

The Poetic Mission of Arben Dedja



Literature

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the creativity of an Albanian poet, prose writer and translator living in Italy, Arben Dedja. It seeks to provide an overview of the Albanian contemporary poetry in emigration, an artistic production of the other language of Albanian literature. Typology of the poetry of the poet Arben Dedja is seen in three levels within the three parts of "The maintenance of masks" *La manutenzione delle maschere* (Mirëmbajtja e maskave). The first part of the poems can be labeled as "Self-portrait" where everything is permeated at the beginning of the memory where the howling of pain is felt; the continuity of poetry may be considered as a disclosure of cultural diversity; while the last piece is distinguished by the poetic prose as an experimentation of another type of literature where is characterized interliterarity phenomenon.

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the configuration of some of the main characteristics of the literary hood of Arben Dedja, characterized by a great variety of either stylistic or thematic as well, just a real challenge to convey the contradictions, human paradoxes of an ambiguous society, in a deeply troubled period. Putting these artistic creations with reference to their historical and social context and highlighting the cultural ideologies and prejudices in which the poetic roots are laid, we conceive the fact that they are closely related to the images that are transmitted through words. According to the comparative literature scholars "*each image is built through a constant confrontation which moves from identity to alteritet*" (Gnisci, Sinopoli, Trochi, 1999: 213), which we see to be present in the poems of Arben Dedja, too.

2. Just a short biography

Arben Dedja is a relatively new entry in Albanian poetry as well as in the Italian literature since he is being included there too. Arben Dedja was born in Tirana in 1964, where he studied medicine and specialized in general surgery. He lives in Italy and works as a researcher at the University of Padua. He writes scientific articles in the field of transplantation and stem cells. In Albania, two books of poetry were published, the first book "Cave of my sadness" "Shpella e trishtimeve te mia" in 1994, "I Thopërkuom" in 2003, and three translations of poetry (All poems of Guido Cavalcanti ; The selected poems by Umberto Saba; and still selected poetry by the Czech poet Miroslav Holub). Translating his own books, he could publish his books in Italy, in the magazines "Semicerchio", "Pagina", "Dedalus". In 2010, in Italy, he publishes in two languages, italian and albanian his book "The maintenance of masks" 'La manutenzione delle maschere' (Mirëmbajtja e maskave), which appears to appeal the Albanian and the Italian reader, as well as the researchers of the migration literature as it is known in Italy. This volume is presented by the Italian Embassy in Tirana and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy in the framework of the project "Two Peoples, One Sea, One Friendship". Among the latest books of Arben Dedja, '*The prolonged amputation*', a volume of short stories, is published in two languages, In 2014 he also publishes the book of short stories "*Eschatological History*)" with which he wins the prize of the author of the year in Albania. The newest flow of the poet Dedja is the volume of poetry "*The vanishing twins*" a product by Besa publishing house in Italy, which produces consistently outstanding works of Albanian emigrants.

3. Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue

From time to time cultural diversity has made it possible to disclose new areas of human creativity. In literary texts, authors reproduce from Homer and Virgil, involve social and historical problems of the current social order in their fantasy forward to deliver their message to a better world.

The intercultural dialogue remains the key to mutual recognition between peoples and increasing cooperation among them. In this aspect works written by Albanian authors in emigration represent a significant literary reality of issues that come before another reality, that of a vital one, which includes in itself a set of by far the most authentic circumstances, experiences and dilemmas. Italian researchers, especially those dealing with comparative literature, as Armando Gnisci and Franca Sinopoli, have continuously paid special attention in their works to emigrant writers praising the art of speech as a bridge between two languages and two cultures. In their evaluations, among other authors who write in Italy, special attention was paid to the Albanian artists as well.

In this regard, based on her scientific competence, Sinopoli distinguishes three authors: the poet Gezim Hajdari, the winner of many awards among which the Montale award, and the novelists Ron Kubati Arthur Spaniard), (Sinopoli, 2006: 122), who identify themselves as interesting writers that represent a special literature which differs from the others. This Sinopoli's assessment is also added the names of Amik Kasoruhos, a well-known Albanian writer and translator, sentenced to imprisonment at the age of 17-years from the communist dictatorship; and that of the novelist Anilda Ibrahim very popular with her novels in Italy and beyond, not to mention the other Albanians, who are fighting with determination to have a voice representative, to be part of not only the Albanian-Italian culture but also The European one. In determining these views we turn again to the definitions of the Italian critic Lecomte, which says that *The immigrant writers or poets know that they cannot be called citizens of the world; only literature still functions as a unique valid passport that identifies and presents them as "citizens of literature" (Lecomte, 2011: 10).*

4. The poetic opus

The poetic opus of a writer is a closed circuit to which you can turn endlessly and not ever return to the same point. It happens to read a poem several times and never receive the same perception. In each of these cases, we go up and down in the literary journey where writers and poets have expressed themselves becoming part of the world then. In the introduction of the book it says: *"I wrote on everything to avoid boredom (and unconsciously) to feed my friendships, attendance and the existence of the persons outside poetry. It is perhaps this luck that my writing was modeled slowly with the features of today: ease and (auto) irony. Contrary to a shy and lonely person as I am, I write a friendly and playful poetry (Dedja, 2010: 1).*

This is what Arben Dedja says trying to meet again his poetic muse and also to reveal the typology of his poetry. Self-confessing, Dedja, facilitates our tracking in his experimental poetry. We chose such a term assuming not to be crucial for the fact that the verses of this author, their figuration and structure build a diversified mosaic of colors and flavors, entirely different from the traditional verse and poetry. In the worldview of the author, poetry is the most synthetic art of literary expressed. In the study of this creativity, the high level of specialized thinking leads us to what Lecomte says *"Maintenance of masks in this compilation is a firm exercise in search of new ways away from the most common mythical poetry, scientifically worked through the exact and expert procedure of autopsy; Well through anatomical dissolution, impartial matter, the moment in which death as the only reality, gives all things eventually the right place they belong to."* (Lecomte, 2010: 7).

Thus, there starts the assessment of the poetry of Arben Dedja by the curator of the book and the researcher Mia Lecomte, who is also the author and co-author of many books, magazines and reviews dedicated to immigrant authors in Italy.

5. The reception of Albanian literature in Italy

The reception of Albanian literature in Italy is a complex phenomenon of long duration. We mean an entire generation of Arberesh writers, who gave a valuable contribution not only to the Albanian intellectualism, but also to the Italian one, since in the early period of European Romanticism that culminated with the name of De Rada. A generation of writers who migrated to Italy after World War II and after 1991 joined those who marked the starting point of the literature considered as the Albanian migration literature in Italy, later as the Arberesh literature. The name of Ernest Koliqi is a specific case of the patriot and cosmopolitan man who witnessed the unification of the human values of indigenous identity and the cultured open-minded multidimensional human.

But in this period we have an information gap in the opinion of the Italian and European readers about Albanian literature that was created in Albania. For this issue, based on his scientific competence, the albanologist Elsie has rightly pointed out not only the negative aspects of isolation for the literature after World War II but also for the entire intellectual establishment of Albanians in these two directions introverse and extroverse "*The long-term isolation of Albania had very negative consequences for intellectual and cultural exchanges. In Albania, these dark years created a huge lack of objective recognitions for the external world, while in the western world they created a backlog of information for Albania, a country that for most people had ceased to exist until tens of thousands of refugees suddenly emerged on the shores of southern Italy in 1991 (Elsie, 1995: 5).*

Through poetic literary directions that are delivered today in Albania and also in Italy, the echo of the verses of Dedja, the poet, translator and essayist, seems special and original. In the case of immigrant poets difficulty of artistic creation is twofold. The first difficulty lies in the concept that artistic idea born through the musicality of the mother tongue, to be recreated in the language acquired, in this case Italian. Secondly, the general orchestration of cultural background performs on the creative process where they belong to. All this sets the motto of theirs, remodeling personal breathing of origin with the awareness of new sounds, the foreign and the native as well. As such they left their tracks in a new universe, part of which they are made, appearing as bilingual writers with dual affiliations. The famous researcher of this field Lecomte, in her latest book about the migrant literary, which has come out in France, in the form of an anthology of poetry by immigrant poets in Italy and which includes the poet Dedja, points out that this kind of literature "*receives every time more and more importance of first hand and is bound to increase now and again in the quality of a motivated writing ethically, rich in history and feelings, both innovatively and linguistically as well*" (Lecomte, 2011: 9). These critic follows carefully the artistic creativity of Arben Dedjes. Mia Lecomte continues to work diligently on the prefaces in the books of the author up to the last volume of poetry titled "The vanishing twins".

It is worth noting that in the poetry of Dedja, without abandoning early themes and motives, it is intended to be given a separate item to the dialectical complexity, leaving emerge the new social conditions by calling memories, as well as describing the impermanence of existence and bodily matter with a lexicon free of any taboo, as he says in the verses "*be aware-they used to tell me-from the gipsies/ because they kidnap children.*" (Dedja, 2010: 15).

In the Italian media it is stated: "*Reading the Albanian poet Arben Dedja, his direct and irreverent language which has favored the cognition of his personal history and that of the Albanian people too, is the testimony of personal life and that of a people; one of those bricks that allow the house of poetry to rely on more*

solid basis, offering the opportunity to expand its borders, join the seas and to become acquainted with other cultural histories (Cati, 2011: 2).

Reading the poems in "The maintenance of masks" of this contemporary author, Arben Dedja, we find synchronic analogous forms despite time distance.

Let's refer again to the curator of the book when she says that *"The onset of posterior of Arben Dedja is the runway and real spectacle of life, an autopsy of individual and universal existence in the back room of the morgue, before being reperfused and left behind, before any maintenance (Lecomte, 2010: 9).*

6. Individual drama expresses collective drama

Between the poetic mask and that of the surgeon, what is the difference and the possible approach, within a creative spirit in these two respective fields? Within the interliterary limits, within the space of the interior poetic environment a journey, in search of the origin itself, is traversed. Among the verses you can see a nation which still bears the bitter scars of dictatorship *"Ah yes, I remember the Albanians / who arrived in crowds from the north / owls increased in the outskirts that year"* (Presentation, 15). Memories turn the pages of the history of a people: *"Under the blighted light of the room, I visited one night / the old frowned man from the outskirts of Pristina: so begins the poem"*, which ends with the tragic pain of the inevitable end *"Simple and fast, the diagnosis was: / prostate cancer. / Little can be done about it - / and there are no seats in the pavilion. / It was night, but I sent him back to the camp: / come again by next week, Bace"* ("Surgical observation", 21-22). In these verses, the national drama is reflected through that of an individual of a nation, which is still at a crossroad.

7. The paradox of living

In the poetry of this surgeon-poet, the metaphor mostly gives way to paradox particularly to the second part of the book titled "In the Wax Museum". Here dominates the self-poetic intervention and the dialectic proportion between the earthly and the spiritual world which based on the thematic background of the imagination gives space to individualism that is shaped in any verse of the three parts of book. Considering the poet – translator of Cavalcanti, we can distinguish how deep underground can be noticed the inspiration from the Renaissance Florentine poet, but never sacrificing the autonomous poetry of Dedja. He takes again the symbol of the love of Dante, but transforms completely the pure image, focusing on the prostitutes who, not coincidentally, he calls Beatrice *"were all tied to/ a mattress per person / to finish instantly their work"* (Prostitutes: 64).

Not only the poems but also the trials involve the existential dilemmas of the individual. In the article "The museum," he says, "Professional curiosity pushed me to visit in Linz, Austria, the most bizarre and probably the funniest museum if I have ever visited." (Museo: 76), pointing out again irony or self-irony as the author calls Dr. Kirchgarden, the creator of the museum. The latter founded the museum of the forgotten objects by surgeons in the belly of their patients. The reflections of the surgeon – poet appear naturally meditating the philosophy of the strange truth "among others different watches, one of them" Rolex (Museo: 77).

Looking for the continuity of a literary creativity featuring common signs, we see the irony as a stylistic tool, which belongs writers despite the time and circumstances. In the poetry of Dedja it passes through all its steps. *Someone ate watermelon at the end/.../. Somewhere in the middle / of the sentence he paused / where he took a deep breath he was heard / besides tik-tak / of the nail cutters (Chinese invention) The leader's speech, p. 61).* Humour is getting an inevitable tool for the theme and motifs of the book "The maintenance of masks". Facing a great Italian writer Luigi Pirandello there seems to appear similarities in the perception and

treatment of problems. Based on the principle "Castigat ridenda mores" Pirandelian humor is astounding and stinging built on paradox and contradictory situations.

Precisely such a form of presentation of the reality appears also to the works of Ernest Koliqi as he has properly been observed by the researchers of Koliqi and has also been the subject of my master thesis. I quote *"Both Pirandello and Koliqi seem to make surgery on a very sick reality, put their finger on the wound, without taking over the cure. But the service that they make to the human society is far more precious than sanctimony or glorification. It is carried by the portraits of the characters facing different realities. In the creativity Koliqi we encounter a thin humor often used to soften the drama"* (Sokoli, 2009: 82).

This way of artistic recreation, emphasizing again interliterary, seems interesting not only for the literature but also for all Albanian culture if we refer to issues often brought to the attention by scholars and intellectuals. Once addressed to the Albanian legendary reality the researcher Luke Qafoku finds himself in front of a real fact: Yet more and more often he survives beyond historical gap towards our unappealable destiny (Qafoku, 2008: 59).

The Albanian environment and the universal one are merged naturally to move from microcosm to universality. Sabri Hamiti a well known literary critic clearly highlights when he says that "Poetry is the most personal and most universal art" (Hamiti, 2010: 22). Human dramas is forwarded, quite originally, leaving a deep impression on everyone who reads this book.

With a careful stylistic choice of elegance as well as dynamism or often rapid and courageous, there appeared the erudite man's world without borders. All his work is permeated by irony, grotesque sarcasm even when addressing to historical figures worldwide *"When King - Sun decided / to operate fistula anal / masters from Alsace, / from the far Golloborda brought / to lift in Versaille / a new magnificent dump"* (Louis XIV, 45), as well as religious ones in the poem "In the congress of Bektashi", which closes paradoxically with the verses *"They celebrated this achievement / with a toast for the prophet Ali and his father in law"* (p. 51).

8. Conclusion

The review of this work, involved in the creative corpus of the author Dedja, demonstrates how the linguistic bilingualism manages to be counted on textual identity of artistic creation. Besides some obvious problems in the context of the development of Albanian literature, particularly a bilingual literature (if we can call it such) "The maintenance of masks" has more affirmative aspects. It is characterized in that the poetic focus of the author is a man of universal dilemmas without discrimination of race, religion, idea or nation. Lexical and linguistic aspect of the author is quite enviable. This is a striking quality because it is lacking in a majority of contemporary writers. Enviably is also the author's courage and innovations in creating new vocabulary directed by medical terminology (here we consider the primary occupation of the author) and using the neglected vocabulary

The problems encountered are related to the level of reading this kind of book. The level of literary criticism, is more than acceptable, but should be further deepened in a more dignified presentation of the values and individuality of these authors located between the borders, cultures and languages.

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