

ALBANIAN GENDER LITERATURE AND ITS IDENTITY IN THE GENRE OF NOVEL

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(Abstract): This study is based on two levels of research: on the narrative and on the referential ones. On the first level, the author, respectively the female author has been identified, who in many cases is the narrator, and on other level, the paradigmatic dimension has been considered as a search for internal structure, which is interconnected with the gender character. The chronological context is also taken into consideration in the Albanian historiography: initially, there was literature about the female, then we made the literature of the creative females and only recently, influenced by the universal literature, we have been reading and compiling the literature of our female writers, which we call gender literature. This study will focus on the individuality and the integrity of the exterior features, and of the spiritual characteristics of women's characters in some novels published after 1990 by Albanian female authors, concentrating for a more general analysis on the novels of the following Albanian (including in this term also Kosovo) writers: Elvira Dones, Flutura Ačkaand Behare Rexhepi.

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Literature about women

In our historical-literary texts, it has become a tradition to discuss the topic of women in our literature, as it is said since Queen Teuta. A long time in Kosovo (starting from Bogdani onwards), the portrait of the historically-known women was the center of the writings, as it was shaped for centuries in folk literature; including its mythical figure all along with its imaginary character etc. With this trend, the woman as a character in literature and the woman as author of literature works, have been studied by Ramiz Kelmendi, Don Lush Gjergji, Resmije Kryeziu Ibrahim Kadriu etc., Whereas in other forms of literary studies, the historical the cultural contribution of Albanian women has been treated by Hasan Mekuli, Rexhep Qosja, Ibrahim Rugova, Ali Podrimja etc.

The woman and her world has been traced historically and implemented artistically as a concrete and imaginary character by many Kosovo writers: Nazmi Rahmani: *Malësorja (The Highlander Lady)*¹; Rexhep Qosja: *Mbretëresha Teutë (Queen Teuta)*,² *Trashja (The Obese)*, *Romana*,³ Ramiz Kelmendi: *Zoja (The Lady)*,⁴ Emin Kabashi: *Dora d'Istria*,⁵ Nebil Duraku: *Drenusha (The Hind)*,⁶ etc. Not only writers, but also scholars, who are enough brave, respectively 'mature', to approach the topic of women in literature, have not been able to escape her myth.

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¹ *Malësorja*, Prishtinë, 1965.

² *Mite të zhveshura*, Prishtinë, 1978.

³ *Vdekja më vjen prej syve të tillë*, Prishtinë, 1974.

⁴ *Heshnja e armëve*, Prishtinë, 1971.

⁵ *Nusëria e Princeshës*, Prishtinë, 2001.

⁶ *Drenusha*, Prishtinë, 1980.

The literature of a woman writer

Since more than three decades, literary work have been written and published by female authors. Although, in the beginning they were limited in number, within a short time the women writers became notable by number and value. The first names to come up with specific work of artistic creation, especially in the field of poetry such as Sheherzade Shkreli, Sadete Emërllahu, Merushe Gjoshaj, Afërdita Skënderi, are not mentioned in the contemporary Albanian Kosovo literature anthology, were other names of female writers such as Edi Shukriu,⁷ Flora Brovina and Miradije Ramiqi appear.⁸

Some of the women, who started their creativity in the 80^s, would be individualized with their literary creations in '90. Such are: Faketex Rexha, Lindita Aliu, Nerimane Kamberi, Hida Halimi, Xheraldina Buçinca-Vula, Punëtorie Ziba, Teuta Arifi, IlireZajmi, Teuta Zymberi, Valentina Saraçini. These are the years, when women writers engage themselves not only with poetry, to witness their creative sense (although by profession they were doctors, scholars etc.), but they also developed other literary genres: drama, novel, literary criticism (Shefkije Islamaj, Hida Halimi, Resmije Kryeziu, Drenusha Zajmi), with translation activities (Lindita Aliu, Sazana Çapriqi, IlireZajmi etc.), with study of literature (Shefkije Islamaj, Resmije Kryeziu), and artistic painting (Miradije Ramiqi), just to name few of them.

The recent years will be remembered for the publishing achievement of a number of books written by female authors. Unlike the female writers in Albania, who have brought new values and highly original voices in literature (i.e. Elvira Dones, Flutura Aça, Violeta Allmuça, Helena Kadare, Mira Meksi, Mimoza Ahmeti, Brunilda Zllami), the female writers in Kosovo are very similar to each other in terms of their voices and individual accomplishment. There are certainly some exceptions such as Flora Brovina, Hida Halimi, Edi Shukriu, Shefkije Islamaj, Sabile Keqmezi Basha, who do not fall into this category.

This is perhaps the reason why they are not represented in literary anthologies, which recently have been many. Some years ago, the writer Ali Podrimja prepared an anthology of female writers of Kosovo called "High heels".⁹ and only a year later, the same anthology selector of the project entitled: *Leave the window open*, could not find enough female writers to include in it! His task was to prepare an anthology for women and another for men of the same generation, with writers of the '80^s. It is questionable, whether one can write an anthology with writers of this generation, as it is questionable whether there has been a generation of writers at that time at all.

The female literature in Kosovo can be distinguished for a particular side of its creativity: prison literature, i.e. literature created by them within the Yugoslav prisons. Some of the young writers at that time, like: Have Shala, Akile Dedinca, Myrvete Dreshaj, Zyrafete Muriqibecame popular with their written lyrics in the margins of daily newspapers. Others like Teuta Hadri, Ramize Abdullahu would be distinguished for their prison and war diaries. The authors of these female writers and other prisoners, recall the large number of poems and even artistic portraits of family members left among the prison library books and under the earth's prison boulevards. Their lyric epistolar may even make a separate branche of literature. Nowadays, we recall the literary works and the martyr's diaries of Hyrë Emiri,¹⁰ and Yllka Domi¹¹ written during the last war in Kosovo, are also of high interest.

The gender literature

In the historiography of Albanian literature, it is time to study and deal with the feminist literature written in Kosovo, primarily as a genre of poetry, but not only. As a matter of fact, the existential situation of women in the Albanian society of the recent years has been treated by many woman authors, with special emphasis on the position of women in today's urban society. Nevertheless, other forms of literature such as essay, commentary, etc. have been more successful than fiction. The topic of gender in literature has been discussed by Teuta Arifi, Drenusha Zajmi, Suzana Çapriqi, Nerimane Kamberi and Ilire Zajmi.

Overwhelmed by national, political and social agenda, creative women in Kosovo are still unable to find a physical and spiritual angle, from where to tackle literature in their own original way. Their creative shelter seems to be too narrow, to enable them to reflect within their existing zone. If one day their energy will be entirely directed at the search of their own selves, the history of literature will recognize more than a *Rina* of

⁷ Rexhep Qosja, *Antologji historike e letërsisë shqipe*, Prishtinë, 1985.

⁸ Ibrahim Rugova, etj., *Lulet në ballkon*, Prishtinë, 1982.

⁹ *Taka të larta (High heels)*, *Antologji e shkrimtareve shqiptare*, Prishtinë, 2002.

¹⁰ *Ditari i luftës 1998-1999* (manuscript).

¹¹ *Kënga e pranverës (The song of spring)*, Prishtinë, 2003.

Serafina (De Rada), more than a *Tringa* (Gjergj Fishta) and a *Vita* (Jakov Xoxa), more than a *Zoga* (Ndre Mjeda) and *Dije* (Haki Stërmilli). Already carried out by female writers, and implemented in more than characters, like their archetypes, there will be more than one *Eye burial* (E. Dones) and more than *A female loneliness* (F. Aça).

Let us see closer, how the character of the woman has been outlined in the Albanian novel and performed in several literary proses nowadays.

Historical parenthesis

So far, only female writers have been mentioned and treated, and the line of their articles, which first of all was poetry. Now, we would go back to another research, in order to see the condition and the extent of female author participation, dealing with prose articulation, respectively with novel, and carry out the typology of women characters, created by these authors.

The Albanian, as well as the gender novel and other types of Albanian literature have their own periods, major themes, representatives and their main streams. Although in its infancy, it is not easy to summarize the values that it represents, for example poetry in the period of Romanticism, or in the dialectic materialism period of literature. During the second half of the XX. The novel not only reached its peaks of artistic excellence, but it has become the literary representative of the time.

If in the first period, Albanian romantic literature was symbolically conducted by only two writers of that time, in the second period it was written by more writers. Nevertheless either thematically, nor in terms of volume or aesthetic values, did it exceed any of the literary genre. While in the contemporary literacy, novel was the genre carried out by almost all the best writers of the time, it distinguished quite enough in its volume. Within this genre, a huge set of artistic and aesthetic values were created for the entire literature of the time. Thus, the novel is the preferred genre which comes out prestigiously, continues with sentimental topics, gets expanded in historic and realistic new areas and reaches its peaks as modern and postmodern novel.

In our research we focus on women characters of some novels, which are successfully examples of their literary activity, such as *Fitnet* of Sami Frashëri (the period of Romanticism), *Dija* of Haki Stërmilli (period of realism), *Plaka Nicë* (The old woman Nicë) by Kadare, and in particular *Vita* of Jakov Xoxa (soc-realism) and the *Trashja* of Rexhep Qosja (modernism), marking also their special characters, respectively female figures and leading characters of the Albanian literary work.

Are these characters, i.e. these female ones, delineated in the Albanian literature of the various literary eras, sufficiently typical as to speak about a female typology within the Albanian novel? Of course not! Women writers are those, who create this typology by creating types and characters, which are extremely rich spiritually and externally, which have never been delineated by previous or present writers. Nowadays, we cannot talk anymore simply about significant or insignificant writers, but we also have to talk about writers of this or that gender.

Now it is natural to talk about the feelings and the courage of writers, who bring a slight individualism and subjectivism in their own creativity, since the level of narration, research and realization lies exactly in this approach. No matter how much sentimental and influential has the *Dija* of Haki Stërmilli been, and how much lyrical would the *Vita* of Jakov Xoxa be, or how much epic-lyric may Kadare's *Dianabe*, the feeling, the internal perception, also perceived as experience is the thing that naturally connects women characters with the characteristics of literary works and with the special creativity of stylistically motivated female authors.

The novels taken into analysis in the following, *Stars do not dress like this*, *Woman's loneliness* and *In search of love* have been published at the same time, after the 90^s.

The artistic value and 'documentation' in Elvira Dones work

The novel of the writer Elvira Dones, the *Stars do not dress like this*,¹² is the artistic work, which has advertised greatly her artistic work. Although her entire literary work focuses on pain, on individual tragedy as a collective expression of her people's fate, on death as a deliverance from internal conversion, on slavery and torture as a replacement for the missing freedom, on spiritual upheaval as a warning to premature death, on modern prostitution as universal heritage. This work is perhaps more than each of the other ones, because it represents the fullness of ethno-psychological legacy of *Pain trilogy*, winning the sympathy of readers and

¹² "Sejko", Elbasan, 2001.

of critics.

At first glance, the theme of Dones' novel is a schematic representation of all that has happened in post-communist Albania: massive migrations to Greece and Italy, and bad luck on the way strangely combined with high expectations. The author of the novel, using uncommon dramatic skills, initially downed time, by placing another time between life and beyond it, within which the narrator and the main character recount simultaneously.

Dones elaborates the present in order to demythize the past. She addressed the sad presence through referring to the tragic past by putting parallels between them and creating puzzles for the reader. When recounting the past to carry the theme through time, to confess, or to complement the present with the past. In the eyes of the present reader, her tragedy the real and the out-of-date one are yesterday's subconsciousness as fictitious past. Although, early in the novel the author warns her reader of possible similarities (a common general formula in this novel), in reality she is saying the opposite: that similarities are only parts of what is known after the creation of archetypes: *Eye burial* and *Diary burial* quite possible in their dramatization, in the way of drugs and prostitution. The whole text is a *hypo-lecture*,¹³ as the researcher Floresha Dado would define it, which it deals with all aspects of information and all the elements that create paradigmatic relationship between situations in space, time and aesthetic accomplishment.

In the novel of the Elvira Dones, the devoted critic and reader have no difficulty to separate the three Albanian mythological paradigm and ethnographic elements: the journey of the living with the dead, the twin *mythological burying of the eyes* and its modern version of *diary burial*. Indeed, such ethnographic and mythologic paradigms have been noticed and have used also by other authors (like Ismail Kadare, Ridvan Dibra, etc.). Nevertheless, none of them have managed to integrate them and give literary and artistic dimensions, the way Elvira Dones has achieved in her work.

The first component is the documentary level, which is a forerunner of the mythological level: criminals kill one of the Albanian prostitutes to show their strength in front of her protesting colleagues. They mutilate her eyes, in order to give this action the symbolic character: annihilating what happened with the Albanian prostitutes and with the organized crime of these creatures, which generally occurs in the whole world and thus is universal. So mutilating the eyes of the prostitute and burying them, is in the first glance fictive. The artistic fiction itself and symbolic reflection of the truth which lasts so long that it creates the image that affects cultural anthropology and indigenous foreign ethno-psychology.

How much my heart would bump to hear your groaning when you see me? Mother, I do not know what would I give in life just to embrace you. But I'll have to endure besides cry, unable to put my head on your chest: shshsht mother, now I'm here, passed, the pain went away, now I'm here and you should not sob any more. Do you remember what you promised me? Just to be together and then everything would be surmountable, poison of thoughts, and wickedness of the sun, even coldness of the moon blue. But I wouldn't be able to utter a word, and only my soul knows how I would endure that moment.

I decided not to go back, not just as I was laid, not the way I am monstrous. I would never go back. I'll stay here, though nothing connects me with this place. You're stubborn, so you would never do good things in life. Yes, that's true, I'm stubborn, I would better be like that. Leila, without having anything, you would not move out of here. (Novel excerpt).

The second component is the level of the mythological paradigm. Her main character does not have the mission of Constantine (in Albanian popular and literary fiction) to tell the truth of the given word. On the contrary, her character, Leila, has the mission to show the mystery of what has happened.

The third component is the real documentary level without the mythological and symbolic dimensions of what happened with the fate of the Albanian women in an incredible moment of Albanian society. Such is the burial of Leila's diary by her parents. With this act, the levels between the sins are divided even more by parents hiding the truth, as a traditional act of preserving the purity of the family, or as a consequence of continuity and as the concealment of the organized crime from the highest state authorities, where the dilemma *did the homeland betray us or did we betray it*, is simply put as a rhetorical question without any further function.

The creativity and typicality of Flutura Aça's work

Flutura Aça comes into the Albanian prose in an usual way: through poetry. As a matter of fact, that is the way almost all the Albanian writers have come. Nevertheless, the way how she transposed her literary creativity from one literary genre to another, how she reconstructed it in an accurate way, and the way how

¹³ See Floresha Dado, *Sfida teorike të të historiografisë letrare*, "Bota shqiptare", (Tiranë, 2009), p. 324.

she has constructed it one after another, is unusual. It is unusual not only in the Albanian literature, but even in the contemporary literature, in general. Her poetry, as well as her prose, are coated with the same motifs, contexts and characters especially women, who are introduced to the reader, according to the size of the cultural level of the recipient. It is due to those structural components of poetry and prose of her rhythm, her language syntax, content and thematic motivated code, the narrator, the condensation of matter and the spiritual sublime feelings of the characters, which permeate prose and poetry that researchers consider her work which lies between poetry and prose extraordinary. While speaking about her While speaking about the novel *The Woman's loneliness*¹⁴ Dr. Josif Papagjoni states that it "seems like a continuity of her poetry; or as a poetry of words, who secretly escaped from the rigidity and the bloodiness of the poetic vocation, somewhere in the files of her experiences, to find shelter in another corner, in another form, by breathing, as an epic or story".¹⁵

In our search for the image of women in the contemporary novel, prose, respectively the novels of Aça, the writer, perhaps more than any of the other forms of writing in general meets certain missing parameters with woman characters in Albanian letters. We do not mean just the aesthetic realization of her prose. We are talking about some specific aspects of its communication, namely the real and unreal characters, the creative force that transposes gender sensitivity in artistic sensibility, to dramatically reveal the psychology of its characters.

With her work, Flutura Açkatries to enrich the Albanian novel not only with experience identity, but somehow even with foreign experience. Criticism has therefore assessed it as a novel of mixed theme. This is a quite famous story, at first glance, with formal message. An woman (Jeta Bregu) kills another woman (Donjeta R.) in order to protect her love and still she is not happy. Nevertheless, her daughter gets another fate: she finds the man of her dreams, who makes her happy. In the course of this logic, we accept the rational message that not every love ends in love and affection, and not all evil is transmitted from generation to generation.

In this novel, generally, there is the melting of the national subject in the regional (Balkans) one and the national one into the European, thus the universal one. In her novel, although her characters have identity, in most cases they do not think, do not feel and do not even act like female Albanian characters, which we are used to meet and reading the Albanian literature. In their inspiration, their behavior and their spiritual world, there are other factors that intervene and make it acceptable to readers. As such, they are not coated with ethnographic outlook, neither material nor spiritual Albanian ethnicity, but more with European life experiences and environments. It can be said that they perform as a fusion of Euro-Balkans colors. This is the reason why it can be said that in the novel of Flutura Aça, *The Woman's loneliness*, the female character can be realized in a fairly original way, the way she has chosen the motive and the modern way of storytelling, giving less space to the social and historical character and more to the emotional and sensory world.

The traditional as a forerunner in the novel of Behare Rexhepi

In the Albanian literature, there are some topics to have passed from one time to another and from one author to another. The topic of love, of dreaming and its implementation, is one of the creative experiences in Albanian literature, not to ruin the concept of appearance, but to complement it with sensitivity that brings new circumstances. The novel, *In the search of love*,¹⁶ the author Behare Rexhepi built exactly on those literary motivated inclinations, which we have previously recognized, like the traditional way of narration, but filled with new experiences of this type of novel, with new characters and new constructed narrative structures, which give shape and substantial essence to this novel.

While on the one hand, the unrestrained pessimism is missing, which was a characteristic of the earlier prose of this type (*Flower of remembrance, The abyss of love, If I were a boy, The love of a graduate etc.*), in this literary text, sentimentalism is as much present as optimism, as a form of the development of internal narrative situations. This novel is an attempt through an unusual story to present artistically the daily life of a young generation of the city of Prizren with all their concerns: sex, love, learning, drug and criminalization, experienced by nowadays teenagers.

Besa, a wise and beautiful young lady, a high school student, falls in love, almost by chance, in the eyes of Agron, also a student from the same town who is a courteous and clever young man. The way from the fictional search to artistic reality is long. As usual in such situations, love faces many demons, which come

¹⁴ Edit "Scanderbeg books", Tiranë, 2001.

¹⁵ See Josif Papagjoni, in "Mehr Licht", 2007.

¹⁶ Prishtinë, 2005.

out anyway and with this kind of narrative writing it brings us some strata of the female mentality and behavior of the young after-war generation. Besa who comes from a stable social class, becomes hostage of a first-sight love, a fictitious love, whereas Agim, deriving from a rural area, but in good economic conditions, becomes the nesc of evil, even though he himself becomes a victim of it in the end. In her spirit, *Besa* starts to build a dream of eternal love, while Agim breaks into debauchery, which is typical for a youth in transition. He built his life on two paradigms: interest and riches. Paralelly, other constructed characters are not of less importance. They bring individualities and reflections. Such are Shpresa, Agron, Zana etc. Love and the search of love are the essence of their existence, therefore, the courage of our women to seek the essence of spirituality without giving up in front of difficulties is the core of this novel, which comes out as intention to try again, several times this search, without complex external reflection.

The literature of gender as a creative concept

The definition that the number and quality of Albanian women, as writers, are growing more and more, justifies the selection of the following three novels, which were published at the same time: The novel of Elvira Dones, the writer *Stars do not dress like this*, Flutura Aça's novel *Woman's loneliness* and the novel of the writer Behare Rexhepi *In search of love*, as if to identify all its ideo-artistic dimensions all along with aesthetic requirements of this period and its readers. It is, thus, not random to made this selection of heterogeneous female writers.

As a matter of fact, beside them or in their place, other female writers could have been selected. Instead of Elvira Dones, the fate of Albanian women raped during the war in Kosovo could be found in the novel of Shefkije Islamaj, *Do not say you dreamt about me*. One would feel the same pain and sorrow. Instead of the novel of Flutura Aça, *Woman's loneliness*, one could chose the novel of Mira Meksi *Profida-Ballo in Versailles* and not lose anything in the aesthetic concept of the novel assessment of gender. Instead of the novel of Behare Rexhepi, *In search of love*, we could have selected one of the novels of Brunilda Zllami and not lose interest to read one of those sentimental novels, which we have read and evaluated with the early emotions of our early youth, without being concerned about its literary and artistic accomplishment.

Regardless, whether we would have chosen the first or the second group, the respective tipological assessments of female character in the published novel in recent years would have not lost anything from the structure of literary, artistic, substantive, emotional, spiritual and historical aesthetic, but complements and typologies the concept by increasing the coloration of characters created by female writers, as an external and internal status of the Albanian literature.

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