

**“NITA” OF JOSIP RELA, AN ELEGANT
SHOW SIGNED BY FANKO!
THE SECOND COLLABORATION
BETWEEN ALBANIANS DURING THE
EIGHTIES**



Creative and Performing Arts

Keywords: Albanian drama theater, stage, rehearsals, post World War II 1948-2008 Albanian drama, etc.

Rozina Kostani

**Actress, Director
Professor at University of Arts, Tirana - Albania**

Abstract

The second collaboration between Albanians happens with “Nita,” a production by writer Josip Relja and director Serafin Fanko. Our journey will take us to the Albanian Drama Theater in Skopje, in 1980. The event takes place eight years later. In 1972, the first Albanian director invited by the Theater of Nationalities was Kujtim Spahivogli, who put on stage “Korça Carnivals,” a comedy by Spiro Çomora. Then, during a 10-day-visit of the delegation of the Theater of Nationalities Skopje, in Tirana, in 1973, two plays were put on stage: “The Gone” and “Korça Carnivals.” In 1980, he was the second and last director, invited by Albania, until after the 90ties, when Albanian totalitarian regime fell. The director, Serafin Fanko, together with set designer, costume designer and notable painter Ksenofon Dilo, put on stage the drama “Nita,” of the Arbëresh author Josip Relja; its premier took place on May 10, 1980 in the Albanian theater drama in the Theater of Nationalities in Skopje. Director Serafin Fanko is the first director who put the national flag in the Albanian drama set, which caused commotion in the Macedonian government and the police tried to stop the performance, but they weren’t successful due to the pressure of the public. Theater dramas with a national content were considered an event for the Albanian public living in Skopje. Scenographer Ksenofon Dilo talks about this significant detail which they had the courage to put in action together with director Fanko, twisting the scenic elements, and since the drama had a national character, the flag on stage was necessary. In the scene depicting festivities organized by the villagers where Nita would become a man, the well takes center stage. Scenographer Mr. Dilo engages the characters to decorate the well’s crown with small national flags. Mr. Dilo recalls that one night before the premier, during the general rehearsals in the Theater of Nationalities, the Macedonian director employed by this theater, Mirko Stefanovski, did not respond quite well to the scene with the national flags.

M. Stefanovski: Could you please take those flags down, sir?

I answered: They are Albanian flags, why should I take them down?

M. Stefanovski - Please.

I answered: No, I will not remove them. You are my friend, but I will not take them down.

So, the scene was left unchanged. The flags remained there, but I felt that there was high pressure.¹

After the death of Tito and the first demonstrations in Prishtina, the theater performance was annulled, after 26 runs, discontinuing the relationship with Albania for a second time, which would last until 1990. Both directors, Mr. Spahivogli and Mr. Fanko, who were praised and commended by critics as two of the most iconic theater directors of Albanian origin, were able to express their artistic values even under the constant pressure of surveillance practices carried out by both communist countries that of RPSSH (People’s Republic of Albania) and RJM in Macedonia.

¹ Interview with scenographer, Ksenofon Dilo, on set design of “Nita”, in Tirana 2019.

DELEGATIONS: STARTING THE COLLABORATIVE WORK

In May 1979, the Ministry of Culture in Albania sent an invitation to the Theater of Nationalities, specifically to the Albanian Theater of Drama in Skopje, for a visit in the People's Theater of Albania. Five people were part of this delegation: Mr. Ilhami Emin, General Director of the Theater of Nationalities; Mr. Qenan Mahmuti, Director of Albanian Drama; Mr. Mirko Stefanovski, director appointed to Albanian drama; Mr. Bajrush Mjaku, head of the Albanian Drama Council and Mr. Luan Starova, vice-chair of the Commission for Cultural Relationship with Foreign States.²

The motivation of this visit was the concert "Decades of May 1979" and conversations about a possible cooperation between the two theaters in Tirana and Skopje, which were frozen since 1973. If we recall year 1972 the first Albanian director, Kujtim Spahivolidg was invited by the Theater of Nationalities, who put on stage the comedy by Spiro Çomora "Korça Carnivals" and the 10-day-visit of the Theater of Nationalities Skopje in Tirana in 1973 with two stage performances "The Gone" and "Korça Carnivals." On May 15 1979, the aforementioned delegation of five members departs for its 10-day visit to Albania. At the border, in Qafë Thanë³ they are welcomed by director Piro Mani, who will accompany them throughout their stay. In the memoire published by actor Bajrush Mjaku "Madness and Wisdom: Impressions, Memories, and Valuations" he treats the initial confrontation with the term "foreign expressions," that for Albanians meant jeans, long hair or leather jacket, which were all punishable in Albania during those years. After waiting for two hours, they departed. The delegation has a tight agenda with first meetings being held with the Director of the People's Theater, Vasko Ristidhi, the Minister of Culture, Vath Koreshi, and the Minister of Education, Anastas Kondo. The delegation watches some performances in the People's Theater: "The family of the fisherman" by Sulejman Pitarka under the direction of Misto Zoto. This theater performance would be put on stage, one year later, by the director of the Albanian Drama Theater and member of this delegation, Mirko Stefanovski. It is accepted as the second Albanian narrative plot put on the Albanian Drama stage during those years, mentioned in this abstract, after "Korça Carnivals" in 1972, "The fisherman's family" was staged in 1980. Let's return to the delegation, which is now heading to Migjeni Theater in Shkodra, where they would see "*Baca of Gjetaj*"⁴ by drama writer Fadil Kraja, and director Serafin Fanko.

² Mjaku, Bajrush, *Madness and Wisdom: impressions, memories, and valuations*, Skopje 2018, pg. 27.

³ When we crossed the border {...}The Albanian authority did not allow us to enter Albania because I was wearing jeans, a leather jacket and long hair. After spending two hours in the bar of the Albanian border, we did not expect to wait for that long. pg. 28.

⁴ "Baca i Gjetajve" of Fadil Kraja (1979, in Migjeni Theater, director Serafin Fanko) is famous for its harsh antagonistic conflict between two families and their family heads, which are identified with two enemy political stands representing two leading groups in the period during the Anti-Fascist National-Liberation War. The drama was successful in Shkodra. The directorial vision of S. Fanko, besides the processing of the drama plane was memorable even due to the epic handling of some scenes like the siege of Baca's Home from Kadri Bajraktari, the temptation of Baca to vindicate, his going alone in the home of Bajraktari to reclaim the kidnapped daughter etc. Ndrek Luca plays the role of Baca, Lec Bushati plays as Bajraktari, Tinka Kurti as Vitore Nino, Bep Shiroka as Tonin Ujka etc. Papagjoni Josif, *History of Albanian Theater*, QSA, Publishing house "Kristalina-KH", Tiranë, 2011, pg.151,152.

Pirro Mani, a reputable Albanian director, expresses his regards about the direction work at “Nëntori” magazine no.6/1984 “*an original and elegant narrative*” also “*it intertwines in an artistic unity the pictorial composition and narrative thought...*”⁵ This director was appointed by the Ministry of Culture of Albania to work in the Albanian drama Theater in Skopje on “Nita,” a drama piece written by Josip Relja. The delegation finalizes its 10-day-visit after numerous meetings with official representatives, but doesn’t get to meet theater actors. The dates for starting work are scheduled. Director Serafin Fanko and scenographer Ksenofon Dilo with the script of Josip Relja of Arbëresh origin were working together at the Albanian Theater in Skopje. The pre-stage work lasted four months, one month longer than planned and the premier was extended by five days, because the leader of the Yugoslavian country, Josip Tito, passed away. Actor Bajrush Mjaku is appointed director of the Albanian drama in January 1980. He would lead this process which was scheduled to last from February until April, but things came to a halt when “*scenographer Ksenofon Dilo insisted that the costumes of the elderly were to be originals, tirqs with stripes and backgalloons and shirts. Costumes like this are found in Gjakova, not Skopje.*”⁶ This added to the project’s budget and also due to a high number of actors engaged in the play it was postponed, which caused visa issues for both Albanian artists. Extending the stay permit of director Serafin Fanko in Macedonia should have been approved by the Secretary of Interior Affairs in Belgrade. After he was granted an extension in his stay, the play faces another obstacle that of the death of Josip Tito, the head of the Yugoslavian State. It is the first play put on stage in Yugoslavia after his death. The premier is on May 10, 1980. “Nita” authored by Josip Relja with the direction of Serafin Fanko, a guest from RPSSH. With the scenography and costumography of Ksenofon Dilo, a guest from RPSSH. Lecturer: Hamza Reka. Music: Rexho Mulliqi. Asistent Director: Ismail Rama. Actors: Ismail Rama, Drita Aliu, Silvana Bajçinovci, Sefedin Nuredini, Zija Berisha, Mark Marku, Bexhet Pitarka, Ekrem Ahmeti, Bajrush Mjaku, Antoneta Kovaceviq, Ajet Rexhepi, Elhame Bilalli, Drita Morina, Xhevat Limani, Selman Jusufi, Hekuran Loga, Zijadin Murtezai, Agron Berisha, Mehdi Bajraktari, Kamil Vajner. Figurantë: Leze Tomi, Vera Joze, Meseret Çavolli, Dijana Mehmeti, Zeqir Duraku, Arben Shahiqi, Luan Aliu, Linda Aliu, Salahudin Bilalli, Mysheref Lozana, Fehmi Grubi, Perihan Tuna, Fazli Shaqiri, Ramadan Demiri, Bashkim Pacuku (tenor). The play engaged a total of 35 actors. Some roles were played by amateurs such as Nita, played by D. Aliu and S. Bajçinovci; Roza played by E. Bilalli and D. Morina; Niku played by S. Jusufi and H. Loga; Mimqi played by Z. Murtezai and A. Berisha.

This play did not have many reruns due to the political atmosphere that lingered during those years. One year later, on March 6 1981, after the first play was released in Prishtina, a large-scale historical event took place, the demonstration of the students of the University of Prishtina. The tension was high and the government exerted pressure on Albanians discontinuing all cooperation and banning the play which lived and breathed in Albanian. The former director of the Albanian Drama during those years, the famous actor of the theater stage, Bajrush Mjaku put his

⁵ <https://aktoretshqiptare.info/2019/05/06/serafin-fanko-regjicura-deshira-endrra-jeta-dhe-dhimbja-ime/?fbclid=IëAR0QS1spb6FEEXNPËGËo0gQ8NV7rEAKcmHLTYZ6fAFI8K4JdM6MIL4t9dËY> seen on 05.06.2019

⁶ Mjaku, Bajrush, *Madness and Wisdom: impressions, memories, and valuations*, Skopje 2018, pg. 27.

thoughts in his book “Wisdom and Madness: impressions, memories, and valuations” regarding the life span of the play: “*The theater piece titled “Nita” produced by drama writer Josip Relja, director Serafin Fanko, and Albanian Drama at TKSH, had 26 runs at Skopje stage, and some others in the former Yugoslavian Republics. The last performance was held in a theater in Prishtina on March 5 1981. Right after the University of Prishtina students’ demonstration “Nita” and “The General of the Dead Army”⁷ of Ismail Kadare, scheduled to be played on TKSH at the end of 1981 under the direction Branko Stavrev, were both removed from the repertoire of the Albanian drama.*⁸We brought some significant facts about “Nita” that besides displaying for the first time the national Albanian flag on stage, it had also a poster written only in Albanian. Posters were written in Macedonian and Albanian. The brochure was written in Albanian and Macedonia.



The poster for “Nita” in 1980 S. Fanko⁹.

⁷ “The General of Dead Army” - a masterpiece of Albanian Literature of I. Kadare. The most staged novel, over six dramatizations. In this theater it was staged many years later, from director Dino Mustafiq and dramatization of Jeton Neziraj. Mjaku, Bajrush, Madness and Wisdom: impressions, memories, and valuations, Skopje, 2018, pg. 230.

⁸ Mjaku, Bajrush, Madness and Wisdom: impressions, memories, and valuations Skopje 2018, pg. 59.

⁹ Archive of Albanian Theater in Skopje, file of “Nita” play, 1980.

THE PLAYS WRITTEN BY JOSIP RELA

Josip Rela (1895-1966) was born in Arbanas (Borgo Erizo) a village in Zarë of Dalmacia. His parents were of Albanian origin who had emigrated during 1726 - 1729 -1733 from the High Mountains of Shkodra from Brisk, Shestan and Zjare villages. He worked as school teacher in the Albanian schools in the areas of Rabi, Vinjerci, Zarë, Kastel Novo, Salltinë, Plava, Gucia, Priftaj of Trieshti, but also as the director of the Peoples' Theater of Zarë and the normal school.¹⁰ Josip Rela has given an invaluable contribution to the Albanian culture in addition to 13 literary and esthetic works of poetry, short stories and plays. His literary creation expands from 1916 to 1966. Josip Rela is author of many drama plays such as: "Kungulli" ("Pumpkin"), "Dila", "Fisi i mallëkuem" ("Cursed Extended Family"), "Tallasat e dybjës", "Zani i fëmiut" ("Voice of the Child"), "Ik, Jak, ik" ("Go, Jak, Go"), "Në liri" ("Freedom"); and comedies such as: "Deri në tetë ditë" ("Up to eight days"), "Provat" ("Rehearsals"), and melodrama "Martesa" ("The wedding"). One of the most important dramatic works of Rela is "Nita," a drama with four acts published in Prishtina as part of the Literary Compilation I-II 1968-1971. It was also published as a separate work in 1983 by "Rilindja," a publisher in Prishtina. He devoted his contribution to preserving and fostering the language and the history in Diaspora and attracted attention as a reputable personality.¹¹ Professor Eqerem Çabej writes about Josip and his contemporaries: "...they honored the legacy of their fathers and the future of their homeland."¹² The reaction of Albanians from Albania regarding his famous Arbëresh origin personality of literature and national culture comes 21 years after the drama "Nita" was published in Tirana, in 1973.¹³

Even though the drama was published, it didn't entice directors to put it on stage. The devotion of Rela and his contemporaries to preserve traditions, mores and manners of their predecessors and their struggle for identity was strongly expressed at "Albania" magazine where many articles and other materials were published on arbëreshë people. The ever-lasting activist paper "Zani prëje arbnëshvët" was also established. The national association was founded in the Assembly held on April 8 1903 at Arbëresh, which had been a significant event for Albanians living in this region. The Albanians expressed their wishes and the first among them was: "Our blood and hearts are Albanian and we announce it out loud. As Albanians, it is our sacrosanct duty to love each other, to stay united and to give our language and our blood the place it deserves".¹⁴ However, the best tool to accomplish the purpose of dramaturgy is the stage¹⁵ and "Nita" accomplishes its purpose on the lit stages of many theaters in Albanian speaking territories leaving traces in the collective memory, as a necessity to approve the identity of the Albanian drama. Such were the People's Theater of Prishtina, "Istref Begolli" theater in Peja, in other Kosovo theaters during the 50ties and 60ties, in Zarë (it is put on stage for the first time in 1976)

¹⁰ Sami, Çabej. Introduction. At: Nita, drama in four acts, Publishing house "Naim Frashëri", Tiranë 1973, pg.3. <http://www.elsie.de/pdf/B1997HistLetShqip.pdf> parë më 19.05.2019

¹¹ <https://www.radiokosovaelire.com/dr-isak-shema-jeta-dhe-krijimtaria-letrare-e-josip-reles/> seen on 20.05.2019

¹² <https://www.radiokosovaelire.com/dr-isak-shema-jeta-dhe-krijimtaria-letrare-e-josip-reles/> seen on 19.05.2019

¹³ Rela, Josip, Nita, Publishing house "8 Nëntori", Tiranë, 1973.

¹⁴ <https://www.radiokosovaelire.com/dr-isak-shema-jeta-dhe-krijimtaria-letrare-e-josip-reles/> seen on 19.05.2019

¹⁵ Islami, Nebi, The History and Poetry of Albanian drama (1886-1996) I, ARTC, Prishtinë, 2003, pg. 25.

for the commemoration of 250 anniversary of Arbëresh migration,¹⁶ and in 1980 in Skopje in the Theater of Nationalities under the direction of Serafin Fanko during a tense political situation, which will be referred to later. “Nita” has four acts and 52 scenes. The first Act has 15 scenes. The second Act has 12 scenes. The third Act has 12 scenes. And the fourth Act has 12 scenes.

THE DIRECTORIAL SCORE OF SERAFIN FANKO

Another national drama was undertaken to fulfill the nature of his mission through the expression of language and tradition to better grasp the meaning of self and identity. In order to appreciate and decode the sublime moment of creation, the analysis will concentrate on the method that Serafin Fanko uses to construct the directorial platform of the play: *...At first is the message and the spirit of the play (the message of the stage, not the author). Based on the author's message, the director picks his own messages that are influenced by the time period and are subject to it. Thus the question begs: “What will we narrate to the spectator through this play?” The vision of the show is created based on this spirit and message. Later they are followed by the scenes, décor, handling, music and all the other elements that mold the portrait of the show.*¹⁷ Endowed with a finesse and thought transfusion that are characteristic of Franko as a director who has an admirable intellectual and artistic capacity, the author of 140 plays, from which 110 are in Albanian language; he is capable to express on the stage of this classical play, “Nita,” the historical collective and a linear drama which is donned with sentimental overtures and a romantic thread. The inner drama that ultimately harbors the tragedy of life. Here Franko starts to entangle the classical play even further. Besim Rexhaj (PhD) quotes in his book “The Albanian drama post World War 2 1948-2008” the observation of the literary critic and scholar, Dr. Ibrahim Rugova: *“Based on fundamental principles, Rela's text is a classical drama text, meaning that it is subject to classical narration of drama, emphasized by the drama constantly present in the text.”*¹⁸ A master of the stage, he tries to articulate messages that could speak to the time when the play is put on stage, but also the future. At the center of his scenic narration and metaphorical deconstruction serving to discover truths, on top of which he could build stage images, he puts this message: *Everything flows from the message, - enunciates Franko on the method he uses to build the score of the play. At first, I analyze the play and whether I have commonalities with the author's taste, which works as a starting point to get involved with the drama. Secondly, I attempt to discover those values that speak to our time, on top of which I will start to build the show, which will be emphasized in the coming play. And thirdly, I have a go at capturing the vision of*

¹⁶ <https://prointegra.ch/nita-e-reles-eshte-shfaqur-per-here-te-pare-ne-zare-me-1976/> seen on 19. 05.2019, “By Hajro Hajra “Nita's Premier” staged for the first time from arbëresh people of Zarë” brought me to a distant place in 1976. At the time I was in Zarë, Croatia. During May of that year, at Arbëresh in Zara a number of manifestations were organized commemorating the 250 years of the migration of arbëresh. Many arbëresh from different countries in Europe, USA, Argentina, and Brazil had come to participate. During this commemoration the drama “Nita” was also staged of arbëresh author Josip Rela. I have published an article in “Rilindja” Newspaper, dated 24 May 1976, pg. 11

¹⁷ <https://aktoretshqiptare.info/2019/05/06/serafin-fanku-regjisura-deshira-endrra-jeta-dhe-dhimbja-ime/?fbclid=IwAR0QS1sp6FEEXNPËGËo0gQ8NV7rEAKcmHLTyZ6fAF18K4JdM6MIL4t9dËY> seen 05.06.2019

¹⁸ Rela Josip, Nita, Rilindja, Prishtinë, 1983, pg. 12... Rexhaj Besim, *Albanian drama during World War 2, 1948-2009, poetry, typology, periodicity*, Part I, pg. 65

*actualizing the values of the play. A feature of my work is that before talking to the actors, I envision the image of the show. And I have a general clear idea of where I'm going and what I'm doing...*¹⁹ He gives his thought a dimension that will transfer the literary work to stage and reach the public ultimately without destroying its structure, but finding motivation and confronting it with the present. His platform deconstructs the literary work, wiping out melodrama and verbose monologues of the main characters, and furthermore, it unfolds the inner conflict through action, not narration, as it puts the tempo and the stage structure to risk. Stage action takes priority through massive scenes so that the message of the play is clearly conveyed, but also Fanko meets his own expectations and goals during this play-show. On his directorial goal, composed with scenic events, pieces and episodes weaved with a romantic thread, he says: *my goal in this drama is to reflect the war for existence, the significance of the given word, the battle against deep-seated conventions.*²⁰ The aforementioned messages that the director himself enunciates are derived from the habitat proposed by the text in the folkloric terrain as a historical nuance of the play valued by Besim Rexhaj (PhD) in his analysis of "Nita", as a historical tragedy.

He says: *Since the entire tragedy of the play develops in a historical context, given the trauma of resettling, this context takes a social and psychological character, so Nita could be considered a historical tragedy*²¹. This play has a deeply Albanian spirit painted with the nuances of the landscape of the location that is reflected on the stage, even through the costumography created by the set designer, Ksenofon Dilo. Not without purpose, thanks to his directorial concept, the drama writer and critic, Teki Dërvishi, between the show of Franko and the drama of Rela, has called it the best performance realized on stage, a spectacle of colors. The text was put on stage in Albanian speaking regions several times by professional or amateur casts, this time he makes the following observation: *"Nita" constructed in his directorial concept is the most beautifully realized performance of the text that we have ever seen, even though it was put for two straight decades on the stages of our professional and amateur theaters. The director has hit the mark with the display of colors utilizing theater props at best, and his work has been aided by the inventive creation of scenography and costumography of Ksenofon Dilo*²². The stage events, pieces and episodes, messages, ideas, emotional percussion and its scenes are packed with a robust dance rhythm, reminding us of a saying by a pioneering Albanian director, Sokrat Miho, befitting to his creative streak, who said: *"the director must be part author, part actor, part musician, lightning technician, part tailor..."*²³ But, Serafin Fanko was even more, he was an actor who had good knowledge in music, dance, painting, and film. He was a comprehensive artist; he was "the show," giving form to style, the entirety of his characteristics. Let's recall his artistic dimension in the aforementioned areas: *in 1951 he was a dancer in the Army's Ensemble, where he stayed for two years. In 1954, he works as a ballet instructor of a youth club called "The Heroes of Vigu."* In

¹⁹<https://aktoretshqiptare.info/2019/05/06/serafin-fanku-regjisura-deshira-endrra-jeta-dhe-dhimbja-ime/?fbclid=IëAR0QS1spb6FEEXNPËGËo0gQ8NV7rEAKcmHLTYZ6fAF18K4JdM6MIL4t9dËY> seen 05.06.2019.

²⁰ Sadiku, Rahim, The collaboration intensifies "Rilindja" newspaper, on Friday, 16. 05. 1980, Skopje, Macedonia

²¹ Rexhaj Besim, *Albanian drama during World War 2, 1948-2009, poetry, typology, periodicity*, Part I. pg. 63.

²² Dërvishi, Teki, *Qan e qesh Talia (Talia cries and laughs)*, published by OPBP "Flaka e Vllazërim", published by NGBG "N.Makedonija" Skopje, 1980, pg.156,157.

²³ Oktrova, Esat, Issues with directorial craftsmanship, publishin house, "Afërdita", Tiranë, 2002, pg 16.

1959, Mr. Serafin completes his degree at the artistic Lyceum “Jordan Misja.”²⁴ In order to better grasp the critical review of this play-show, a gift of Franko from the 80ties to the Albanian Drama Theater, the concept, logic, clarity and drama impulse, let’s quote journalist Xhahid Bushati, who in a biographical and analytical interview for Mr. Franko, he writes: *in his plays, he used all available stage tools such as the scenes, décor, lightning, music, props etc. He carved the individuality of actors or dancing-actors using force and materializing it with the text from the drama or comedy. Endowed with finesse, he gracefully conveyed it to the public. The work of Mr. Serafin stands out even for its logic, clarity and drama impulse.*²⁵ This trait is tangible at “Nita.” The director and his cast were able to harmonize the creative individualities, relying on actor-director binomial, which is inseparable, if the goal is to achieve a stage unity. While interpreting signs, he discovers the semiotics of the play by building an ensemble. While approving his concept on directorial display in a multifaceted creative collaboration, he says: *This binomial cannot be divided, because the actor cannot be separated from the director. The director leads, creates the show in his head, has an image of the upcoming show, but the actors put it into play, with the director’s support. The director takes care of the entire show, the actor takes care of his/her own role. The director harmonizes the creative individualities of the actors, he personalizes and connects the creative elements of the actors with the other elements of the play such as the scenes, décor, music, lightning, sound etc. I think that each of them has their own function, but the director puts the finishing touch.*²⁶ Harmonizing each of these elements that construct the stage performance make this show a veritable ensemble, thanks also to the colorful folklore that affects the spectacle, the composition, the outer and inner action dynamic recognizing the split nature of action, which is the main reason of the directorial reading. Ibersfeld analytically, in his book “The time and space of theater,” highlights: *“Regarding the tempo-reality of the theater it is of critical significance the entirety of the text and the study of the text’s articulation. We will see the meaning of theatrical time (text/show) assisted by the textual articulation and their function. Let us first take into account the distinction of two divided tempo-realities, the tempo-reality of the play and the tempo-reality of the presented event.”*²⁷ The rapport between time and space at “Nita,” dramaturgically speaking is referred to by B. Rexhaj (PhD), where he says: *this play is famous also for a compositional balance, that doesn’t come apart when faced with the reality of time and space, as it extends over a long time period, and includes distant locations.*

²⁴ <https://aktoretshqiptare.info/2019/05/06/serafin-fanku-regjisura-deshira-endrra-jeta-dhe-dhimbja-ime/?fbclid=IëAR0QS1sp6FEEXNPËGËo0gQ8NV7rEAKcmHLTYZ6fAF18K4JdM6MIL4t9dËY> seen on 05.06.2019.

²⁵ As above.

²⁶ <https://aktoretshqiptare.info/2019/05/06/serafin-fanku-regjisura-deshira-endrra-jeta-dhe-dhimbja-ime/?fbclid=IëAR0QS1sp6FEEXNPËGËo0gQ8NV7rEAKcmHLTYZ6fAF18K4JdM6MIL4t9dËY> seen on 05.06.2019

²⁷ Look: Ibersfeld, An: “Theater: Time and Space” Hysaj, Fadil: Theater theory, dramaturgy, directorship and acting: Text anthology, Prishtina, 2006, pg. 289.

THE STAGE PERFORMANCE OF “NITA”

The scene of migration covered in **the first act** is treated by Franko through elements which he knows exceptionally well such as music and collective etude. He uses these directorial details on stage not only to build²⁸ a diagram of the tempo-rhythm of the play, but also to confront the migration phenomenon, not by isolating it in the past, but the message is speaking of the present about a challenging political situation in North Macedonia and its ethnic groups, coinciding with the everlasting goal of Albanians’ assimilation in their territories. He adds to the troupe of the stage, in the large group of extras, a tenor, Bashkim Pacukun,²⁶ who performs during the scene of migration (and other scenes) an Arbëreshsong “Moj e bukura Morenë” (“O, beautiful Moren”) as a reminiscent of the long journey, donning the scene with massive physicality and emotional force. He thus eliminates an entire act of narrative or sentimentalism by suffusing the grandiose scene with dynamic action and placing attention on this national phenomenon as an existential need while diverting from, or giving second place to sentimentality, and highlighting once again the act of “the given word and trust” (known as *Besa*) during the scene of separation between a young couple during the migration. Considering that Nita’s character is the main pillar, *the structural epicenter of the dramatic text*.²⁹ This tragic character, a character that carries onto itself sublime human values could possibly consider the play *a tragedy of personality*³⁰ (a tragic character since she commits suicide), where ideas of the play are transmitted and the motivations of its characters and the main theme of this drama, which was referred to previously as a historical tragedy. The dramaturge and art critic, Teki Dërvishi, expresses his view on J. Rela’s drama and S. Fanko’s performance show, its narrative read and construction, confronting it with all the elements that go in the stage work such as directorship, screen writing, costume design and actors which he sees as an ensemble show of creative values: *it is open, beautiful, comprehensible and each spectator will find something likeable. “Nita” is a traditional text also due to its stylistic language factor and literary text, together with the motivations laid out*.³¹ In an interview with the press of the time, one day before the premier, director Serafin Fanko, talks about the style of work and his goals and expectations: *I proposed this drama for the stage of the Theater of Nationalities. This is what I liked the most and I started work with great zest. One month before starting rehearsals with the actors, I studied J. Rela’s drama in its entirety.*

I read the critical notes on “Nita,” I saw two films put on TV of Tirana in Arbëresh language, and I later went to Zarë, where I got familiar with the environment in which J. Rela created. I found that romantic thread that is characteristic of this play, which is reasonable, given

²⁸ Rexhaj Besim, *Albanian drama during World War 2, 1948-2009, poetry, typology, periodicity*, Part I, pg. 65.

²⁹ Bashkim Paçuku, Albanian tenor, born in Debar in the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia and has graduated in the Faculty of Musical Arts in the University of Skopje. He has also studied in the reputable “La Scala” in Milan, due to his high level of performance of lyrical songs. He also studied in the Opera Institute at the University of Boston. His professional career includes his work as a conductor at the professional choir of the National Radio and Television Station in Prishtina. He has had in main roles at: “La Traviata” (Alfredo), “Rigoletto” (Duca), “La Bohème” (Rodolfo) etc. for more: <http://www.bashkimpacuku.com/biography.html> seen on 13.07.2019.

³⁰ Rexhaj Besim, *Albanian drama during World War 2, 1948-2009, poetry, typology, periodicity*, Part I, pg. 63.

³¹ Same there, pg. 64.

the period of time during which the play takes place and the yearning and pain that the author feels for his ancestors' country. Removing the lengthy monologues, sentimentalisms and overwhelming intimacy between the characters, my goal is that the drama shows the struggle of living, the meaning of Besa (trust and the given word), the battle against harsh habits, which bring the play to current time and place. To make it feel closer even from a historical perspective, I read several materials and archive documents.³²

In the second act, Mr. Fanko draws quite an interesting atmosphere for the festivities celebrating Nita who will be declared a male. This massive scene is considered to be among the most beautiful ones, for the dynamic and feeling that it conveys, a scene where desires and possibilities clash one with the other. The guys of the scene are decorating the well with little flags and the girls are helping exchanging stinging and flattering comments regarding Nita. The colors of the scene, visually as well as contextually, carry a deep national liveliness. Mr. Fanko endows it with a dimension that it is also expressed in the songs and folk dance highlighting the preservation of the traditional. The scenography of K. Dilo is reflected in an action plane, representing the North part of Albania, with a *tower*³³ like the ones found in the Higher Mountainous area, planted deep on the left of the stage taking the square, close to the center and leaning to the right side, a well and even deep further there are scene props representing cliffs.

The well has a tall metal rod, decorated with ornaments made of iron, dotted little national flags, and regarding this scene detail, we were lucky to get an interview from the scenographer Ksenofon Dilo: *The scene has been simply built, a tower was placed in the background, in the left side, so it shows that they have abandoned the North Mountain areas. At the other side in the square, I put a well with a tall metal rod decorated with ornaments. During this scene actors put little Albanian flags around the well.³⁴*

The third act is presented once again through an inventive directorial development and a different stage expression. The tower is placed in a different position as the performance is reaching its climax. Nita carries on her routine in her environment, where she will become a “he”. Nita will be challenged in a running match. During this time she saves a little child from drowning in the sea. Thus, the male side of Nita is being reflected in this scene which is later followed by the arrival of Zefi. The scene is dynamic and is painted with emotional hues as all the characters of the village are involved with an intensified tempo-rhythm, everybody seems to be running around, the atmosphere is jolly, festive and Nita wins the running match. This “running around” comes to a halt once Nita and Zefi meet one another. This is the landscape which draws the curtain of act two. The ending of all acts are rather expressive and almost like a movie, but this one ends with a halt, as a photo, increasing the suspense and the anticipation of the public for future events.

³² Dërvishi, Teki, Qan e qesh Talia (Talia cries and laughs), published by OPBP “Flaka e Vllazërimit”, published by NGBG “N.Makedonija” Shkup, 1980, pg.155.

³³ The tall two-three storied house made of stone, built usually in a high platform, with small windows and embrasures that served as a dwelling and fortress. Tower of isolation, tower of hay and fortress tower etc. The Academy of Sciences of RPSSH Albanian dictionary, publishing house Mihal Duri, Tiranë, 1980, pg. 910.

³⁴ Interview with Ksenofon Dilo regarding the set design of “Nita”, Tiranë, 2019.

In Act four, the emotional intensity of the performance is increasing. Mr. Fanko constructs an authenticity pitch, shifting the risk of the pathetic, increasing the sensitivity and awareness managed by Luk Kapedani, the character played by actor Bajrush Mjaku, almost like the show will divert its flow, resulting in a positive conclusion.

But, that is not the case. The scene leaves powerful impressions and has been stuck in the memory even today, 39 years later, because it plays with a variety of intense emotions and pathos that creates strong sentiments. Nita commits suicide and the heralding of the news is shocking as the picture of this moment is dreadful. Director Serafin Fanko brought forth strong messages that come from close distances, constructing a painting with traditional colors, original stage expressions, moving emotions, iconic compositional scenes, all of which hold Fanko's signature.

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