

**THE ALBANIAN POETRY OF THE
1970s GENERATION AND THE PLACE
IT OCCUPIES IN THE BEST ALBANIAN
POETRY OF THE 20th CENTURY**



Literature

Keywords: Albanian poetry, the 1970s generation of poets, modernity, socialist realism, original influences.

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Abstract

The title “The Albanian poetry of the 1970s generation and the place it occupies in the best Albanian poetry of the 20th century”, aims to prove the hypothesis that the arrival of the 1970s poets in Tirana was an original introduction in our 20th century literature, which brought freshness within the schematic rigidity of socialist realism, being inspired by modern European poetry. The topic tries to answer the question whether the modernity of this generation’s creativity is a spontaneous phenomenon or Albanian’s poetry maturity in general?

Introduction

1970s Generation of Poets

The study, through a comparative, formalist and stylistic analysis, seeks to prove this generation’s link with leading representatives Frederik Reshpja, Xhevahir Spahiu, Moikom Zeqo, Anton Papeleka, Fasli Haliti, etc., with the ‘70s poetry in Pristina, and also the generation the ‘30s, in the 20th century (Poradeci, Migjeni, Gasper Pali), the latter considered by most Albanian scholars as the founders of modern Albanian poetry, with its source in Western-European literature.

The commentary after taking a short look at the 20th century poetry (1900-2000) tries to prove that the essence of this poetry’s modernization appears like this generation’s hallmark, in contrast to the ‘60s generation and even less to the ‘50s generation, but also as a reaction against the closed society, as an attempt to convert literature into its natural habitat, although within the solid schemes of socialist realism and its ideological criticism.

Based on a structural, textual, and sometimes biographical analysis (as a tool to better understanding this poetry), the theme tries to prove that the poetry’s inner life may remain untouched by external literary factors and that poetic codification remains a secret form of the universal self, despite the various persecutions and pressures experienced by this generation in Tirana, labeled by the idyllic criticism of the time as “decadent”, “hermetic”, and “formalist.”

This manifestation of modernity in literature has been investigated and commented based on the exemplary texts of representative authors and theoretical concepts, in many poetries with existentialist connotations as this this generation’s hermetic individualization, however delayed, in a clear construction with the common society and the deformed lyrical self of the revolutionary poetry.

At the end of our research we will try to prove this theme's hypothesis; that this generation mostly identified with Frederick Reshpja, Xhevahir Spahiu, Moikom Zeqo, Anton Papeleka, Fasli Haliti, etc., brought a very dynamic poetry, although not dissident, very different in its essence from the oriented poetry of the time, and perhaps with remote links to the poetry of the '30s, as a poetry with strong roots in the 20th century's Albanian literature.

The best critics' publications and scholars such as: Ibrahim Rugova, Rexhep Qosja, Ali Aliu, Agim Vinca, Arshi Pipa, Shaban Sinani, Floresha Dado, Vehat Shipa, Adriatik Kallulli, Razi Brahimi, Klara Kodra, Xhezair Abazi, Fatos Arapi, Sabri Hamiti, Ali Podrimja, Dritero Agolli, Skënder Bucpapaj, etc. have been studied. Tirana's press of the time was collected, especially the literary bodies of the Albanian's Writers and Artists Association, the weekly journal "Drita" and the monthly journal "Nëntori" in the period 1968-1978, the State Archives have been researched, the Archive of Albania's Writers and Artists Association, the National Library of Tirana, etc.

The materials reviewed: Robert Elsie's "The History of Albanian Literature", Peja 1997. The Albanian Literature's History of Socialist Realism. the Academy of Sciences-Institute of Linguistics and Literature, Tirana 1978. Agim Vinca's "The Albanian Poetry's development structure (1945-1980), The Publisher of Learning Tools and Textbooks (Reprint, Pristina 1997) and "The Hours of Poetry", Pristina 1990. Umberto Eco's "For the Literature", 2007.

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Position

The Albanian poetry of the 20th century has been developed in critical circumstances and in different social, political and public realities. It is easy noticeable that "in the Albanian literature, the poetry generally sets an apparent place"¹, it even had a leading role in until the '70s

¹ Anthology of Balkan Poetry. Botot: "Friends and the Journal" ANTI, Athens 2006, pg. 29.

when, according to the researcher Agim Vinca, “the ratio between poetry and prose changes”², the later would see a powerful and dominant development, mainly with Ismail Kadare’s novels.

The Albanian poetry reflects Albanians’ drama and national inspiration. Perhaps more than any other Balkan literature of this period, it oriented its nation towards Europe and the West in general, by communicating through this literature and playing its role in the native continent’s culture, as a permanent mission of Albanian writers from: Barlet, Buzuk, Bogdan and so for centuries up to Ismail Kadare.

According to Kadare's researcher Eric Faye, “Literature’s fate in the 20th century sometimes reminds us of the oil quest: dry pools one after the other, from futurism to abandoned surrealism for the sake of new pools, just like Siberia after Baku, Buku 2 took the relay. Just like the underground literature as well, as the time of schools and manifestations passes, is threatened to be drained.”³ “The Albanian poetry despite the circumstances, the dictatorships’ restrictions and other extra-literary threats, or even “dry pools”, did not vanish, on the contrary, it strengthened its European affiliation through perseverance, often with unexpected pain and unpredicted loss due to intolerant ideologies, isolation and divisions of some states, a strategy that essentially required non-communication, disorientation or at least misguided orientation and eventually dissolution. This kind of distressing echoes are heard even today, however seldom and without influence, “for two cultures”, “two nations”, or even “two literatures.”

If one makes a short chronicle of our literature, throughout the twentieth century, it appears that this poetry was written for about a decade under the Ottoman Empire (1910-1912) as an inspiration for national freedom, and latter our literature appeared with a strong aesthetic reflection during the Independence (1912-1939), it had a nearly empty period during the fascist empire (1939-1944) presumably as a rejection and silence, survived under the Soviet empire during Moscow's satellite monist regime and other communist centers (1945-1990), generally as an engaged and ideological poetry, to arrive in the last decade of the last century (1990-2000) as a developed poetry in all forms and aspirations that the Albanian nation needed; for political freedom (Albania), national freedom (Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro) modernity and general social development.

Nowadays Albanian poetry is living in the global era of freedom after the 1990s, being a poetry in progress and in my opinion, without any distinctive characteristic features, without names that guide it, without any specific definition, except the closure of a long experimental cycle and these trends’ consolation.

² Agim Vinca: “The Structure of Albanian Poetry’s Development” (1945-1980), The Publisher of Tools and Textbooks, pg. 397.

³ Eric Faye. Preface and introductory notes in “Ismail Kadare, Works, Volume 1”. Fayard Publishing House, Paris 1993, pg. 15

The Preceding Literature of the 1970s

I think that the 1970s poetry in Albania marked an original evolution compared to the epic preceding. This generation of poets, however very distinct from each other, joined in efforts to modernize Albanian poetry in exceptional circumstances of isolation and Cold War, using every achievement of the 20th-century Albanian literature. Over a century, Albanian literature went through interesting developments.

We see the end of Naimi's literature romanticism, but also the survival of this romanticism intertwined with the 20th century modern literature. Poets like Mjeda, etc. According to Arshi Pipa, "the post-romantic nationalist literature of the period was able to blossom, because achieving independence did not change the structure of Albanian society."⁴ The '30s poetry for many scholars is seen as the creator of modern literature in Albania, with more resources in the Western European literature.

According to the Professor Jorgo Bolo, "In the Albanian literature between the two wars sentimentality shows (F. Postoli, M. Grameno) and those of late classicism were not lacking, especially in dramaturgy (E. Haxhiademi). The emerging of modern trends- impressionism, symbolism, etc., were separated phenomena in the works of some writers (Migjeni, Poradeci, Asdreni) not being able to form a school."

The 1960s poetry or "The Generation of the Sixties" is a dominant generation of postwar poetry in Albania. According to the researcher Shaban Sinani "With this generation begins the technical modernization of the verse. "The 1960s generation dominated in the Albanian literature for more than a quarter-century, until, especially in poetry with its architecture converted into creative cattle, almost in imitative patterns, especially with the poetry, turned into an obstacle for advanced developments."⁵

Another flaw of this literature was the strong identification with the socialist realism and regime, which made the confirmation of this realism. Unfortunately, it introduced the model of tribune poetry.

Between the '30s and the '60s, the Albanian poetry did not recall any important event. So we have some kind of a qualitative gap there.

In the 1960s, the Albanian we find in the Albanian poetry Agolli, Arapi, Kadare, etc. This period's feature is that this is a better poetry than the one after the Second World War, but with strong influences of Majkovski's and Esenin's poetry. I think this poetry brought two new things:

- a. The new figuration overflowed
- b. Albanian poetry's themes were enriched.

⁴ Arshi Pipa, "About Migjeni, Three Essays", Princi, Tirana 2006, pg. 53.

⁵ Shaban Sinani. "Literature in Totalitarianism and Dossier K", "Naimi" Publishing House, Tirana 2011, pg.79.

The 1970's Poetry, "The Short Liberal Spring's Generation"

The names of the 1970's poetry generation known as the "Middle Generation" or "The Short Liberal Spring's generation"⁶, with Moikom Zeqo, Frederik Rreshpja, Xhevahir Spahiu, Ndoc Papeleka, Skender Bucpapaj, Fallsi Haliti, Sadik Bejko, Natasha Lako, Faslli Haliti, Suleiman Mato, Hamit Ali, etc., confirmed the aesthetic achievements of the 1970s poetry. They can create a phenomenon of aesthetic, apolitical dissidence. I think it is the art, not the dissidence, the characteristic of this period. There was indifference towards this generation, often silence and doubts from cultural institutions that had already established the hierarchy of names in the pyramid of national poetry, therefore lacking of interest in literary criticism for this poetry and generation. On the contrary, this generation became the object of severe overthrowing measures from the Fourth Plenum of the CC of APP in June 1973. Frederick Rreshpja ended in prison, Faslli Haliti publishing rights were removed for about 14 years, and was sent for re-education in a cooperative, Viktor Qurku committed suicide, Xhevahir Spahiu's publishing rights were removed, was sent to a mine for re-education, Moikom Zeqo left the Writers' League, and so did Sulejman Mato.

Official criticism did not recognize it as a new poetic school, not even as a literary generation, and this implied a bypass and rejection for this generation of poets. Given this fact there were rumors of another generation's struggle, though not as fierce as the war of the 1960s, but it sought its place in the rigid poetry pyramid of the time, which would change only with the collapse of totalitarianism.

Ardian Marashi talking about this phenomenon says "in the situation after the 1990s, we had our prejudices; sadly big in number. Here I am talking about some colleagues, more than about some others. We were accustomed to a hierarchy that we had somehow set ourselves, and we were willing to do everything except opposing ourselves."⁷

The 1970's poetry is poetry of another kind. According to Agim Vinca, "the deepening of thematic and stylistic revolution, the tendency to seek "unexplored routes", the growing interest in the national history and mythology, the contacts intensification with tradition, foreign literary experiences, etc., are some of the features and characteristic traits of the poetry of this time, which from the typological point of view can be characterized as a poetry of the contextual symbol or even as a poetry with modern and avant-garde trend."⁸

This overwhelming passage in the Albanian poetry of the 1970s has also drew the attention of the critic Ali Aliu who states that "in the socio-realistic pressed horizon, however troublesome, a generation of talented poets was growing; slowly but consciously departing from the rhetoric,

⁶ Shaban Sinani. "Literature in Totalitarianism and Dossier K", "Naimi" Publishing House, Tirana 2011, pg. 80.

⁷ Ardian Marashi, Scientific Conference: History of Albanian Literature, Pristina 2009, pg. 24.

⁸ Agim Vinca: "The Development Structure of the Albanian Poetry" (1945-1980), The Publisher of Tools and Texts, pg. 429.

opening a broader path to the metaphor, researches into form and deepening into the intimate world of the individual.”

I think this generation silently, intuitively and without rage, even without the help of official criticism, began to re-find the orientation of the source, or to rebuild the broken strings of the Albanian poetry with the western poetry founded in the 1930s with poets of western orientation such as Lasgush Poradeci, Migjeni, Gasper Pali etc.

The Links with 1930's Poetry

In my research I have ascertained and found links between the poets of the “liberal, short spring’s generation” of the early 1970’s in Albania with some of the most representative contemporary poets of the 1930s, such as Poradeci, Migjeni, or even a lesser known name of the time, Gasper Pali, who departed from life at the age of 26, in 1942.

If it is widely accepted that the Albanian literature entered the stage of modernity in the 1930s, and on the other hand, we try to find links between the poetry of the 1970s “liberal, short spring’s generation” in Albania with Poradec, Migjeni, or G. Pali, the question is: how much could the controlled system of socialist realism allow the emergence of modernity in the Albanian poetry of this generation!

In Rexhep Qosja’s assessment, “Modernity completely excludes conformism, just as conformism does not allow any space to modernity. Modernity; whether literature’s or its critics, cannot rely on folklore and ethnography, in the decoration, enthusiasm and sentimentality, because modernity is the fruit of suspicion more often than enthusiasm.”⁹

However, the texts selected on my part, clearly show that the poets Rreshpja, Spahiu, Papeleka, Zeqo, Haliti, S.Bucpapaj etc. used what was later called “the liberalization era”, which suddenly included the literature and arts in Tirana, as a moment not well explained yet by the scholars, as to why it was allowed, similarly as not having dilemmas about why the characters of this “literary and artistic spring” were treated so fiercely.

By addressing the concept of modernity in Albanian literature, the scholar Sabri Hamiti emphasizes that “In the cultural-historical and structural observation, modern Albanian literature begins at the end of the last century with Konica, when a critical writing model appears, other than the earlier, anthemic writing and latter develops with the literature of Lasgush Poradeci, which seeks new forms, new poetic language and literature’s aesthetic effect, which builds in depth the identity of the Albanian world.”¹⁰

⁹ Rexhep Qosja. “New Albanological notions”, Albanological Institute of Pristina, 1983, pg. 18

¹⁰ Sabri Hamiti “Modern Albanian Literature”, pg. 12, “Albas” Publishing House, Tirana, 2000.

Conclusion

“The middle generation” or “The short, liberal spring generation”, known as the poetic generation of the ‘70s, I believe had some achievements in the post-war Albanian poetry of the Second World, which made it influential in the 20th century poetry.

The main features of this generation compared to the previous generation:

1. Avoided congresses and plenums’ thematic.
2. It silently opposed to pompousness, rhetoric.
3. it opposed the folklore imitation (Siliqi, Jakova, etc.)
4. This generation’s genre was mainly lyrical, unlike the previous ‘60s generation, which was an epic or epic-lyric poetry.
5. It came closer to the European poetry, benefited from few and sometimes clandestine translations.
6. It systematically used the metaphor.
7. Priority was given to the free verse (unlike Kadare who remained in neoclassicism and Agolli in classicism).
8. It started making bashful experiments, as in the poem “The Raven” by Skënder Bucpapaj. Skënder introduced elements of “sonorous” poetry, giving priority to the imitative harmony (caw, caw, caw ... ravens- may you eat your own heads).
9. Setting a fairer relationship between the national and the universal. They lean towards a philosophical poetry; they did not remain captives of mere traditional symbols, such as the mountain, tower, rifles, etc.
10. The theme of war prevails. Some of the forerunners were also LNC participants or its witnesses like Musaraj, Siliqi, Varfi and others. The generation of the '70s, avoids this thematic, does not center in their works.
11. This poetry does not have the musical element in the center, but the pictorial element, the image instead; A philosophical poetry.
12. The conception for the poet changed; he did not see himself as a spokesman or bugler of the revolution, according to the guiding principle “our verse-bomb and flag.”
13. The landscape is functionalized and occupies a larger space.
14. The distinction between poetry and ordinary verses and versification became clear.
15. There was no report of literary criticism or its interest in this poetry, and this generation. The regime did not recognize it as a new poetic school. Why? Because this generation of poets did not enjoy any state functions like the previous generation of poets- which caused servility from among critics, also for providing rewards and favors like creative permits, permanent publications, etc. As part of this generation were mostly teachers, journalists, or other ordinary work.
16. The poets of this group tried to cast off the mold, uniformity and stereotypes of the previous generation.

17. It was a more indifferent generation to the socialist achievements, including the country's industrialization. So they were not impressed by the technical progress as in the previous generation with the high voltage poles, lathe, tall chimneys, tractors that did the work of twenty people, excavators, etc.

18. Their politicization was largely imposed rather than a voluntary, militant choice, as happened with a part of the '50s or '60s generation poets who accepted socialist realism and duly contributed to them as theoreticians of this realism, thus being identified with the socialist realism.

19. The jubilee poetry was not their favorite genre, although they had to pay a price to publishing and affirmation rules, but also diverting attention from them, as a self-defense tactic to continue further with their work, forced to always take a defensive measure against the repressive and censorious observing apparatus.

20. The world poetry's influence of Elyar, Prever, Ricos, Neruda, Lorca. The theme of everyday life began to take place compared to the so-called great themes of socialism, revolutionary vigilance, the defense of socialism's victories and the achievements of the new man.