatory readings; four are compulsory, with a ratio of two to two, and two are selected, with a ratio of six to three (nine options). Sixth grade has again six mandatory readings; four compulsory, with a ratio of three to one, and 2 selected, out of a total of ten options, with a ratio of five to five. Seventh grade has seven mandatory readings, four compulsory, ratio three to one, and three selected (out of ten), with a ratio of four to six. Eighth grade has again seven mandatory readings; compulsory are four, with a ratio of three to one, and selected are three, again out of ten, with a ratio of six to four. Ninth grade has seven mandatory readings; four compulsory, with a ratio of four to four, and three selected (again, out of ten), with a ratio of four to six.

The selectable options under each grade are largely versatile in a number of ways. Other than being representable of a variety of origins, national and foreign, the time period in which they were written and their status as “classical” or more “contemporary” and “commercial” varies. The books that some may consider “commercial,” however, fall within the category of recent books that along with commercial success have also enjoyed critical success, and have gained a place of renown and established quality among literary circles beyond “mass” readership. The attempts at variety are successful as the selection

not only tries to strike a balance between national and world literature, but also allows for the pupils to be drawn to the world of reading through texts which would appeal to their generations specifically. In pairing reading a classic with a contemporary novel that may intensely appeal to compatible experiences, sensibilities, and needs, the syllabus succeeds in attempting to awake in the student a genuine interest of and love for literature.

### 3.4 Sociological Analysis

In the previous chapter, I shared some of Bourdieu's arguments about how schools reinforce real social distinctions by channeling students to prestigious or devalued positions (in relation to their social origin)<sup>95</sup> and by teaching the students the culture of the dominant class, thus creating a disposition towards the legitimate culture.<sup>96</sup> Bourdieu also argued that items within the canon form a network of reproduction, referral, and inter-legitimization, that is, a closed system maintaining the domination of the hegemonic class.<sup>97</sup> He similarly qualified reading the classics as "social solidarity disguised as intellectual solidarity"<sup>98</sup>, wherein members of the hegemonic class perpetuate their position. Bloom also categorizes writers of the classics as members belonging to the elite, at least in terms of the relationship between great artists and patrons within any given society. Still, all authors cannot be made to fit the same cultural and socio-economic fate, and they can hardly be considered parts of the hegemonic class. Although works within a canon certainly are a part of a system of inter-referral, and often legitimized by the dominant group, the case of the mandatory literary canons in Yugoslavia and Macedonia do exemplify different characteristics in terms of class distinction.

The reading list of 1947, for instance, is saturated with folk texts in the forms of tales, songs, poems, and so on. Many of these folk texts are without authors. The authors that are represented in the reading lists, are oftentimes dealing with topics of folk, socialist, or national character, so class distinction is again negligible. (Even more contemporary Macedonian authors that are present in the current syllabi, although often very well educated, would not be considered members of the 'elite' as is often conceptualized and connotated.) Thus, even though the reading list is dictated by the dominant class, the dominant class was – at least on paper – the only class, the proletariat

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<sup>95</sup> Bourdieu, 25, 26

<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 52-53

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 73

of the socialist federation. So at least in terms of class distinction through legitimate culture, Bourdieu's criticisms cannot be applied here. Although censorship was present throughout the society, be it by imprisonment of political and intellectual counter-thinkers or through the clear ideological propaganda in the syllabus, at least in terms of class distinction, the syllabus is not discriminatory towards the 'lower echelons' of society; if anything, it's discriminatory upwards (if there were an 'upwards').

In terms of exclusion of a variety of world literature texts and selection of texts for largely ideological purposes, it can be said that the legitimate culture which was taught to the children was dominated by the ruling class (even if the ruling class was the ruled class as well). In this sense, the government was certainly responsible for the manipulation of knowledge and information which reach the pupil. The 1947 curriculum is a very transparent example of politicizing literature in education. Although reinforcing class distinction in the way Bourdieu implicated educational institutions is not the case with this curriculum, there is a clear and politicized monopoly over the dissemination of knowledge, and exclusion of many works of world literature that could otherwise be chosen on literary or aesthetic grounds. This, in turn, works as a mechanism of exclusion of the intellectuals or intellectually inclined in that society.

At the same time, 1947 is only two years following WWII, and marked the opening of a period of competition between the two prevalent government systems at the time – communism (socialism) and capitalism. At the same time, active pro-Stalinism in Yugoslavia could result in castigation, or even imprisonment. (Yugoslavia's lifespan certainly was marked by a balancing act by its authorities.) Additionally, these were the early formative years of the Marxist federation, so the momentum of appropriate politico-social formation of the members of the society, of its citizens, was still at its zenith. In terms of what the government wanted to feed its youngest members, it certainly was propaganda literature. As at least a good portion of the readings seem to have been chosen on the basis of ideology, it is difficult to talk about the selection of the works by the legitimate culture in terms of "taste." As already I argued in the previous chapter, "taste" may not be the best word to use in this context, and explaining taste entirely through social construction is too reductionist (a repetition of one of the main criticisms of structuralism). However, here "ritual" seems to me a good alternative. Rather than developing the disposition of a certain taste among the young citizens, the government, through the educational institutions, develops a sort of ritual of thought and perception. The commonness of folk songs and dances in the syllabus are examples of rites that

accompany this sort of ritualistic element. In fact, encounters with generations that would have been in school at that time always leave me astonished at their extensive knowledge (and memory) of folk songs, dances, tales, and sayings.

The changes in components, representations, and criteria in the syllabi over time are in great deal related to social and political dimensions. As we can observe from the stated goals and from the mandatory reading lists, already in 1989 there was an increase in varied world literature readings. In 1989, we find Yugoslavia in a different political climate, considering that by this point, its policies had gone through a rejection of Stalinism (already in 1948 and 1949) and a development of stronger diplomatic and economic ties with the West. Additionally, by 1989 socialist and communist systems around the world were crumbling, Yugoslavia included. Thus the openness to a wider variety of world literature texts and a Western emphasis on the development of education can be partially attributed to the shift in the perception of which political systems seemed prevalent, and which education, on a global level, seemed to be dominant and most necessary for the development of cultural capital within a broader international setting. By 1991 there is an even greater increase in world and Western literature, and a further decrease of Yugoslav literature (although Macedonian literature remains). In terms of educational institutions teaching the culture of the dominant class, it can be argued that the dominant culture, or the legitimate culture in this case is not exactly the dominant culture within national boundaries, but the dominant culture in a global, international sense. If western capitalism established itself as a dominant political system, then it is its literature that is presented as dominant, and thus further integrated in the Macedonian literature syllabi.

The last revisions between 2001 and 2008 include both texts from the Western canon and more general world literature, as well as national literature. Still, world literature is more heavily representative of the West, and the curriculum mimics Western trends in literature selection and selection criteria. In this sense, in Bourdieu's terms, the hegemonic class is active in selecting the legitimate culture – even as an influence from abroad. However, the fact that Macedonia is a Balkans country trying to “earn” its place in “Europe,” explains the tendency to appropriating some characteristics of Western educational canons. Overall, although Bourdieu's discussion on the social construction of taste is relevant and partially applicable to the case of literary canon formation for Macedonian primary and secondary schools, there are a number of variables and conditions which show that the issue is not reducible simply to class distinctions.

To begin with, the conscious attempt at striking a balance between national literature and world literature, selection on the grounds of aesthetics and on the grounds of culturalism – in the sense of familiarizing the student with national struggles and heritage – is reflective of the balancing act nation states are facing, especially newly established ones. As Macedonia is a young independent nation-state, placed in a global context of other dominant economic and political powers, the national canon makers and pedagogues, under the direction of government institutions, are focused on both familiarizing students with acclaimed world literature often belonging to the Western canon, and situating the development of a national identity in the pupil through texts of national importance and heritage. Interestingly, these texts, even when criticized for being outdated (folk tales or NOV related texts that the students may have a hard time relating to), they are not criticized for being nationalist. Thus, it is important to emphasize that while the curriculum attempts to preserve national heritage, it does not propound nationalism, so to speak, while several other Balkans nations' syllabi have been qualified as nationalist.

The current revisions, where I was most limited in naming authors and works as the list has not been made official yet, are indicative of new socio-cultural currents affecting selection. Although I will further elaborate on the literary dimension in the next section dealing with literary theoretical analysis, here I want to note that the introduction of some “commercial” or “mass” literature in the mandatory readings list (even if these works are selectable from a list rather than compulsory), reflect the attitude that educating new generations, which are increasingly exposed to visual media from earliest ages, calls for a reversing of the roles of the media-literature bridge. Consider the stated goals in the 1989, 1991, and 2001-2008 curricula. Each of them has a section that deals with the students' introduction to media, wherein the emphasis of literature's importance in this regard is to help the students to interpret media critically. So in relation to media, literature and the analytical, aesthetic, and social capabilities it develops in the reader, have a purpose of serving as a bridge for student to carefully and critically approach media. Now, media comes in the life of a pupil earlier than literature, before the pupil is a pupil, and in amounts greater than ever before. As will be revealed in the next chapter, this phenomenon has led to a conscious effort on the part of the canon-makers, to treat this early visual stimulation as a cause for media to serve as a bridge to literature: thus, the roles are reversed. As the mind from an early age is visually stimulated by films and video games, so the literature that the pupil is to build a relationship with, needs to maintain

relatability on this level, and to have the ability to also visually stimulate the young reader's imagination.

### 3.5 Literary Theoretical Analysis

In relation to the debates surrounding the “canon wars,” the criteria of selection and implied rationales for reading literature in the educational curricula have changed throughout the decades. Some of these changes, however, can be also described as mutations and additions – as some of the criteria have only shifted form (old ones becoming rebranded), new rationales emerged also, which have not even been seriously considered by the literary theorists central to the discussion. To begin with, the 1947 syllabus can be seen as an amalgamation of multiple approaches - the moral approach, practical approach, and culturalist approach – in terms of introducing the lifestyle of the thereto suppressed classes, like environments of farmers and factory workers. In terms of the practical approach, the literature and history education can be considered as cultural capital necessary for being a part of that particular society. In terms of moral approach, there are many folk tales included in the reading list, as well as Marxist and revolutionary texts, which are considered to propound the values of a socialist society. Beyond this, there are few texts (as I have already mentioned) which seem to be selected on literary or aesthetic grounds (Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov, for instance), but even in this case, pairing Chekhov and Leo Tolstoy with A. N. Tolstoy, makes it seem like “Russianness” is an important characteristic of the choice. Still, Moliere is also found as a mandatory reading for fourth year, which shows that aesthetic choices move beyond the political in terms of national belonging. Additionally, it is not my place to categorize folk literature, for one, as serving a practical purpose solely, as it may have been considered to possess aesthetic qualities according to the taste – or ritual – of the contemporary context of Macedonia under Yugoslavia in 1947. Thus we see that the ideological component of any education includes a variety of the different approaches, and rather than seeing them as contradictory, we may begin to see them as complementary to each other in the process.

We see a strong shift towards widely accepted, canonic world and Western literature and classics by 1989. This includes Western classics in a sort of chronological order – Sophocles, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Dostoyevsky, Gogol, Chekhov, Flaubert, Miller, Hesse, and so on, alongside critically acclaimed Yugoslav authors, such as Ivo Andrić, and Macedonian authors, such as Slavko Janevski. Although we can



attribute this much broadened variety of world literature also to a shift in, as previously mentioned, dominant global cultures and intellectual currents which encourage selecting literary readings on aesthetic grounds, it can also be considered that in the reshaping of society, it is again with a practical purpose, in terms of cultural capital, that these particular texts are selected. Additionally, the representation of contemporary authors of different ethnic backgrounds within the territory of Yugoslavia, such as Adem Gajtani or Ilhami Emin, can be interpreted as culturalist in that it represents diversity, and in saying this I do not mean to question the aesthetic qualities of the texts. At the same time, stated goals of reading these texts include the development of a socially conscious and moral citizen. Thus, once again, we have similar criteria, changing forms, and passing over in a new historic context. Additionally, part of the practical purpose of studying literature in the 1989, 1991, and 2001-2008 syllabi is the development of a critical approach to and conscious interpretation of various forms of media. In terms of culturalism, although the world literature texts often belong to the list which is criticized by the culturalist for being representative of the tastes of the hegemonic groups spanning over centuries (“dead white males”), we see that inclusions of Macedonian and Yugoslav literature often address local struggles of at least globally marginalized groups. In this sense, I am considering the Balkans as a globally marginalized region, which has often fallen prey to dominant foreign politics, thus giving rise to the English verb “to Balkanize.” The texts concerning national struggle have not been categorized as nationalist because often the narrative, even when presenting a foreign enemy (like Ottoman occupation), is not focused on Othering the enemy, but emphasizing the struggle of the region throughout the years to gain and maintain some form of autonomy. Furthermore, as I have shown, these syllabi do include texts by authors of various ethnicities within the country, although their number has increased by the 2001 revisions.

In these revisions, most texts for primary school are written by Macedonian authors. This may be seen as an attempt to better familiarize the students with national literatures and the Macedonian language. Books chosen by foreign authors, such as London (*The Call of the Wild*), Stevenson (*Treasure Island*), or Verne (*20000 Leagues Under the Sea*), are books which are widely renown members of the Western children’s literature canon, (children’s classics, in fact), and can certainly be considered novels that actively stimulate the pupils’ imagination (an important criterium in the current list revisions). Secondary school mandatory readings in the 2001-2008 syllabi revisions, as mentioned, include more Western classics than Macedonian literature, and follow similar

choices to the 1989 and 1991 syllabi. The inclusion of Balzac, Chekhov, E. T. A. Hoffman, Gogol, Hesse, Kafka, and Salinger continue to imply the importance of internationally acclaimed classics in the educational literary curriculum.

Still, it can be noted that texts by socially marginalized groups, such as women, remain largely underrepresented. Texts on the subjects of gender and sexuality, or written by LGBT members, remain an undiscussed topic. One of the justifications for this that I gained from an anonymous source is that one has to consider the context of Macedonia today, with its Yugoslav legacy and unique struggles, where questions of deep social issues of marginalization of LGBT members, for instance, are yet to be addressed, losing primacy to broader social issues in terms of economy, poverty and unemployment, ethnic divisions, political polarization and turmoil, and so on.

I have placed the criteria of the current revisions for selecting literary readings in the following chapter as I do not have an official copy of them, but rather gathered them through interviews and references to a list of criteria set by prof. Vladimir Martinovski and summarized in a news article. Although I will delve further into details in the next chapter, what I want to capitalize at this point is that the outline of these criteria suggests that although the stated focus is selecting literature on purely literary merit, this literary merit is posed as a concept broad enough to include a variety of the approaches I have discussed. Importance is given to representability of contemporary Macedonian authors – a dimension which is crucial, in my opinion, because it is encouraging for students to see that there is an active field where literature is produced locally, and that literature is neither solely foreign, nor a thing of the past. The aesthetic component includes the culturalist approach, as beget by Goethe, in having the purpose of familiarizing students with multiple world cultures and the cultures of neighboring countries, something which is important due to, well, Balkanization. It also includes a practical dimension, in having the characteristic of awakening curiosity in the pupils, and turning them into life-long readers. The dimension of curiosity is also important and resounds as a strong motivation in the currently revised reading list, due to the previously mentioned variable of excess visual media. Thus a new criterium emerges in the guise of curiosity (or seemingly new, as it seems to have always inherently been present): entertainment. Lastly, another interesting, yet very self-evident criterium, is that foreign translations must be done well. This is emphasized because there have been multiple translations of mandatory readings by publishing houses either without authorization, or without appropriate standards. This is an interesting intersection of foreign literature and Macedonian language: a good

translation is a retelling of the original, thus a good translation gives the student both an appreciation for the work itself, and the beauty of the local (Macedonian) language.

**CHAPTER 4:**  
**THE CASE IN MACEDONIA:**  
**INTERVIEWS AND CHATS, ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS**

**4.1 Introduction to the Scene**

The list of mandatory readings for primary and secondary school students has been subject to criticism from various places and angles. A good starting point is considering the criticisms and proposed methods of how to formulate and revise the canon offered by Macedonian writers, professors, and literary critics. A recently published article by Toni Dimkov for the MKD news site goes over some of the main issues of the mandatory literary canon for primary and secondary school students, and it includes statements by individuals specializing in literature (and members of the Macedonian Writers' Association). Many are calling for urgent revisions to the canon, and criticize it for being stagnant and unbalanced, among other things. It is criticized for lacking new authors and genres, being too heavily focused on history and ideological premises rather than sufficient literary values, and as such is perceived by the students more as something imposed, rather than something that stimulates further reading. Proposed methodology and criteria for formulating the canon include aesthetics, intellectual stimulation (the mandatory readings are a pivotal point in many students' approach to literature – whether they are attracted or repulsed by it), decent translations and decent material presentation of the books, diverse backgrounds among the authors and texts in terms of country and gender (texts by female authors are nearly completely lacking in the canon, and almost no readings from Asia, Africa, or South America are assigned), relevancy of the texts and their compatibility with the experiences and age of the students (sexuality, broken homes, coming-off age stories), and so on.<sup>99</sup> The previous chapter has shown that the readings

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<sup>99</sup> Dimkov, Toni, “Изборот На Лектирата е Од Суштинска Важност За Светогледот и Ставовите На Личноста Што Се Развива и Учи,” МКД.мк, 27 Aug. 2017

lists have indeed been revised over the years, but perhaps not with the ‘correct’ directive in mind, or at least so critics would argue.

According to facts presented by Dimkov, in a meeting in parliament, the Society of Writers of Macedonia asked the Ministry of Education and Science to employ independent experts from the spheres of literature and education to revise the mandatory reading list “according to aesthetic and pedagogic parameters in the spirit of the contemporary educational system, as well as liberating the choice of authors and works on the grounds of any ideological or non-literary motives.”<sup>100</sup> Dimkov cites prof. Vladimir Martinovski in listing the “literary” motives in the context of educational institutions, which have been broken down into four subcategories of criteria. The first criterion is aesthetics, although once we look at what it includes, we see that the criterion as presented here does not have the limited scope or definition that has been ascribed to it so far. The first point of the aesthetic criterion is aesthetic, i.e. literary value of the suggested work, wherein aesthetic values are those verified by literary criticism and literary history, which includes works endowed with “stylistically refined and linguistically understandable expression, graspable by the students of the appropriate grade.”<sup>101</sup> The second point is that, through the aesthetic aims, the suggested readings must stimulate reading curiosity in the students so that they may develop a reading culture. This is a sort of an affective and practical goal, in fact, as it aims at fashioning a certain kind of individual. The third point is that the principle of representability is present when selecting the works for children and youth. Thus, the culturalist criteria here is included under the aesthetic. The fourth point is the importance of high quality translations of the works by foreign authors. The fifth point is that despite world classics, there must be sufficient representation of works by authors of neighboring literatures. The sixth point is the pivotal significance of ensuring good selection from contemporary Macedonian literature for children and youth.

The second criterion concerns the literary-historical and genre dimensions of the selection, which includes a selection which is representative of Macedonian and world literature works for children and youth from a literary-historical perspective, works which are representative of the various significant epochs of Macedonian and world literary production (including present day), as well as a works that will familiarize students with various literary genres in relation to the Macedonian language program. The third

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

criterion is the pedagogical criterion, which relates the importance of ensuring that the chosen works are compatible with the curriculum as well as the age and developmental characteristics of the students, since recent surveys at the time had shown that some of the works were incompatible with the age of the students. The fourth criterion concerns the technical standards for the literary publications. I.e., this emphasizes on the importance of rules that need to be administered to the publishing houses wishing to publish these mandatory readings. Such standards would include readable fonts, decent quality paper, as well as artistically engaging surfaces, since the visual aspect is considered “quite significant in the reception of literary works.”<sup>102</sup>

Perhaps one of the most significant issues to consider when selecting the educational literary canon, is considering the fact that the mandatory readings in school are “most often the main reasons of inception or rejection of love towards literature” within the students, in the words of prof. Aleksandar Prokopiev. Prokopiev explains that these initial encounters with and perceptions of literature can “enrich the imaginative world of the child by expanding the field of its spiritual and mental activity, to educate it in culture in the most beautiful, playful way.” Prokopiev points out a very evident issue – the importance of nourishing love towards literature in younger generations today, when the Internet, a “might opponent, is most literally conquering the child’s time and attention.”<sup>103</sup> Thus, it is only a good book that can help induce the young pupil in the neverending source of stimulation for all senses and neurological centers, to the open sea of literature. As I will reveal in the rest of this chapter, prof. Prokopiev and this approach became a vital part of the latest revision of the literary curriculum for primary and secondary schools.

The suggestion to revise the curricular canon had been supplemented with reading suggestions, as well as the position that the revision of the list should be undertaken in a “public and transparent manner, with the elimination of politics and the inclusion of the opinions of teachers and students in the revision.”<sup>104</sup> Additionally, the methodology and criteria would need to be made clear. The Ministry of Education and Science had responded positively to the demands. Although at the time when this article was published there had been no action undertaken by the ministry yet, by the time I am writing this thesis, the changes are underway.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

In fact, many of these issues are being currently addressed. The new government took over the project that had been accepted by the previous government. As of January 2018, the Ministry of Education has commissioned the Bureau for Development of Education to issue revised mandatory reading lists for primary and secondary schools.<sup>105</sup> Although primary school education was thoroughly restructured between 2007 and 2009, secondary school, in particular the literature curriculum and readings lists, were last revised in 2001. Additionally, the restructuring of primary education was more focused on mathematics and natural sciences, so a revision there as well in terms of literary readings cannot be considered redundant. The Bureau employed a variety of external organs to come up with propositions for revised readings lists. The reading list for primary education has been set, whereas the list for secondary education is due by the end of the summer. This is the case because while for primary education the Bureau was satisfied with counseling external experts, for the case of secondary school they had also done focus groups with students and teachers, as well as issued questionnaires which would give them, the fashioners of the canon, a better idea of if the teenagers of today like to read, and if so, then what they like to read.<sup>106</sup> So in fact, a lot of the suggestions brought forth by the Society of Writers of Macedonia were accepted and implemented, although the fact that the events are so current makes it impossible for me to have official knowledge about the finalized readings lists and the official criteria; still, some of my interviews have provided me with general ideas about what intentions surrounded the process, and I will try to present some of them throughout the chapter.

The way that I will illustrate the issues and solutions in the case of the literary canon for primary and secondary schools in contemporary Macedonia is by going over the several interviews and chats I have undertaken over the last year. Firstly, I will go over the two interviews with Marina Dimitrieva-Gjorgievska, an adviser in the Bureau. The two interviews are set two months apart, but I will merge their content, thus kind of spoiling the twist – the fact that I somehow ended up writing this text in the middle of a revision of the literary curriculum in Macedonia. Thus I was lucky enough to procure the revised reading list for primary schools which is in the workings this summer, and which I could partially introduce in the previous chapter. The third interview is with Nikolina Andonova-Shopova, a high school Macedonian literature teacher. She revealed what she

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<sup>105</sup> Hatka Smailovikj, “Новото време бара нови содржини во лектирите,” Македонска Информативна Агенција, MIA.mk, Jan. 12, 2018

<sup>106</sup> Second interview with Marina D. Gjorgievska

considered to be lacks in the curriculum, as well as her own ways of perceiving the students and teaching literature. Lastly, not an interview, but a chat, contributed to my study. Prof. Aleksandar Prokopiev ended up being crucial to the process not only as a third juror and my adviser in Macedonia, but also as a member of one of the expert external organs that were commissioned by the Bureau to send a list of propositions for revised readings lists. This is what an afternoon beer in Skopje will get you – a lucky serendipity.

## 4.2 The Bureau

The first time I went to the Bureau I got a little bit lost. Not unlike other government organ buildings in Macedonia, it is an institution distributed among several barracks that have stood the test of time, so to speak. The Bureau is situated right next to FDU, the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, so the area is basically a mix of beer bottles left by students attending plays the previous night and bureaucrats having their morning coffee and cigarette on rickety chairs, wondering if I am there by mistake, and if they should direct me to the buildings next door. Several minutes into finding Marina's office (following some asking around), I realized what a rare find she is. Not only was she passionate about what she was doing in the Bureau, but she was an ex-high school teacher, which made her a sort of a well-rounded, thoughtful source of information. I will first pay attention to some of the issues she outlined in the literature education, and then go into the specifics of the process she described of how readings are chosen. Lastly, I will go over the reasons and conditions surrounding the latest revisions.

Marina considered that although revisions would be welcome along certain lines, the program itself was not the main issue with Macedonian literature education. Although there may be changes needed in the portions dealing with history of language and dialectology, the attitude of the Bureau is that a gymnasium program should remain classical. This, of course, does not mean that they do not encourage useful revisions. Modifying the reading list to contain more established contemporary authors from the last 40-50 years, for instance, is one of the objectives of those revisions. Another one would be dealing with the issues of presenting literature and the history of literature chronologically, as the earliest texts are sometimes the hardest to digest for young students. Still, the point was that there are many contributing factors to what makes the course problematic. For one, an item popular across concerned and involved parties



(journalists, educators, writers, government officials) is that they are now dealing with a generation with different environmental patterns – a generation more surrounded by technology and media than any generation before. When the visual patterns of a child are so stimulated, what does this mean about their capability of consuming literature? Marina did not emphasize these technological advancements as hinderances in literature education, but did point out that one of the main problems is motivating the students to read and study, and grasp depths through educational transference.

This leads to the second variable, which is the teachers. Marina pointed out that for the students to be involved, a teacher needs to be devoted and hard working. The lesson does not begin and end in the classroom – there must be a lot of preparation involved. There are new trends in education, she pointed out, which many teachers are not fans of. There are two crucial aspects of development, Marina pointed out in our second interview, that teachers have to constantly undertake: the first one is pedagogical, and the second one is scientific. Of course, we should always remember that primary and middle school teachers all over the world do not always have the best financial or social reasons to stay motivated – they are underpaid and underappreciated. Still, in terms of her own experience, Marina discussed how she, at the time when she was a teacher, did not necessarily employ particular methods, but rather lectured to the students with a spark and passion, and communicated with them, asking them questions, to keep them engaged. She argued that it is not about employing a specific technique, but being willing and open to try out different things and see what works for the students.

Another very important issue with which the Macedonian educational institutions and organs are facing, Marina pointed out, is the lack of not only adequate textbooks, but also decent translations. Many of the translations that publishing houses publish in Macedonia are translations of translations. Due to the small market (as it is a small country with a population of about two million), there are many bad translations. There is especially a lack of translations of children's books and adolescent books, and the ones which are published lack adequate fonts, illustrations, etc. This is important for children's books, especially considering their intense visual stimulation from an early age, as I have already mentioned. Marina argued that a possible solution would be the Ministry of Education motivating and controlling the publishing houses, in terms of which of them get to translate and publish mandatory readings and their quality. This sort of regulation would, if not exterminate, limit, inadequate translations. In addition to the lack of good translations, Marina also pointed that there is a lack of Macedonian literature for

adolescents, with Gorjan Petrevski being one of the few authors, three of whose books are assigned readings in primary school. Still, these books include parts which are debatable and sensitive for certain age groups, so these books must be introduced to pupils carefully. In primary school though, there is a ratio tipping to domestic books, with only two foreign books per reading list (except in third grade, where there is a third one, but that one also includes Macedonian folk tales). Marina had stated in an interview earlier this year that it is of crucial importance that pupils read literature written in the language of instruction, supposing that that is also the language of a given ethnic community the students belong to, and is the most important part of adopting literateness.<sup>107</sup>

It is the Bureau, meanwhile, which is in charge of creating the course programs and plans. For the program to be adequate, they engage external experts with knowledge about what the program should consist of. For the formation of the literature syllabi, they usually employ philology and literature experts, who recommend mandatory readings. In terms of how the canon is formed, Marina pointed out that there are no written criteria according to which the readings are selecting (aesthetic, ideological, etc.) at least for secondary school. Still, there are criteria which have been integrated in the reading selection for primary education, which were established as a part of the research and drafted criteria by prof. Vladimir Martinovski, and which I have cited above. These criteria were established in 2012 and 2013, and were guidelines in 2013 for the formation of new primary school reading lists. Under the same guidelines written by Martinovski, currently, in 2018, as I have mentioned, the list is being refreshed, with the consideration of suggestions made by the Institute for Macedonian Literature. Some of the suggestions have been accepted and some have not; most works that were considered too “commercial” were left out of the lists, while the more “classical” works, that have been internationally recognized and awarded, have been included. The list has been set and sent to the Ministry of Education and Science for approval.

In terms of criteria, Marina also pointed out that fully crystalized affective goals are lacking, that is, goals which would refer to the upbringing or disciplining segment of the education, as well as goals that address the total influence of the educational process in the formation of the person of the student. Still, both the previous and the current revisions do involve objectives, which can be interpreted as guidelines for establishing criteria. Once officialized, we will be able to see what criteria are involved in the latest

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<sup>107</sup> Smailovikj

revision. Furthermore, the choice of texts is based on the developmental characteristics of the pupils, and the proposed readings should be compatible with the adequate age groups. Unfortunately, not much attention has been paid to the gender or origin (cultural representability) of the author, their focus is on selecting the books more representative of the literary currents being taught. Still, Marina pointed out that the aim is to read a good book, and as much as they may like to, she noted that it is not possible to put *all* good books in a single mandatory school reading list. Marina also attributed the lack of women authors to the smaller number of women writers in Macedonia, but also emphasized that there is a necessity for more gender representability. So far, she pointed out that texts are generally chosen in accordance with the course program. The knowledge of each literary movement, such as romanticism or realism, is encircled and confirmed with mandatory readings; in other words, they select readings that are representative of a style. Regardless of changes, she pointed out, the canon is what it is: standardization is necessary.

Still, Marina emphasized that in Macedonia, secondary school is mandatory. Gymnasiums are not just for the elite, they are for everyone. Thus, the education offered needs to be based on a lot of research and analysis, so that it can offer the best possible education to children coming from different backgrounds. In our first interview, Marina outlined some ways in which this could be done: through questionnaires in the schools, by looking at what the publishing houses are offering, and importantly, by considering what the world is reading now. In accordance to such research, standards can be formulated for the local context.

Indeed, as was revealed in the second interview, these methods have already been applied in some capacity in the formulation of the revised reading lists. As already mentioned, the Bureau had recently released questionnaires to high schools for both students and teachers to consider when revising the list, in addition to conducting focus groups with teachers. Additionally, external experts had been engaged in sending over suggestions. Regarding various suggestions, Marina pointed out that some of them had to be rejected for various reasons. Some would be inadequate for the national curriculum because they may be unsuitable for the Macedonian context, especially at an early age. This seemed to me an allusion to certain social, political, gender, and sexual movements (culturalist criteria) which have had increasing relevance in the West, but the Balkans mentality is supposedly not ready for. My interpretation is that no matter how willing officials would be to involve such things in the curriculum, there is yet to be fertile ground

for it. They are not only dealing with students, but families too. Marina pointed out that one cannot be too avantgarde too suddenly, but that rather things need to be ordered in a careful manner. Classical literature, however, which has been established (even if once considered avantgarde), deserves its own place in the syllabi. So, she concluded, before any controversial additions, there is first a need to shape a new environment. Another reason of why some suggestions had to be rejected is that they may be too ‘commercial’. The basic idea of literature courses, she pointed out, is that pupils should be familiarized with language and expression, and if the readings are too ‘commercial’ this idea is lost. One idea that she proposed in the first interview was giving the teachers a list of picks for the mandatory readings, so that for instance, if out of six readings three are set, the rest of them would be chosen from a list of ten options.

The official reason behind the latest revision is achieving a compatibility of the reading lists with contemporary life and modern living, contemporary subjects, and youth life today, in opposition to the past insistence on classics and classical education. Although Marina does consider classics to be necessary, as I mentioned, she does find it crucial for them to be paired with contemporary literature. What she considers especially beneficial from the revision is that there will be new books involved through a process of sublimation. The Bureau has employed external experts, literature professors for instance, through certain institutions. This will be relevant in discussing my talk with Prof. Prokopiev. Marina’s concluding remarks were that it is necessary to create a system of mutual listening and development between government officials, teachers, and students, and the fact that “children learn, whether we like it or not.” This means that the educational institutions need to be fully aware of their significance and responsibility in what they teach and how well they teach it.<sup>108</sup>

### **4.3 The Teacher**

Nina Andonova Shopova, who is a Macedonian literature teacher in an economics directed high school, discussed her experience with me over a tea at a jazz bar. Being a young teacher and a writer contribute to her critical eye and approach to teaching. She noted that there is weak interest towards readings and literature among the pupils, and that teachers end up working only with one part of the class. She believes that this is

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<sup>108</sup> Interviews with Marina D. Gjorgievska

partially because the students are not very fond of the mandatory readings, and thus she occasionally recommends different books to them to spur their interest towards literature. Some authors which Nina noted would be more exciting for high schoolers are Salinger, Vonnegut, Baricco, Atwood, Orwell, and various contemporary Macedonian literature. Although students do read 'commercial' literature, she tries to give recommendations which would help them build criteria about what is 'good' literature. She teaches second year, which is still 'early' on in terms of the chronology of literature, so the students find quite a few of the topics archaic. For instance, studying Dante or Byron at that age is difficult: the students do not understand anything from the texts until they arrive in the classroom and the teacher explains the texts to them. She argued that if those readings are to be in the curriculum, there needs to be a specific way of teaching them that would reach the students. For instance, watching film adaptation of certain literary works may awaken interest in the students about the texts themselves. Thanks to this line of thinking, she does take her students to the theatre, and does believe that multiple media sources are important in developing a love for literature in the pupils.

In terms of teaching style, Nina tries to not approach a text in a classical manner, by lecturing on what the topic or idea is, but rather by applying an individual approach to students and what their interests and capabilities are. For one, she encourages open questions and discussions. For another, she asks the students what left the greatest impression on them, and oftentimes this is the sort of essay question that she would assign, rather than trying to see if the student *really* read the work. In her experience, the same book is different in every class, as every student picks up on different things.<sup>109</sup>

#### 4.4 The Canonist

What my beer with prof. Prokopiev revealed, a chat meant to update him on my thesis developments, was that he was a part of a committee issued by the Bureau to write a list of proposals for a reading revised list. As a member of the Institute of Macedonian Literature, prof. Aleksandar Prokopiev, along with two other professors and specialists, came up with lists of revised reading lists and recommendations for primary and secondary schools. Thus from our chat I had the opportunity to learn some of the new criteria according to which the Institute made recommendations. Prof. Prokopiev echoed

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<sup>109</sup> Interview with Nikolina Andonova Shopova

what he had already said in the MKD article in terms of what the primary purpose of mandatory readings needs to be – to awaken a desire for reading. Both in terms of texts and pedagogy, he emphasized that the early reading experiences are an important time to develop love for the book. The professor emphasized the need for a change in criteria from following a socialist tradition, to adapting to the contemporary world and the contemporary Macedonian context. For instance, the group of specialists recommended the elimination of books which are stereotypes of a time, outdated and irrelevant for today's pupil. Some of these outdated texts, (which refer to NOV, partisan, and komiti works) are lost on the students and fail to spark their interest. He argued that the importance of these texts can be studied by interested parties at the university level. Additionally, the committee at the Institute tried to eliminate some more brutal works, while at the same time recognizing that childhood is also a period that faces the realities of death and pain, and selected books accordingly.

Prokopiev told me that the criteria need to change in accordance to the frameworks of today's time and contemporary literature. The selection criteria, thus, were focused around the books' innovative potential, as contemporary children gain visual culture at a very early age, as well as the books' capacity to inspire children to create and craft their own fantasies. This includes seeing what is effective for the creative development of a child. For instance, some of the media the children are surrounded with, such as films, video games, and so on, may inspire visual fantasy, but lack a psychological element, a personal touch of creation. To supplement these visuals with personal imaginative thinking and development, the pupils need to read all kinds of books that stimulate them, such as books from the adventure genre. Another dimension of the criteria is very cultural, as the topics need to be relatable and relevant to the culture surrounding the children, as well as the trends and currents in the world and in world literature.<sup>110</sup>

And so these encounters with three relevant persons from the world of literature and literary education allowed me to gain some insight about the issues and solutions concerning educational literary canon formation, as well as about the mental and institutional processes surrounding it. What becomes increasingly visible is a trend towards introducing literature to new generations in line with contemporary conditions and phenomena. Once the priority becomes the inception of love towards literature, then contemporary books that have enjoyed recent commercial success make it to the

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<sup>110</sup> Conversation with prof. Aleksandar Prokopiev

mandatory reading lists, partially as an indirect attempt to build a bridge to the depths of various literary canons. The idea is, you need to hook them – once they're hooked, they will be open to reading increasingly mentally challenging literature. (What the classics may be considered.)

## CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude this work by first overviewing what I have gone over in the preceding chapters, and then by addressing some insights and questions that this analysis has provided for me, both in terms of the pedagogical process of canon formation for literary education, and in a return to the original question of what is a canon, is there a Canon, and what can be said of the differences between types of canons?

The content and formation of a given literary canon varies in relation to its context and circumstances, and the aims and purposes behind it. National canons, world literature canons, and Western and Eastern canons, are – once again – the sites of “texts struggling with one another for survival.”<sup>111</sup> The literary theoretical side of the issue of canon formation is concerned with the issue of *what* the selection criteria ought to be, while the sociological dimension of understanding canon formation poses the question – *who* gets to do the selecting, and what does this imply about power structures? In this thesis, I have tried to approach the process of canon formation by taking a look at mandatory reading lists for primary and secondary schools in Macedonia. I have done so by looking at syllabi dated throughout the last sixty years, as well as by conducting interviews with agents involved in the process.

What the overview reflects is that canon formation never loses its significance, despite political, social, or intellectual changes, but the criteria selection *do* change based on these factors. In the second chapter, where I discuss the debates surrounding the canon, I tried to also convey the idea that strict borders between literature selection criteria, such as aesthetic or culturalist, are unrealistic and unnecessary, as they additionally limit the potential and purposes of literature. Of course when it comes to canon formation selection is of great importance, but oftentimes the criteria that have been posed as opposing, prove to be overlapping. I have tried to show that such strict divisions are not necessary, but

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<sup>111</sup> Bloom, 20.



that there is space for constructing a selection synthesis which addresses the concerns of varying canonists.

In the third chapter I presented the syllabi available from 1947, 1989, 1991, 2001-2008, along with some hints about the mandatory readings list which is currently being revised. The various teaching programs and reading lists revealed how varying forms of government and intellectual currents affect what is prioritized in literature education as well as in book selection. Although, in Bourdieu's terms, the readings are representative of the legitimate culture, and thus hegemonically infusive of the dominant class's culture, I have tried to show that firstly, academics involved in the process are not exactly the sort of elite that makes up the dominant class, and also, that in the case of Yugoslavia, in terms of its socialist structuring, and Macedonia, perhaps in relation to its socialist past, primary and secondary school literature curricula have been often aimed at enriching the cultural capital of the students, rather than creating larger crevices of divisions among classes. While the Yugoslav reading selection in 1947 was largely based on ideology, the most recent Macedonian syllabi are focused on what has been referred to as purely literary merit, although at the same time it shows a strong inclination to following a Western canon which includes a number of classics. In terms of selection criteria, then, it is easy to see from the reading lists and curricular programs that not only do criteria change over time, but also that there is no single criterium of selection, but that there is space for multiple criteria all at once. This is visible in the stated goals also – that a student should at once familiarize herself with literature for its practical value in her practical life, and also to enrich herself spiritually.

In the fourth chapter I summarized the interviews I conducted with Marina Gjorgievska, and adviser at the Bureau, Nina Shopova, a high school literature teacher, and Prof. Aleksandar Prokopiev, a member of the selection committee for the latest revised reading list. These interviews provided me with depth concerning the process of literary canon formation in schools, the reception of books among the new generations of students, and the obstacles that the various agents face. At the same time, I gained insight into the currently proponed selection criteria, and how contemporary life shapes and reshapes what is considered necessary in literature education.

From a pedagogical point of view, two interesting insights I would like to emphasize are the way the most recent revisions were undertaken, and the reversal of roles in the bridge metaphor between literature and media. By the former I mean to refer to how the Ministry of Education, i.e. the Bureau, combined several different

methodologies to arrive at a revised mandatory readings list that makes an effort to mend the issues cited by critics, while at the same time remaining somewhat faithful to a traditional educational curriculum. The methods, roughly, include: asking the public for opinions – the public was encouraged to make books suggestions to the Ministry website; commissioning the Institute for Macedonian Literature to propose a reading list; for secondary schools, conducting focus groups with teachers, and issuing surveys to students; and in the end, officials at the Bureau, such as Marina, fulfilling the task of making the final selection based on all the gathered data and propositions, and sending the final lists to the Ministry. This hands-on approach, especially asking the public for suggestions alongside trying to gain an idea about the thoughts and attitude of the individuals most directly involved in the process, i.e. students and teachers, shows that the educational or curricular canon formation has reached a stage where it is recognized that all actors ought to be involved in the process in some capacity. In the end, as I have mentioned, classics did secure their place in the revised reading list; however, contemporary and “commercial” literature with wider acclaim also made the cut. This suggests that genuine regard is given to the opinions of the less traditionalist professionals (like the professors which are members of the Institute), the professionals witnessing the process first-hand (the teachers) and the laymen – students and citizens.

This also shows that the institutions behind educational canon formation recognize a need to address the circumstances of contemporary students in selecting readings *for* them. This brings me to the reversal of roles between media and literature – of how once, one of the applications of literature was its serving as a bridge to interpreting media, and how now, there is a strong implication that media is being considered as a bridge to students approaching literature. The argument that visual stimulation from media from an early age calls for a need to also choose literature that would stimulate visual imagination is an example of this. Rather than a traditional didactic approach that obligates the student to study what the syllabus contains, this approach is more concerned with the student’s willingness to study a certain kind of literature. Is this the politicized curriculum that Bloom referenced? It does not seem so, at least not in the way he ‘fears,’ by the inclusion of works on purely culturalist grounds, or based on social agendas. Still, it can be argued that it is a politicization of a different sort, in that it is a part of different educational politics. It seems, in fact, like a *democratization* of the educational process, wherein rather than strict traditionalism in selection on the part of governing bodies, there is consideration given to the *wants* of the ‘subjects’ – the students. It is rather like a piano

teacher assigning her student a Bach two-part invention, while allowing the student to choose her second piece to be a piano arrangement of “Moon River.”

This brings me to the original question of canonicity and different types of canons. These last observations of the process suggest that educational, that is, curricular canons, may ask for and indeed leave more space for democratization and improvisation than the Canons with capital C’s allow for. While curricular canons may be subject to common change in relation to the political, social, and intellectual currents surround them, the Western Canon, for instance, is a very slow-moving entity. Milton will maintain his place in it, and inclusions of new authors showing promise to becoming ‘classics’ may take generations of academics. These literary canons may be referred to as official or critical canons – the former being a section of overlap among canons, and the latter going a bit further in including works that may not have been widely officially recognized as canon but pertain critical acclaim and potential, or are simply relevant and controversial enough at the time. One of the reasons for this is that academics involved in the preservation and formation of these kinds of canons often focus on selecting texts which, as Bloom explains, have stood the test of time, and show promise of the preservation of their meaning and relevance beyond specific contexts. Is this the firm, fat line between a Macedonian folk tale and Chekhov short fiction? It seems irreducible to this sort of universality alone, as there is style to account for, aesthetic forms argued within academic literary circles, and so on... It seems that certainly there is distinction between the canons which are meant to induct young readers into the halls of literature, and the canons which are vigorously argued, which academics attempt to select as carefully as craftsmen working with filigree. In the end, not only the selection criteria but also the roles of these canons also seem to differ a great deal, with curricular canons serving as a starting point, which attempts to establish an initial ground of familiarity with literature, and official canons, serving to tempting the readers or students to further depths, provoking them to spend hours discovering the intricacies of language, of literature, of art. This further accounts for the flexibility of curricular canons and the frigidity of the Canon – it is not due to the selection criteria, but to the purposes that these bodies of works have come to serve.

Yet, the bodies are comprised of parts, and the parts are books attributed personal value by individual readers beyond reading communities. In the end, we may only consider the constructed divisions as guidelines to seeing how literature is critically categorized, while allowing ourselves and the new generations of readers to ascribe our

own purpose and worth to the books we all come in contact with, become absorbed by, *change* alongside. Additionally, the role of education in fashioning the student into a reader, also indirectly poses literary education as a bridge to a network of canons – national, Western, Eastern, feminist, ethnic, science-fiction, and so on. As for turning young generations into readers...

### **Freestyle?**

I have enjoyed reading since I was very young. I used to swallow books whole: hard covers, soft covers, yellow pages and white. I had in my arsenal an accumulation of books from grown up cousins paired with a steady income of new books. One day I discovered *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, and I read it once, and then twice, and then several more times, to my mother's growing horror. The same process repeated itself for each new *Harry Potter* sequel. I awaited each following sequel desperately. I remember that I am missing the third book, because I lent it to someone irresponsible, and that I have two copies of the sixth book, because I thought that I had lost the first copy (at least one is soft cover and one is hard cover). I remember this although I have not had any mental interaction with the books for about eight years. So what is the point? The point is my mother's horror. She believed for a long time that *Harry Potter* had *ruined* me for other books. "You used to read so much, so many books! Now it's only *Harry Potter*, damn *Harry Potter!*" Yet, her fears proved to be baseless. Even though in my childhood and adolescence there were phases when I was uninterested in reading, or too eager to reread a *Potter* book in place of something new, I never limited my literary intake. And OK, *Harry Potter* did influence my interest in fantasy and my writing style for a period, but so has every other book I have read. There is something to gain and learn and keep and let go from so many authors! Over the years I have enjoyed reading contemporary literature of varying genres and acclaim, be it science fiction or the intricately woven works of Bolano; classics and their in-between "semi-precious" companions; sometimes catching up on readings that others finished in their high school years, and other times taking up books that I will understand even better in a few years. At the end of the day, laments over the limited number of books one has time to read in a lifetime reverberate in my ears. Love for literature is multifaceted, fluid, multipurpose, always mutating. It is magnanimous, for all the different things it has to offer to the lover...

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*Syllabi, Curricula, Reading Lists*

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*Interviews*

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