

**“KOSOVAR POETS” PUBLISHED IN
TIRANA, AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON
THE MODERNIZATION OF THE 1970s
POETRY IN ALBANIA**



Literature

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Abstract

The "Kosovar poets" commentary published in Tirana and these poets' impact on the modernization of the 70s' poetry in Albania" aim to shed some light on one of the less studied phenomenon of the Albanian poetry of this period, though accepted by the very creators and critics of that time, viewed also with concern also by the political authorities of Tirana.

The former communist leader Ramiz Alia, who had covered the culture problems for decades, spoke of this phenomenon with concern: *“We should consider the negative influence that comes from Kosovar literature. It is not just hermetization. It is undeniably not just in our way. We notice a language, we have the mania borrow the clatter from Kosovars, created by the Slavic. As for the quality, the low quality work turns into an ideological weakness. We have the opportunities for that. Let’s publish them when they are talented.”*¹

The creativity of this generation in Tirana, that wrote a “different” poem, considered as “hermetic” or “decadent” by the critics of that time, I think is also dedicated to the inspiration of Albanian-Kosovo poets. This poetry, published through fine filters and under the title “Poets from Kosovo”², a strange presentation “made with the pretention that it was not the literature of socialist realism, so as to be distinguished from the official literature in Albania”³ resembled as another kind poetry, also because it was more freed from restrictions and the imposed hypocrisy of the dogmatic socialist realism of Tirana, thanks to the free communication with European and world poetry, which had its impact in the creativity of this generation of poets in Tirana.

Ali Aliu, one of the well-known scholars of this period, asserts that *“Contemporary Literature in Yugoslavia is open to external influences. That is why one can feel different currents of wind in this creative atmosphere of ours. And agreeing in this aspect, it might be a favorable circumstance for it.”*⁴

¹ A protocol for gatherings of art and press leaders, for problems about the art’s purity. Central State Archive, Structure, date 24.3. 1980. File 62 and 63.

² Pandeli Koci. Interview given to the “National” journal, Tirana, no. 338, date 7-14 February 2016, pg. 2-3.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ali Ali: “The Trend and Anti-trend.” “Nentori” 1972, No. 10, pg. 39-45. The article was first published in the journal “Jeta e Re”, 1972, no. 3, Prishtina.

The hypothesis for this topic is that Kosovo-Albanian poets published in Tirana, under censorship and edited and selected carefully, influenced many new phenomena in the Albanian poetry, written and published in Tirana, such as: metaphorism, symbolism and all other models of modern Western poetry acquisition, free from strong ideological influences.

In the following, we will try to answer the question of how the 1970s Albanian poetry was influenced by the interaction between the poetry published in Pristina and the ones in Tirana. And in general what did our national poetry gain from the beginning of this literary integration process. The subject tries to shed light and prove through a comparative, formalistic and sociological analysis and its influence on the main representatives of this generation, such as: Xhevahir Spahiu, Frederik Reshpja, Moikom Zeqo, Anton Papeleka, Fasli Haliti, Skënder Bucpapaj etc., who tried individually or together, to break from inside the solid rules of socialist realism, silently opposing the pompousness, rhetoric and revolutionary tribunality that the previous generation had.

The topic gives a short overview of the Albanian poetry development in Kosovo, mainly in the 1970s, while analyzing their publications in the Tirana Times Press (Azem Shkreli, Ali Podrimja, Rrahman Dedja, Din Mehmeti, Enver Gjergji, Eqrem Basha, Sabri Hamiti, Agim Vinca, Edi Shukriu, etc.), including of course, the father of modern Albanian poetry in Kosovo, Esad Mekuli. In particular, the phenomenon of modernity in the poetry of this generation in Kosovo will be examined, as it tries to argue why the influence of Kosovo's poetry of the time is greater in this generation of poets, who published their works in Tirana compared to the previous generations.

The topic examines the role of these poets, called “modernists”, for introducing the elements and phenomena of modern poetry in the Albanian literature, especially at the time when little or no international poets were published in the literary press of Tirana.

The topic studies literary and extra-literary factors that influenced the Albanian poetry of the 1970s generation in Albania and Kosovo.

The study mainly deals with the concept of symbolic subjectivity and hermetization in this poetic school, as a reaction to the political situation in Kosovo (symbolism) and the influences of Western currents, and the hypothesis as to why this poetry influenced mostly the poetry of the 70s, in Albania.

The best publications have been utilized from critics and scholars such as Ibrahim Rugova, Rexhep Qosja, Ali Aliu, Agim Vinca, Vehat Shipa, Adriatik Kallulli, Razi Brahimi, Klara Kodra, Xhezair Abazi, Fatos Arapi, Sabri Hamiti, Ali Podrimja, Dritëro Agolli, Skender Bucpapaj, etc. The entire Tirana press of that time was collected, especially the literary bodies of the Albanian Association of Writers and Artists, the weekly journal “Drita”, the monthly magazine “Nëntori” during 1968-1978, State Archives, Albania's Writers and Artists Association, the National Library

of Tirana, etc. Robert Elsie "The History of Albanian Literature", Peja 1997, Umberto Eko: About Literature, 2007, have been consulted.

Cleanth Brooks (1906-1994): *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947) and "Modern Poetry and the Tradition" (1939). Robert Penn Warrens (1905-1989) and Cleanth Brooks: "*Understanding Poetry*." Robert Penn Warren: "New and Selected Essays", (Hardcover –1989). Rexhep Qosja's "Writers and Periods", Tirana, 2005. Ibrahim Rugova's "Literary Criticism", Pristina, 1980, "Aesthetic Refusal", Rilindja, Pristina, 1987 and "Strategy of Understanding", Rilindja, Pristina, 1980. Ardian Marashi's "Identical Symbolism among Kosovo and Albanian poets of the '68. ("National Journal", Tirana, 31 January 2009, pg. 18). Tomas Eliot's "Selected Essays", Rilindja Pristina, 1982. Ibrahim Rugova's "Literary Criticism", Pristina, 1980. Shaban Sinani's "Literature in totalitarianism" and "Dossier K.", Tirana 2011. Ali Aliu's "Metaphors Pathway", "Critical Writings for the Albanian Poetry", Toena Publishing House, Tirana 2001, Floresha Dado's, "Uninterpreted Literature", "The Albanian World", Tirana, 2010, etc.

All the editions of Kosovo Albanian poets in Tirana during this period have been reviewed, publications in the form of anthologies, as well as all the cycles of poetry published in the literary press, mainly in the newspaper "Drita" and "Nëntori", as well as critics during these years, etc.

I think that recognizing the "Kosovar poets" influence in introducing new phenomena into Albania's poetry of the 70s, is an enrichment of our critical attitudes for this period of our national literature, no matter where it was written- inside or outside the borders.

Exposition

The contacts of Albanian poetry written in Kosovo, with Albanian readers, began late, because of reasons with political character.

The first publications in Tirana's literary press began in 1970. According to the researcher Agim Vinca, "From 1966 onwards, the Albanian literature created in Yugoslavia entered a new and unknown stage. At this time, especially since 1968 and onwards, the process of its integration with the native literature initiated, namely the process of its awareness for its unique national affiliation; an awareness articulated firstly in Rexhep Qose's critical, essayist and historical-literary writings."⁵ This awareness is strengthened in the years 1968-1972 by unifying the literary norm of the Albanian language and its use by Albanian writers in Albania, Kosovo and other Albanian territories.

⁵ Agim Vinca: "The Development Structure of the Albanian Poetry" (1945-1980), Publisher of Teaching Tools and Textbooks (Revision, Pristina 1997).

Despite the various stumbling blocks and peculiar social and political developments in Albania, Kosovo and the region, the Albanian poetry of the 1970s generally recognizes a strong boom. The researcher Bashkim Kucuku, in addressing this phenomenon, states that “as in no other period it is written in the Albanian language and culture: in the native country, in Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and in some of the diaspora centers (Italy, Germany, USA)⁶.”

Albanian Poetry in Kosovo, a Short Story

The Albanian poetry in Kosovo during the second half of the 20th century faced an impressive development. The father of modern Kosovar poetry, Esad Mekuli (1916-1993), who started writing engaging poems since the mid-‘30s, would be followed by a number of prominent poets. Albanians after WWII in the former Yugoslavia, although fallen under a new bondage, gained the formal right for Albanian schooling and press, denied to them during few-centuries of the Ottoman rule and also during the Serbian realm.

As known in Camaj's poetry volumes: “A Flute Amongst Mountains” (Pristina 1953) and “Vërrini’s Song”, along with Mekul’s poetry collection “For You” (Pristina 1955), created a tradition that would inspire future generations of Albanian poets in Kosovo. Another group of poets, who later became well-known, came on stage in the late 1950s and early 1960s with Enver Gjergjeku, Fahredi Podrimja, etc.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the previous group of poets would compete with Esad Mekuli, Mark Krasniqi, etc., then with Shkrel, Podrimja, Din Mehmeti etc., but also the younger generation with Beqir Musliu, Musa Ramadani, Teki Dervishi, Muhamed Kërveshi, Sabri Hamiti, Qerim Ujkani, Mirko Gashi, Agim Vinca, Nexhat Halimi, Edi Shkukriu, Kadrush Radogoshi etc. In the early eighties a number of young poets would bring in their Albanian poetry their creative individuality with a variety of styles and new motives. The poets that emerge in this period are: Milazim Krasniqi, Ramadan Musliu, Basri Chapriqi, Ibrahim Berisha, Abdullah Konushevc, Naim Kelmendi, Fatmir Sulejmani, Salajdin Salihu, Lulzim Haziri, Mustafa Xhemajli, Linditi Ahmeti, Anton Berishaj, Lindita Aliu (Tahiri) Kujtim Shala, Vehbi Miftari etc.

Literary and Extra-Literary Factors that Influenced Kosovo's Hermetic Poetry

Although in the absence of the national freedom, for the already well-known circumstances, it is acknowledged by all critics and scholars that Kosovo Albanian poets had more contact with the cultural world compared to Albanian writers in Albania, who lived in a completely closed and isolated society.

⁶ Bashkim Kucuku. Exposition of “Anthology on the Contemporary Albanian Poetry”, Onufri, Tirana, 2008, pg.5. Azem Shkreli. “Nentori” 1972, Nr. 9, pg. 158. Agim Vinca: “The Development Structure of the Albanian Poetry”, (1945-1980).

Kosovar poets began writing poetry with dark figures and strong meanings by hiding and camouflaging their true messages of freedom using: metaphor, symbol, allegory, and any other literary means that the Serbian censorship would allow. This can be seen in Azem Shkreli's poem "Ferver"

*For a while
The sun is attempting to rise
But it cannot...⁷*

The researcher Agim Vinca analyzing this phenomenon states that "the symbol is a frequent and important figurative tool of that part of poetry that follows the experience of symbolic and neo-symbolic poetry, but also of surrealist and expressionist poetry" (some of the middle and new generation poets: F. Gunga, A. Podrimja, Q. Ujkani, Dedaj, Mirko Gashi, Beqir Musliu, Musa Ramadani, Nexhat Halimi, Shaip Beqiri, Ramadan Musliu, Muhamet Kërveshi, Azem Shkreli, Adem Gajtini, Din Mehmeti, Besim Bokshi etc.)⁸.

Ali Podrimja in his poem "Unë biri yt" expresses powerful subthemes

*I, your son, Kosovo, know your silent
desires
I know your dreams, the sleeping waves
For centuries
I, your son, Kosovo, know your sufferings, your joys,
Your deaths ...*

But what was the Year 1968 for Kosovo, and the World

1968 was a year of dramatic developments, social conflicts and escalating protests in Kosovo and around the world. The Anti-nuclear Movement, the Environmental Movement, the Hippies Movement, the Women's Liberation Movement, the Movement Against US Involvement in the Vietnam War, etc.

In June 1968, students' protests occurred in Belgrade, other protests broke out in other capitals of the Yugoslav republics; Sarajevo, Zagreb and Ljubljana, but major democracies were also held in Pristina. Kosovo-Albanians protested their national rights and freedoms.

⁷ Azem Shkreli. "Nentori" 1972, Nr. 9, pg. 158.

⁸ Agim Vinca: "The Development Structure of the Albanian Poetry" (1945-1980)

Year 1968, Change of Generations in Literature

For many scholars year 1968 in Kosovo marks among others the change of generations: the younger generation, who does not live in the War ideals, imposed persistently its own way.

This finding is also made by prof. Ardian Marashi when writing that “For Kosovo-Albanians this year also marks the change of generations. Affirming a new generation who does not agree with the war generation on fundamental problems: the communist and internationalist ideal of the generation that fought in the war, loses ground in front of another ideal, the national ideal and self-determination, which is forced upon them. Kosovo's distinction regarding this generation change in 1968 is that the old generation joins the younger one, which causes the overcome of “the conflict among generations”, at least for the national issue, which is projected as the major preoccupation for the entire Kosovo Albanian population.”⁹

The fact that Albanian literature written in Kosovo and other territories had followed its independent development, benefiting from contacts with the cultural world and the aesthetic freedoms tolerated by the Yugoslav regime, compared with the controlled literature written in Albania, was immediately apparent in those few publications made in Tirana.

According to the well-known scholar of literature, prof. Shaban Sinani “The Albanian literature developed in Kosovo was more methodically ransomed, but politically controlled.”¹⁰

The movements that left traces in the US and Europe, such as: Futurism, Abstract Art, Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Expressionism, Hermetization, Symbolism, Decadentism, Existentialism etc., left traces even in Kosovo's quality poets who made use of these opportunities, while Tirana's poets were deprived of these chances because of aggressive political censorship.

For the scholar and literature professor at the University of Tirana, Floresha Dado: “The '60s,-'70s and onwards were different in the Albanian literature, here and across the border. If here, the poetic experiments were considered as foreign influences, there the artistic researches were more acceptable. The distinction was also visible in the field of literary criticism: while here the political dogma had blurred the aesthetic aspects, highlighting the inability of true artistic interpretation, there the criticism was more active and more sympathetic to the criticism of the artistic sphere. On the other hand in the field of science, in Kosovo, there were some scholars and critics (R.Qosja, M.Raifi, I.Rugova, A.Aliu, etc.) who were openly pronounced against the principles of this literature.”¹¹ It is about the literature of socialist realism (My note MB).

⁹ Ardian Marashi: Interview given for the “Nacional” journal, Tirana, No. 238, 7-14 February 2016, pg.2-3

¹⁰ Shaban Sinani. “History of Albanian Literature, Open Issues,” pg. 216

¹¹ Floresha Dado: “Uninterpreted Literature”, Bota shqiptare, Tirana 2010, pg.35.

Prishtina's Hermetic Poets present in Tirana

Despite the dilemmas of what attitude should be taken towards the Albanian literature written in Kosovo and other territories, in the early 1970s we have a timid change of course in the official politics of Tirana. The Central Committee of the APP decides to allow the selected edition of Kosovo's poets and writers. "It was only at the beginning of 1971 that the Publishing House "Naim Frashëri" was permitted to publish one to two books per year from Kosovo's literature."¹² A window of communication was open, and the literary press of Tirana, however, in a fearful and controlled way, began to introduce some of the best Kosovo-Albanian poets.

During the 1970s, according to my research in the literary press of the time, six poets from Kosovo appeared in "Nentori" journal, named: Rifat Kukaj¹³, Esad Mekuli¹⁴, Azem Shkreli¹⁵, Jakup Ceraja¹⁶, Sadete Emerllahu¹⁷, Milaim Berisha¹⁸, while the poetical anthology "For You"¹⁹ was published with the participation of renowned poets: Esad Mekuli, with 31 poems, Ali Podrimja with the poem "The Awakened Land" and 2 other poems, Azem Shkreli with 6 poems, Din Mehmeti with 3 poems, Enver Gjergjeku with 3 poems and Nebih Muqi- a poet who is not at the level of other participants of anthology and is not known why he has 3 poems included, while many other quality poets from Kosovo are left out. From the long prose, Nazmi Rrahman's novel "Highlander"²⁰ has been published.

Year 1972, the Year of Kosovar Poetry in Tirana

Year 1972 can be considered as the year of significant presence for Kosovar-Albanian poets in the literary press of Tirana, but also of a great qualitative change in the modernization of Albanian poetry in general. Heroic patos and post-war enthusiasm poets compete, the great turnaround generation of the 1960s, and the generation of liberal poetry, and new stylistic research of the 1970s. The researcher Agim Vinca raises the question: "Should we seek here, at the beginning of the '70s and precisely in 1972, which is also the most fruitful year of post-war Albanian poetry (over fifty volumes of poetry were published this year), the beginnings of a new stage in the development of today's Albanian poetry?"²¹

¹² Ibid

¹³ Nendori, 1970, no.12, pg. 224.

¹⁴ Nendori, 1970, no.12, pg. 218-219.

¹⁵ Nendori, 1970, no.12, pg. 223.

¹⁶ Nendori, 1970, no.12, pg. 218-219.

¹⁷ Nendori, 1970, no.12, pg. 222.

¹⁸ Nendori, 1970, no.12, pg. 225.

¹⁹ "Naim Frashëri" Publishing House in Tirana 1970. In this anthology which takes the title from Esad Mekuli's poem, take part seven poets from Kosovo.

²⁰ "Naim Frashëri" Publishing house, 1970.

²¹ Agim Vinca: "The Development Structure of the Albanian Poetry" (1945-1980) Publisher of Teaching Tools and Textbooks.

A renowned formalist and stylist, Sabri Hamiti, who brought a new spirit within the experimental poetry, written in Pristina, was published at this time in Tirana's press, few of his poems were published with some textual changes.

It is interesting to see how the editor of "Nendori" journal in Tirana, made an effort to publish the poem "Varg", although being a flagrant copyright infringement.

*I sit in the thirteenth row
She sits in the eighteenth row
they say, I suffer from short-sightedness
I dwell in the yellow-colored room
in a circle with a black spot in the middle
I lay the forehead in the streets of my town
Passersby step over it with a smile.²²*

In the original was:

*I sit in the thirteenth row
PERIOD
She sits in the eighteenth row
PERIOD
They say, I suffer from short-sightedness
EXCLAMATION MARK etc.²³*

The Impact of Kosovo's Poetry, Hermetization

Although the poetry of Kosovo-Albanian poets continued to be published in a restrained way, the fear of its influence was great. From researching archives and the examining relevant documentation, it is concluded that this timidness was expressed not only in the editorial offices and Tirana's state publishing entities, vigilant towards every figure and literary verse, but also towards the high structures of the state dealing with culture.

Conclusion

The poetry of Kosovo poets, published for the first time in Albania starting from the year 1970, brought a new poetic experience in style, structure, organization and theme; a poetry released from the rigid schemes of socialist realism in Tirana, imposed to Albanian poets by strong political pressure.

²² "Nendori" nr.12, 1972, pg. 184.

²³ Renaissance, 15.VI and 14.VIII, 1971. Taken from Agim Vinca's "Structure of Poetry Development", pg. 377.

According to the researcher Agim Vinca, “Almost every word, mountain, stone, tower, soil, poppy, pebble, willow, oak, river, blood, rifle, lute, snake, coral, Rozafa castle, Qabe’s Bridge, Konstadin and Doruntina, etc., the use of symbol as a synonym for the new and modern in poetry.”²⁴

This symbolic is also seen among Tirana’s poets:

Frederik Reshpja: Rozafa, Illyrian, Kruja, Kosovo, Arberesh, Gjergj, Ajkune, Kremlin, legend, Tirana, Dukagjin, lute, Arberia, Drin, Korabi, the legend of Constantine, etc.

Anton Pappleka: Dri (Drini), mountain, Tropoja, highlander, stone, fire, legend, alpine mountain ranges, Bajram Curri, blood, river, lute, Skanderbeg, Ajkune, mountain pasture, seven-headed serpent, freedom, bridegroom’s parents of the dawn, the land’s beautiful one.

Xhevahir Spahiu: George Castriot, stone, mountain, Drin, blood, Libohova, elegies’ heroes (*kreshnik*), Avni Rustemi, Nallban Probatimi, Donika, George, Trojan horse, mountain pasture, Çerciz, Rrapi ne mashkullore, blood, Argjiro, Gjoleke labi.

Skender Buçpapaj: mountain pasture’s bird, mountain pasture, Gjakova, mist, Montenegrin’s tomb, kralj Nikolla, ravens, events, Asim Vokshi, Mitrovica, Bajram Curri, Bytyci, Gjakova’s blood, blood giant, lamentations, freedom etc.

Fasli Haliti: Skanderbeg, Kruja, torch, eagle, crag, Albanian red flag, Shkodra, castle, Buna, oak, storm, Drini, sea etc.

Moikom Zeqo: Mujo Ulqinaku, Phoenix, land, sun, Albania, Saranda, Joni, storm’s bird, seven-headed serpent’s cave, tribe, stone, Caesar, Pompey, Cheops’ Pyramid, Afroditi’s star, Gjergj Elez Alia.

Hamit Aliaj: Tower, mountain pasture, sun, flag, soil, Dada Shote, cradle, cathedral, cross, black horses, Muji, legend, Bajram Curri, tribe, white cap, hero (*kreshnik*), Mic Sokoli, war cry, raffle’s hole, Drenica, Azem Galica.

As prof. Agim Vinca notices “The tower, one of the most influential figures of Kosovar poetry takes the meaning as the symbol of resistance and national identity, or even the Albanian highlander” (especially in the poetic texts of Din Mehmet, Ali Podrimja, Qerim Ujka etc). This poem is supported mainly in the metaphorization and symbolization of the poetic language, as Agim Vinca says, “Its poetic lifestyle is brought in the triangle between symbolism, metaphor, and allegory. Ancient mythology symbols prevail (Zeus, Prometheus, Sisyphus, Antaeus, Narcissus,

²⁴ Agim Vinca: “The Development Structure of the Albanian Poetry” (1945-1980) Publisher of Teaching Tools and Textbooks, Pristina

Phoenician, Troy, Troy's Horse, Laocoön, then symbols of biblical mythology like: Bible, Christ, Adam, Eve, Cain, Judah, etc.).²⁵

Even the poets; Papeka, Reshpja, Spahiu, Bucpapaj, Zeqo, Haliti, Aliaj etc. use the symbols of ancient mythology, expanding this arsenal with new and significant meanings of the time.

Some Kosovar poets according to Vince "use in their poems the symbolism of numbers and geometric figures (Rr. Dedaj), the symbol of colors (A. Podrimja), the symbol of plants and animals' world, respectively of flora and fauna, leading to the phenomenon of phytomorphisation and zoomorphism (E. Gjergjeku, M. Camaj, Q. Ujkani, Rr. Dedaj). This is also expressed in the structure of this poem; it is no coincidence that Rr.Dedaj and A. Podrimja's verses, two of the most typical elliptical poetry representatives of the contextual symbol, often take the fairytale's, the fable's and kashellashé's (anecdotes) form which are embedded numerous symbolic elements.²⁶

The works of the liberal poetry's generation in Tirana, which wrote a "different" poetry, considered as "hermetic" or "decadent" by the critics of that time, are also dedicated, I think, to the poetry inspiration of Kosovo-Albanian poets, which although published through small filters and under the "Poets from Kosovo"²⁷ umbrella, made with the claim that it is not socialist realism literature, to distinguish from the official literature in Albania"²⁸, looked like poem of another kind, also because of the liberal communication with the European and world poetry, and I think it also had its own impact on the creativity of this generation of poets in Tirana.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Pandeli Koci. Interview given for "Nacional" journal, Tirana, Nr. 338, date 7-14 February 2016, pg, 2-3.

²⁸ Ibid