

The History of Albanian Literature after World War II. Some Facts toward Its Revision

Albanian Literature after World War II may be considered *sui generis* when analyzing specific features that it manifested. It can be defined of a stumbling relation with literary tradition, an imposition of creative literary method from politics and a complete isolation from the developing world-wide literature. The main features that shaped its specific character are:

I. Literature written inside the borders of the Albanian state was separated from literature written by Albanians living in Kosovo, Macedonia and elsewhere in the Diaspora. As a result of the total isolation of the country, literature suffered its tragic fate too. It was treated as a singled out entity, without retaining any relation at all to literature written by authors living outside the Albanian political border. Albanian writers, tragically, were not able to communicate with Albanian readers in Kosovo, Macedonia and the Diaspora. The impossibility of tracing literary development in those language-related areas reduced chances to maintain further contacts with European and international literature. The communist politics dictated the countries to retain contacts within “legal” relations, “acceptable” influences and the writers whose works could be translated into Albanian departing from non-literary criteria. As a result, there were many translations of Russian writers (because of a certain affection for the origins of communism). A small number of classics were published even though the censorship hardly truncated them. The lack of connections with the international trends of literature turned Albanian literature into a desolate island, having no contacts at all with the outside world.

Even though it has developed in geographic and ideological isolation, contemporary Albanian literature should be analyzed in a broader geographic concept, beyond the narrow national framework.

The main features of literature written in Kosovo were: dissociation from “mother” literature and a part of its literary tradition; lack of information of what was going on in literature on the other side of the border. Before the war, works of some writers from the 1930s could have been brought to Kosovo by students obtaining their education in Albania. After the war, in the 1950s, there was a total blackout of contacts because of the establishment of an oppressive dictatorship in Albania. Though it was stuck between two evils, invasion on the one hand, and the Yugoslavian communist dictatorship on the other, Albanian literature in Kosovo was more receptive to the literary “winds” blowing across the world.

The development of literature in Kosovo suffered no rigid ideological restraints quite contrary of that in Albania. Early emigration helped to increase contacts with the world providing so the convenient ground for the written word to develop in a more cosmopolitan way. Authentic literature in Kosovo felt like being more experimental and reached the readers in many different styles, themes and ideas (Elsie 2001: 203).

A fast developing genre in Albanian literature in Kosovo was poetry. Starting at about the end of the 1950s, writers like Din Mehmeti, Fahredin Gunga, Rrahman Dedaj, Enver Gjerqeku, Azem Shkreli, Ali Podrimja, Besim Bokshi, Eqrem Basha, Sabri Hamiti, among others, gave to literature specific features, quite different from literature written in Albania. In prose fiction, Anton Pashku, Ramiz Kelmendi, Azem Shkreli, Nazmi Rrahmani, Rexhep Qosja, Mehmet Kraja, Musa Ramadani, etc., stood forth.

Many writers in Kosovo were sadly incarcerated, deported, or obliged to live as fugitives away from their motherland. Serb invaders exercised cruellest violence against the intellectuals who used the power of words to affirm Albanian national values. Generally, Albanian writers in Kosovo were free to choose the formal elements like language means, metric, figure of speech (unlike writers living

in Albania), but they had to be very careful in the usage of patriotic and national topics.

Along with Albanian literature written and published mainly in Prishtina, new features could be observed among the Albanians in Macedonia, especially in the fiction and poetry of Murat Isaku, Abdylazis Islami and, later, in the literary works of Resul Shabani, Adem Gajtani, Agim Vinca, Din Mehmeti, Luan Starova, among others.

II. The unnatural dissociation of Albanian literature from an important part of its tradition. The valuable experience of the past was submitted to two contrary processes: the negation of the real values of the writers, literary works and literary trends, on the one hand, and the overestimation of certain authors and literary movements, on the other.

Literary works of the Bejtexhinj writers (*Alhamiado literature*) whose works mark the transition from religious literature of biblical writers into meditative intimate literature, or entirely laic, were considered “pure means of ideological manipulation (...) through which the invaders intended to shatter ethnic features of peoples, to dislocate language and traditions and even their total assimilation” (Akademia e Shkencave 1983: 59).

A similar negative attitude was held to literature written during the 1920s and 1930s. This literature grew rapidly, detaching itself from the national renaissance, during which the writing of literary works was considered to be “just a literary act to confront the cultural hegemony of the invader” (Elsie 2005: 93). “Catholic educational institutions established by Franciscans and Jesuits in Shkodra, around the second half of 19th century, were efficient during the 1920s and provided the opportunity to create a new intellectual elite in Albania (ib.). Authors like Gjergj Fishta, Shtjefën Gjeçovi, Vincent Prendushi (Çabej 1936) stand close to others, as Leonard De Martini, Pashk Bardhi, Martin Sirdari, Anton Harapi, Justin Rrota (Koliqi 1941), Bernardin Palaj, etc.

Literary works published during these years are evidence of a rapid development of literature. Influence of creative literary directions and trends started to penetrate the work of gifted authors.

Talented writers such as Konica, Noli, Poradeci, Koliqi, Migjeni, Kuteli, and others, became a landmark in the history of literature. Precious contributions to the development of the literature were made by the clerics, who were familiar with tradition and novelty of international literature as a result of their education accomplished in Europe.

The talented generation that gave a new dimension to Albanian literature faced enormous difficulties during the first years of the communist dictatorship. There were direct threats to the lives of the writers who with their work opposed the mechanisms of one of the cruelest regimes in Europe.

Even the most prominent works of Albanian literature could not escape the claws of communist censorship. A new and artificial ideological outlook on reality turned their role into as peripheral as possible or, even worse, effaced them all from history.

Fishta, a distinguished and most influential figure of the first half of the 20th century, who more than any other writer gave to the soul an artistic touch in search of an independent Albanian nation, sank into the abyss of oblivion. After the communist regime was established, Fishta, a Franciscan cleric with a deep knowledge of theology, philosophy, foreign languages (Latin, Italian, Serbo-Croatian), the founder of several literary organizations, secretary-general of Albanian delegation in the Peace Conference held in Paris, vice-chairman of Albanian assembly, decorated by different institutions – *Ritterkreuz Order*, *Al merito* from Pope Pius XI, *Fenix Medallion* by the Greek government, *Lector jubilatus honoris causae*, member of Italian Academy of Arts and Science (considered a “national poet of Albania” and “Albanian Homer” during his lifetime), was condemned post-mortem.

However, oblivion could not totally erase all the deep marks Fishta had already left in Albanian culture. These marks worked against the state machinery of communist ideology. He was charged with treason of the motherland, being an accomplice of the enemy, etc. Finding it impossible to erase his heritage, communist necrophilia went as far as disinterring his bones from the grave and throwing them in the river Drin. It was meant to erase his memory but instead, symbolically through river Drin, Fishta voyaged across the country

and his memory is still alive even outside political borders of Albania, in all countries speaking the Albanian language. *Lahuta e Malcis*, considered the soul of patriotism even though it was banned from being published, became an epic hymn sung in all Albanian-speaking territories.

Other clerics who devoted their lives and knowledge to the national cause, shared Fishta's tragic destiny. Gjon Shllaku, for one, considered as the most accomplished professor, the most outstanding figure of Albanian culture (Pllumi, At Z. 2006: 152), an ardent opponent of the pro-fascist philosophy of Gentile, was arrested while teaching and was executed in 1946 in the same way as his many fellow-countrymen in the years that immediately followed.

Faik Konica and his work suffered the same fate. He is considered to be "probably the most discussed writer in the Albanian history, considered as a pioneer of Albanian modernism, the fiercest critic of the Albanian world, often turned into a myth, especially in the works of romantic writers. He criticized bluntly in his own language the Albanian phenomena of the time and presented to the world in other languages the refined Albanian cultural values: literature, arts, ethnology and history". (Hamiti 2000: 35) The combination of literary talent with his cultural and patriotic activity (the contribution for the establishment of a common alphabet, ambassador and advocate of Albanian issues in the USA, founder of Vatra Society, Albania newspaper, etc.) made him a unique personality in Albanian literature and culture. Appreciation by Apollinaire as a "moving encyclopedia", "an erudite, a polyglot, an active participant, at least for two decades in the activities of European aesthetic avant-gardes" (Lizarrade 2008: 58), is testimony of his universal character.

However, an anti-conformist like Konica could not avoid suffering from the consequences of misinterpretation of his works. He writes in his will "I will not rest in peace if you my lord Noli (Fan S.Noli) and you my little Lame (Sejfulla Malëshova) or any of all those who consider themselves Albanian will not take my corpse to rest in my motherland ..." (Hamiti 2000: 37), but unfortunately his bones were brought to his country only in 1995, at a time when the senseless hatred of the communists for him had faded.

Ernest Koliqi, another distinguished writer, “the intellectual filter through which he passed the Albanian human reality was the filter of a man who had West European concepts of civilization and development” (Suta 2004: 22). A writer with modern symbolist tendencies could not go unnoticed by the strict eye of censorship that considered such tendencies heresy. The follower of “Neo-Albanianism” (a movement aiming at highlighting the special qualities of the Albanian “race”) was accused of being a traitor of his country and his work was left in oblivion for half a century.

Lasgush Poradeci, an emblematic personality, regarded as “one of the paradoxes of Southeastern European literature” (Elsie 2001: 312) – because according to Rexhep Qose “he feels as a romantic, thinks as a classicist, is lonely and spiritually isolated as a symbolist and cautious and fanatically adhered to verse forms as a Parnassian” (Qose 1979: 144) – could not fall prey to the communist clichés, so he ceased to write. The rigid rules of socialist realism could not turn into a slave the only remaining Albanian lyrical writer. He decided to die as a hardy old man who does not recognize and submit to other laws except those of the soul’s freedom.

Fan Stilian Noli, a poet – “innovator in his language and of high inspiration, a playwright, essayist, polyglot and memorable translator” (Lizarralde 2008: 43) – continued to create throughout Europe and America, but was totally isolated from the literary process in Albania and had no influence on it. Although he is acknowledged for his contribution to politics (Noli led the Democratic June Revolution for the replacement of the tyrannical monarchy of king Zog by a parliamentary republic), his works were published years after his death.

Meanwhile, the work of some other writers was misinterpreted. One of them was Millosh Gjergj Nikolla (Migjeni), the writer who distanced Albanian literature from national romanticism and started a completely new path, that of critical realism. Regarded as an individualistic voice of a real social revolt, one of the few authors of the 1930s whose works were considered “worth studying”, he was considered by the post-war Stalinist critics as “a forerunner of socialist realism” (Elsie 2001: 313). Features such as Schopenhauer’s pessimism, his appreciation for the West, his oppressed sexuality and

Nietzschean elements found in his poetry, were suppressed in the post-WW II publications. In spite of misinterpretation, Migjeni “was not a socialist or revolutionary poet in the political sense of the word, despite the clenched fist he occasionally shows. As a consequence, he lacks optimism and a kind of feeling of involvement in political activities.” (Ib.)

On the other hand, the works of the national renaissance writers were overestimated on the basis of non-literary factors such as an open patriotic bias of their writing. Literary studies concentrated on the activity of such writers as Naim Frashëri, Pashko Vasa, Asdreni, Çajupi, etc., in whose works thematic reference function and not the poetic one prevailed. To understand that the treatment of facts and literary personalities was imposed by the political ideology, it is sufficient to mention that in the *History of Albanian Literature* published by the Academy of Sciences (1983) 56 pages are dedicated to the writings of the “National Poet” Naim Frashëri, whereas only a few (to be sure, negative) comments are dedicated to the titanic work of Faik Konica III.

The third feature of the literature of that period is the imposition of the “method” of socialist realism on the majority of writers. This method, fabricated by the ideologues of communism, was applied for about half a century in Albania. Turning socialist realism into a mainstream of artistic creativity is mostly connected with the harshness of the communist dictatorship in Albania. The influence of this method extended not only into literature, but into all branches of art, including painting, sculpture, cinematography, etc. “Although it was considered as a literary method, in reality it incarnated the rules of censorship” (Kuçuku 2008: 194). As its noticeable features, one could mention the presence of the communist party partisanship and class struggle, the portrayal of the positive hero, the historical-revolutionary tendency, etc. Thematically, literature focused on the glory of the freedom gained by the National Liberation War, and new achievements in the development of the country. Regarding writing experience, literary works of that period always mix the language of literary narration with a kind of ideological propaganda.

This is mainly characteristic of novels published in the 1950s.

The method of socialist realism, which started to be processed, exerted and spread in the Albanian environment since 1945, despite the great impact it had on literature, in its essence it was not a real literary trend, also due to the simple reason that it was not the fruit of the writers but of the party ideologists, who deliberately or not, made it obligatory for them. It was interference, an alienation aggression against literature. Its content, function and goal is more clearly seen in the congresses and the meetings of the Writers and Artists Union, where literature, by writers as well, was assessed through the political-ideological eyeglass. (Ib.)

It was due to these notorious congresses that, upon the decision of the Union of Writers, capital punishment was provided for writers and works whose work revealed inconsistencies with the rules of socialist realism. Even inside the same group that kind of malevolence would make Mitrush Kuteli state that: "Professionalism in literature, in our country, is for the time being a path of suffering, its bread is bitter. I say it is bitter, for the one who does not know tricks and hypocrisy. The terrain of literature is a land where snakes thrive. You are killed by your friends as you overdo them. If not, it means you are not capable of literature" (Plasari 1995: 122)

For almost half a century, the violence of the dictatorial state was harshly felt by those intellectuals who dared to object to it either through declarations or press articles or by means of their literary works. Numerous writers suffered from harsh state censorship. Writers were either shot or imprisoned for several years, unless they managed to escape and spend their lifetime in exile.

It is sufficient to mention the case of Kasëm Trebeshina in order to understand the harshness of the communist dictatorship in Albania. His data are apparently contradictory. On the one hand, he is "an early communist, the best commander of the partisans files and on the other hand he is the greatest opponent of the dictatorship, the most courageous and uncompromising intellectual towards the principles of human and intellectual freedom" (*Trebeshiniana* 2001: 48). He is the dissident who wrote in 1953 the minutes addressed to Enver Hoxha and with the same courage he withstood the sentence for the internment, imprisonment in the most notorious communist prisons, and capital punishment. The numerous difficulties in his life

did not have any influence on his writing activity which can be considered an isolated island having nothing in common with the socialist realist stereotype of literature. His works (18 volumes of poetry, 42 plays, 22 novels, novellas, pieces of writing, etc) were not influenced by socialist realism (...) “neither in the form of obsequiousness, conceptions and fear of power, nor as a schematic counteraction of this power. He was self-protected “by finding the path of the writing activity solely through world legacy in art”. (Ib. 7). Although his first work, *Artani dhe Minja* appeared in 1959, none of his other works were published until the 1990s.

Arshi Pipa, Sejfulla Malëshova, Musine Kokalari, Trifon Xhagjika, Bilal Xhaferi, Pjetër Arbnori, Astrit Delvina, Frederik Rreshpja, Visar Zhiti were among the writers who shared Trebeshina's fate. They spent a part of their life in the communist prisons and their work was published only after the fall of communism.

On the other hand, such writers as Petro Marko, Vedat Kokona, Shefqet Musaraj, Fatmir Gjata, Sterjo Spasse, Nonda Bulka, Dhimitër Shuteriqi changed their literary style and attitude during their creative career. While at the beginning some of them could have been labelled realist writers, as a consequence of the huge pressure from political reality of the time (censorship and auto-censorship), their works acquired the characteristics of the method *en vogue* of socialist realism. “We need humanistic literature,” Nonda Bulka (Bulka 2000: 241) stated, but the humanist ideal was often replaced in the works by the communist stereotypes of a warrior and a worker.

At the end of the 1950s and especially at the beginning of the 1960s one can observe the first steps taken to distance Albanian literature from the stereotype of socialist realism. The publication of the novel *Hasta la Vista*, by Petro Marko brings in a different atmosphere and sensitivity. Two years later his novel *Qyteti i fundit* was published (the only uncensored novel of this writer) aiming at avoiding schematics. Later on Ismail Kadare published his novel *General of dead army* (1962), which along the path anticipated by the novels of Petro Marko, would rise to an international level. (It was to be the first Albanian work to be translated into French in 1972.)

Following the novels by the above-mentioned two writers, during the 1960s a number of writers would consolidate the new tendency in the Albanian novel, looking for other ways of mirroring the Albanian world. In the field of prose fiction, such writers as Jakov Xoxa, Dritëro Agolli, Dhimitër Xhuvani, Ali Abdihojha, Skënder Drini, Sabri Godo, and Vath Koreshi could be mentioned, whereas the peak of lyric poetry was achieved by Fatos Arapi, Ismail Kadare and Dritëro Agolli, followed by a new generation of talented poets. Notwithstanding the strict ideological circumstances, quite a number of outstanding books were published. As Kadare explains: “We propped each other up as we tried to write literature as if that regime did not exist. Now and again we pulled it off. At other times we didn’t. The idea we could create a few mouthfuls of spiritual nourishment for our imprisoned nation filled us with the joy” (from the speech that Kadare held in the ceremony where he won The Man Booker International Prize, 2005).

Contemporary modern features in Albanian literature started in the 1950s and developed gradually at a time when European literature revealed processes which came to be called postmodernism. Contemporary modernism was not clearly expressed in Albania until the 1990s, because a huge part of literary works remained unpublished as a consequence of the communist censorship or the auto-censorship of the writers themselves. The aforesaid is exemplified by Kasëm Trebeshina’s *Odin Mondvalsen* (written in 1956, published in 1992), Kadare’s *Qorrfermani* (written in 1984, published in 1991), *Ëndrra mashtruese* (written in 1985, published in 1991), Primo Shllaku’s *Lule nate* (written in 1970–1990, published in 1994), *Edhe fjalët shkojnë në ferr* (written in 1970–2005, published in 2005), etc. On the other hand, after the 1990s, a considerable number of works published in Kosovo and Macedonia penetrated Albania thus complementing the image of modern Albanian modern literature: A. Pashku’s novel *Oh* and the volumes of his short stories *Kulla* and *Kjasina*, R. Qose’s *Vdekja më vjen pej syve të tillë*, M. Camaj’s *Karpa* and *Palimpsest*, Ali Podrimja’s *Dhimbë e bukur*, *Lum-Lumi*, *Torzo*, *Ishulli Albania*, Azem Shkreli’s *E di një fjalë prej guri*, *Bibla e heshajes*, *Nata e papagajeve*, *Lirikë më shi*, etc.

We can conclude from the above-mentioned facts that the History of Albanian Literature has to be necessarily revised with maximum objectivity.

The Re-writing of History of Literature must not be done only for ideological motives, as pretended by some who are not real historians of literature, but for a range of scientific motives. Therefore, the limitations of the inherited History of Literature include, in their extreme ideology, a deformation of the historical flow of the literary production, thus a missing professionalism. (Dado 2008: 166)

The filling of the gaps in the “Mendelevian” table should represent the totality of periods and creative personalities in the field of literature and the total analysis of the evaluation of the creative literary work of the post-war period and its re-evaluation on the basis of the most advanced of the contemporary world studies on literature (Neziri 2004: 10)

The threat to ethnic values due to the alienation of facts is an evil that has accompanied the past of Albania. It is sufficient to mention such facts as the change of borders, the efforts to appropriate historical characters, false myths of the late influxes of Albanians into the Balkans, massive cleansing campaigns in the ethnic lands, assimilation, etc. However, when danger derives from the self-alienation of historical facts, the consequences become even graver: a nation with a fabricated history is always prone to be misunderstood.

Therefore, the necessity to re-write the history of a nation is an obligation to oneself, in order to clarify the “mirage” that inhibits the recognition and understanding of the values of Albanian literature.

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