

**THE SNOW IN CASABLANCA  
A TYPICAL MACEDONIAN WOMEN'S  
WRITING**



**Literature**

**Keywords:** Macedonian Women's Writing – Écriture Feminine, Restitution of the Homeland, Exile and the Self-Exile, Roots, Religion and Love.

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**Abstract**

The *Snow in Casablanca*, 2005, is a novel which magnificently presents the life of Kica Kolbe's heroine - Dina Asprova in Macedonia in the 1990's. Dina is an Aegean woman who lives in many capital cities in Europe in search of her true identity and then comes back to Macedonia and continues her quest for her roots, identity and the sense of belonging. This novel is a typical form of Macedonian Women's Writing – Écriture Feminine. Dina Asprova is a writer who suffers from anxiety of writing as a result of her loss of identity, which she manages to recover and to become a good writer. This prose work deals with the important questions of the restitution of the homeland, the cultural, the personal and the national identity of the Aegean people, the exile and the self-exile, the importance of one's roots, religion and love. Dina undergoes through a personal transitional period and Kolbe magnificently shows Dina's struggle to get out of the margins, her wish to re-connect to her roots, her quest to find her own identity and her transition from a woman who does not know where she belong, to a woman who finds her true identity and roots.

## 1. Introduction

**K**ica Bardzieva Kolbe is a remarkable Macedonian novelist, who usually tackles the question of the Aegean people in Macedonia and abroad. Her most famous novels are *Aegeans* (Kolbe, B. K. 1999) and *The Snow in Casablanca* (Kolbe, B. K. 2005). The focus of interest in this paper is the novel *The Snow in Casablanca*, 2005 which magnificently presents the life of Kolbe's heroine - Dina Asprova in Macedonia in the 1990's. Dina is an Aegean woman who lives in many capital cities in Europe in search of her true identity and then comes back to Macedonia and continues her quest for her roots, identity and the sense of belonging. Dina comes back to Macedonia in the 1990's, a period in which Macedonia gains its independence and undergoes through a transitional period in which the issue of the cultural, the personal and the national identity is being questioned. Dina undergoes through a personal transitional period as well and Kolbe magnificently shows Dina's struggle to get out of the margins, her wish to re-connect to her roots, her quest to find her own identity and her transition from a woman who does not know where she belong, to a woman who finds her true identity and roots.

*The Snow in Casablanca* is the most beautifully written novel by Kolbe in which she focuses on the presentation of the lives of the Macedonian Aegean women and analyses the questions of identity, religion, exile, self-exile and the feeling of unbelonging, through the life of her heroine Dina Asprova, who is a highly educated and intelligent young Macedonian woman. Kolbe writes about the Faith in God, about love and the importance of having family roots and a sense of belonging.

Slavica Srbinovska writes about this novel in the book *Through the Prism of the Other*, 2003 and Elizabeta Šeleva, writes about this novel in her essay *Love as a Biography and Fatherland - the Old Fragrances in the Snow in Casablanca by Kica Bardžieva Kolbe*, 2008. These two critics, each in her own authentic way, describes the complexity of this extraordinary work of Kolbe.

Srbinovska inspired by Kolbe explains: „What the book releases to the surface and in my opinion, that is the most important issue, is the essence of the question of the continuous development of a person in a cultural circle in which he/she is formed, finds his/her roots and establishes his/her identity. He/she and the environment are merged into one, from the beginning to the end of life. And after the departure from that birthplace, the stamp of belonging to that space always remains imprinted, the connection remains that makes him constantly alert to what was and what is. The book actualizes for me the key issue of identity, as the author declares about herself and her preoccupations in an interview. The division tied to a problem called the Aegeans, I would develop into a problem for all possible levels of division of the subject“ (Srbinovska, S. 2003:28).

Sheleva writes about this novel: „Bardžieva's novel is layered and multifaceted starting from the very title. The country of Casablanca is a metaphor for Macedonia, but also an imaginary determination for any small, borderland, front- country, a crossroad country, a country of refugees - in which many powerful cultural matrices are united. Dina, personally experiencing the intercultural dialogue between the East and the West for twelve years, experiences a transformation not only of the personal, but also of the collective self-representation and valuation“ (Sheleva, E. 2008:6).

The two eminent critics in their works look at this novel from a different perspective and analyze the various aspects and issues it contains. Sheleva focuses on the restitution of Dina's Homeland, Srbinovska follows and considers the identity issue of the Aegean people. In addition to the process of transformation of the main protagonist Dina Asprova, from marginalized to successful, the issues of refugees, the falling apart of Yugoslavia, the question of identity, roots, love, faith and wisdom are being presented in Kolbe's novel, all through the actualization of a feminist perspective, supported by methodological means such as Women's Writing i.e. *Écriture Feminine* and the Macedonian women's writing.

First of all, through the life of Dina, *The Snow in Casablanca* explores the topic of refugees, that is, for the people who left their native country, Macedonia and went to Europe and the world in order to create a better life and future for themselves and their families, but it also follows the consequences of abandoning their own country. The reasons they left their own country are numerous, among them the war, the breaking apart of Yugoslavia, the financial insecurity, the search for identity due to the marginalization, as is the case with Asprova.

Dina and her family are refugees, they left their own country, Macedonia because of the fear of the war and the breaking apart of Yugoslavia, which destroyed all their ideologies and beliefs and broke their peaceful and tranquil life. Dina spent several years with her parents abroad, but then through various scholarships, she lived in different cities across Europe and did not want to return to her own country, because she felt like she did not belong there. The main heroine is in love with art, in writing and she believes that she should live in Europe from where great artists, painters and writers come from, whom she calls her relatives in spirit, and not in Macedonia in which she feels crouched, however she can't fully relate with the either. Thus, Dina loses her identity, wandering around the big cities in Europe with a sense of being marginalized and unsuccessful. She lost her part of her identity due to the breaking apart of Yugoslavia, where she spent her childhood and lived peacefully with her parents, believing in the ideologies with which she was brought up.

Asprova sees Macedonia through the prism of her personal filter, Macedonia is a virtual Casablanca for her and the city of Skopje - Justiniana. She creates a virtual biography for herself, because of the feeling of powerlessness, as she clarifies it. She has no roots, no home, no love, she is a wanderer, until she returns to her native land, until she reveals the secrets of faith, the love of life or as she later realizes, it is one and only secret. The process of transformation from a state of marginalization to a state of success is followed through the contextual coordinates of the faith in God, of love, that is, in finding her old, unfulfilled love - David, in the discovery of one's own roots and in the company of friends that you, love, Aneta, Nora, the Professor and Father Grigorij. The love with David, their connection and their similar situation bring them together and make them yearn for one another, to heal their own sick souls that during the seventeen years of separation, longed for one another.

The love and faith in the Creator opens the door to the secrets of life of which they have heard, and now they become part of them. Love is the driving force of their happiness and in it they find the pleasure of everyday life with the loved one, without fear that happiness will disappear. Kica Kolbe very successfully presents this change - Dina's transformation from a wanderer without identity into a successful and beloved wife who finds her own home besides her beloved and is no longer afraid to live and love.

## **2. Methodology**

This novel belongs in the genre of a Love novel, Women's Bildungsroman, Social and Pseudo-Autobiographical novel. It is a Love novel because the love story between Dina and David is being followed and it is a Women's Bildungsroman, because the life of Dina is being presented ever since she has been a young girl till her late adulthood. This novel also belongs in the genre of the Social novel, because it deals with the question of a city or a country which have an influence on the life of the protagonist. It is a Pseudo-Autobiographical novel as well, because the narrator and the author are not the same person, but there are autobiographical elements in the novel.

The Macedonian women's writing or *Écriture Féminine* - Women's Writing is the main methodological tool we use in the analysis of the *Snow in Casablanca*. In this work, Kica Bardžieva Kolbe writes from a philosophical-emotional position of the migration, that is, about the refugees and the voluntary exile. The narrative is emotional and it is in the first person and the plot is woven around the love story of Dinah and David, with all its standard elements of parting, longing and meeting after a long time and of course, the happy ending is in essence a Woman's Writing, i.e. *Écriture Féminine* or women's writing. Kolbe's sentences are long and sometimes flow without interruption and across multiple pages and her writing is undoubtedly denoted as a women's writing, for example, in the sense of the understanding of Ellen Cixous, who belongs to the French feminist stream. Placing it in the unconscious, subconscious and pre-lingual, i.e. in one sphere of female corporeality, in one way romanticized and idealistic Ellen Cixous in her famous essay *The Laughing of the Medusa* said: *The woman must write about herself: she must write about women and to bring the women in the writing, from which they were driven out as violently as their bodies - for the same reason, of the same laws, with the same fatal aim. A woman must put herself in the text - as in the world and in history - with her own movement* (Cixous, H. 1976:93).

Kolbe as if she had listened to Cixous and in the *Snow in Casablanca*, she expressed her views on how a woman from marginalized becomes successful, citing her own biography that runs through the text and writing about the woman and her experiences. Therefore, we can say that Kolbe with this novel becomes part of the history of the Macedonian Women's Writing.

The French stream of feminism deals with the inner, essential, almost linguistic essence of the women's writing as confirmed by Julia Kristeva when she says: *The women's writing is not because it is co notated by the author's sex, but by itself: the use of language, as and the contents he expresses are never neutral, but symbolic, revealing their own, non-masculine nature* (Kristeva, J. 1984:70).

In the famous work of Bardžieva, the narrative focus is on the family and the personal history, as opposed to the collective history. The theme of love and the emotional narration of the novel add to the female nature in a thematic sense, i.e. as interpreted by the Anglo-American feminist theorists. Namely, while French theoreticians seek the nature of female writing at the level of the linguistic structure and function, i.e. in the letter itself, the Anglo-American critics find the Women's Writing in the thematic preoccupations characteristic of the writers, that is, women as authors.

Elaine Showalter, one of the main representatives of the American feminist theory, explains that: *The Anglo-American criticism deals with the author's sex with "narrative fates", with the image of the woman represented in the texts and gender stereotypes, where gender is the term used to explain the pressure of culture on gender identity* (Showalter, E.1977:131). Under the term gynocritics, Showalter explains the literary critique itself, based on a woman's view and attitude.

She defines the term gynocritics in her work, *A Literature of Their Own* where she states that contrary to the established framework of male literature, the purpose of gynocritics is to create a women's base or basis for analyzing female literature and to develop new models based on women's experience rather than to adapt towards the male models and theories.

The Anglo-American theory shows that the literary tradition and the canon are monochromatic, that is, uniformly male and proves that the literary discourse is a product of the patriarchal history. The other aspect of these considerations takes into consideration the revision and the complementation of the canon, by looking back towards the literary tradition and the discovery, documenting and analysis of the work of women who wrote and were never included in the canon. In their discovery of the "lost" tradition of Women's Writing, these critics actually conceive the question of the reasons for the historical exclusion of women from the literary canonization. In this context, Showalter's insights are as follows: *Although these reasons are placed in society rather than in biology, they nevertheless focus on the female author and character, and to the female experience as a marker of authenticity - of the perceptions of reality and, in particular, of the collective understanding of what it means to be a woman and how she can be presented through a literary work* (Showalter, E. 1977:131).

In *A Literature of Their Own*, Showalter provides a literary history of women writers. She produces a history that shows the configuration of their material, psychological and ideological determinants; while promoting feminist criticism, which refers to women readers and gynocritics, which refers to women writers. Regarding the Macedonian women's literature, Katica Kulavkova and Jasna Koteska are both writers and critics, who sublimate the Macedonian literary works and produce a literary history, while promoting feminist theory - gynocritics.

Katica Kulavkova in 1998, in the book entitled *Feminist Strategies*, sublimate the Macedonian literary criticism in which she collects papers that refer to the women's writing written by Macedonian literary critics and theoreticians. Discussing in her introductory text on some general questions such as: *Is there Women's Writing and does it have its own conceptual opponent in a certain male writing? She concludes that instead of filtering, the apories of the phenomenon of Women's Writing are increasingly accumulating - a conclusion which seems to be specifically related to the Macedonian situation* (Кѹлавкова, K. 1998:9). Namely, the specificity of the women's writing, according to Kulavkova: *It is not in some essential characteristics of the text, which immediately, based on its read, would identify the sex of the author, because there is no methodological automatism on the basis of which for an anonymous text they would claim that it is written by a man-writer or a woman-writer. The authorship is simulated ... But, she says, in a symbolic sense, the women's writing is a specific transition of the oral into the written morphology. Hence, the women's writing in the Macedonian context is not without its own tradition - our literary mothers are not non-existent, they are only anonymous, they are the countless voices that have for centuries, been singing, telling and transmitting the folk art.* (Кѹлавкова, K. 1998:9). In conclusion, Kulavkova writes: *In Macedonia there is a lack of*

*intentional, conceptualized and institutionalized practice of studying the feminist idiom* (Ќулавкова, К. 1998:17).

In the context of the Macedonian Women's Writing, very important views are presented in Jasna Koteska's doctoral thesis and book *The Macedonian Women's Writing*, published in 2002, in which she attempts to establish a history of Macedonian women's prose. Starting from the patriarchal stereotype that: *Women are good as objects of foreign art, they are subject to possession and consumption, but they are very difficult to produce good art*, using the statistics, Koteska writes about the absence of the Macedonian women authors from the literary canon, she states: *The literature written by Macedonian female authors in the Macedonian canon until 1990 participates with the poor 2.7%* (Koteska, J. 2002:24). However, this percentage does not refer to the presence of works written by women on the shelves in bookstores or libraries (because of course they are there), but on their representation in the anthologies, reviews, criticisms, i.e. of their presence and representation in the literary canon. The reasons for the absence of the writers in the canon are traditionally found within historical contexts, through the predominant and sovereign ruling of patriarchy in the human history. Macedonian women's literary history here is no exception.

Virginia Wolf in her famous essay *A Room of One's Own* detects the reasons for the absence of women from the literary tradition and which is summarized in one sentence: *The woman must have money and her own room if she wants to write novels* (Wolf, V. 1998:6). Wolf has detected the reasons why women were unable to write and why they are not represented in the traditional literary canon, starting from the real, material and social constraints of women (such as the almost non-existent opportunities for earning a living or the birth and care of many children) and to the absurd misogynist stereotypes propagated by the men who wrote about women and the conclusion is that the reasons for the absence of women from the literary tradition are in the patriarchy-based domination in the past present in all aspects of the existence. Koteska in her book *The Macedonian Women's Writing* deals with a historical overview of the Macedonian Women's Writing. She points out the earliest recorded names of female authors, those written in some historical documents, primarily as carriers of the Macedonian oral tradition and focuses mostly on the presentation of their contemporaries (Koteska, J. 2002:59).

This attempt to establish some kind of "female tradition" in Macedonian literature, similar to the approach of the Anglo-American feminist critics, carries weight, which is above all historical and anthological. The classification and periodization are procedures that require a long and thorough research approach. In the Macedonian context, this is of exceptional significance, because of the need to observe and remember the part of the Macedonian literary production, which for some reason, most often conditioned by the author's sex, remained outside the canonized corpus. Koteska says about this work: *This is a pioneering work, a syntagm that, on the one hand, implies giving a certain historical positioning and meaning, but also a certain*

*awareness of certain defects or imperfections, because of the very nature of its originality* (Kotecka, J. 2002:60).

Pioneering works are also those who do not invoke a certain previous corpus of similar works, but works that are more focused on their potential future interlocutors in the sense of seeking a future, follow-up confirmation of their theses or inciting controversy about them. The pioneer role of this paper is reflected in his ambition to give a comprehensive overview of the Macedonian Women's Writing. *The Snow in Casablanca* is also a pioneering work, which for the first time examines the issue of refugees and voluntary persecution from its own state and deeply enters the pores and essence of problems affecting Macedonians, whether they live or do not live in their own country. Through the character of Dina, who is a writer, Kolbe opens the question of what is to be a writer of Macedonian descent and in the context of this, the topic for a part of the Macedonian Women's Writing, in which the anxiety of authorship is found, is a constant state to question her own qualities as a writer in relation to the writings of the great European writers.

This prose work, as *Écriture Féminine* or Women's Writing, provides an authentic account of the Macedonian writers in and out of Macedonia, who are facing the same problems that are listed as an inability of a woman to write or become a part of the canon. Among them are the lack of material resources, their own room and possibly the most important element of insufficient self-confidence that the work she writes can be as good as the works of the great male writers, such as Proust, Sartre, because of the stereotypes imposed by male writers for women writers, who say that women are not good enough to create good art. But women refute this "fact," and create works that are worthy of respect and are as important as those of male writers. Kolbe's novel is a good example of a female novel about the Macedonian Women's Writing, which is remarkably good and profound in its meaning, which captivates with its profoundness and integrity and is worthy of respect.

### 3. Conclusion

Dina Asprova is marginalized due to the fact that she loses her roots. She goes into a self-exile and instead of the feeling of belonging, she actually gets the feeling of complete alienation which leads into depression and bitterness. *Dina is a reflection of one absolute otherness. As a woman in contrast with the men in her story, as a contemporary young woman in contrast with her mother and grandmother, as a Macedonian compared with the foreigners and as a Macedonian compared to the Macedonians who have stayed in the geographically determined Macedonia* (Sheleva, E.2008:7).

Dina Asprova falls in the net of marginalization due to the loss of her family roots after the falling apart of Jugoslavija, the country in which she had spent her childhood happily together with her family and friends. After the falling of Jugoslavija and the war which has followed, her mother and father have left Macedonia and searched exile in Canada, because of the fear of the

war and Dina makes a self-exile and lives in different cities in Europe with the hope to find a place to belong to. She is struggling for affiliation, for connection with these European places, but to no avail. Dina starts to feel such a bitterness due to the fact that in this same Europe that she is considering her home, she does not find what she is looking for, and that is a real place to belong to, a home where she would feel secure and peaceful. Dina knows her own fears and frustrations, but she can't find her way out of them.

Asprova has grown up in Jugoslavija and has been taught to live under certain ideals and beliefs, but with the breaking apart of this country, she feels that she does not belong anywhere and that all her ideals and everything that she has been taught, actually does not exist. Jugoslavija is no longer existant and she does not see Macedonia as her own country. She leaves Macedonia and lives 12 years in many cities in Europe in search of her own identity and place to belong to. Instead, she ends up not belonging anywhere, alone, marginalized and confused. She becomes a wonderer, who wonders from one city to another, each and every time with the wish for affiliation, but each and every time with no success.

She is a writer who suffers from the anxiety of writing due to the fact that she has completely lost her identity and she strongly believes that her writings are not as good as the writings of the great men authors, once she compares them with theirs. Otherness is what characterizes Dina, when compared with the culture towards which she is striving toward and because of this otherness she is rejected from the canonized system in which she wants to find a place for herself. Because of the inability to belong, she searches for her creativity in another place and that is the women's tradition of her national writings.

This novel as *Ecriture Feminine* or *Women's Writing* actually gives one authentic review of the Macedonian women writers in and out of Macedonia, who are facing with the problem of the inability of the woman to write or to be part of the canon. This paper also takes into account the categories of sex and gender as determinators which in some other contexts have presented a based for exclusion of the writing of women authors from the traditional literary corpus.

Jasna Koteska by using the statistics points out the omission of the writings of the Macedonian women writers in the traditional literary canon and explains that: *Till the year 1990 the women's literature in the traditional literary canon participates with only 2,7 %*. (Koteska, 2002:24). Namely, Virginia Wolf also writes about the omission of the women in the traditional literary canon and explains that: *The woman must have a room of one's own and to be economically independent so that she can write* (Wolf, 1989:52)

In the case of Dina there is the problem of anxiety of writing and she is constantly questioning her qualities as a writer and she suspects in her creativity. Asprova sees Macedonia through her own prism. She creates a virtual biography for herself because of the feeling of hopelessness. Macedonia becomes Casablanca and her home town Skopje becomes Justinijana.



She makes this virtual biography, because she feels only bitterness and confusion, because of the paradox in her real biography. She is really bitter and she explains: *Actually I have created the picture for Casablanca out of powerlessness, because of my continual defeats in the West in Europe, Casablanca, Justrinijana, Balkanija. Codes od powerlessness. I wanted to emphasize the paradox in my biography. For example when I am filling in documents for applications. Born-Jugoslavija. They tell me, there is no such thing, it does not exist. I explain, there was Jugoslavija when I was born.... Ok. I write Macedonia. No, it does not exist either...You have to write it with FYROM. I answer it does not exist, not now, not in the past, not ever and I am talking about the reference..... After all the wars that have taken place on the teritory of Macedonia, its teritory became smaller and smaller, so as at the end it to become nameless... (Kolbe, 2007:257).*

Dina is frustrated and afraid, she is scared just like every Macedonian in Macedonia whose national cultural and personal identity is being put under question. Each Macedonian is interested in the outcome of the question of the name of our Country Macedonia, because everything depends on that, Macedonia's future as a country and the lives of two million people who live in and love this country. Dina has suppressed deep inside of her love for her country, she has done so out of powerlessness out of frustration, but once she comes back after 12 years in Macedonia she remembers her beautiful childhood spent there and she goes back to her roots.

Dina remembers her grand-mother Angelina and she remembers her faith in God. She thinks about the life that her grand-mother has lived, a plain pure and ordinary life in which she was happy and fulfilled. She thinks back about the wisdom that her grand-mother has taught her and that is that the secret of happiness in life should be searched deeply in the faith of God, that all the answers would be found through the faith in God and through love. She accepts the triad of love life and God and through Christianity and becoming a believer again she finds a way out of the margins. She experiences an epiphany when she remembers all these things and that way she starts her process of restitution of her Homeland, which is complete when she finds her long lost love David with whom she reconnects.

Her search to find herself, the many travelings and moving from one city to another is actually, obviously a search for an authentic, women's creativity, a search for an authentic Women's Writing. The knowledge of our ancestors the knowledge of our roots and our history going back towards our family nucleus is the place when we can feel the peace and security and the feeling of belonging. After reconnecting with her roots and finding her love, with the faith in God she manages to find her identity and manages to find her home and a place to belong to. She gets out of the marginalized position and becomes happy and successful. Dina surpasses her anxiety of writing and now that she knows the secret of life she can write and she can be happy.

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