

Overview of Albanian Literary Criticism 1912-1944

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Abstract *The purpose of this paper is to explain the development of Albanian literary criticism in the early twentieth century. This study is intended to create a panorama of Albanian literary criticism, taking into account a number of key components that enabled the birth of Albanian literary critical thought, its development and maturation. This paper also intends to approach the study of Albanian literary criticism diachronically and synchronically. These approaches create an opportunity to interpret how literary criticism developed in the period 1912-1944. The reason for using these methods is to give a complete overview of the steps of Albanian literary criticism. This study carefully constructs a socio-cultural context of the period and shows how the social-cultural context creates the necessary conditions for the emergence of literary criticism in Albania. This study also shows the most well known representatives and types of literary criticism. Special attention is paid to problems that accompanied the origins of Albanian literary criticism. These problems are classified according to their literary genres developed in the period 1912 -1944.*

Keywords: *Literary criticism, literary criticism panorama, socio-cultural context, synchronic and diachronic approach, issues of criticism, representatives of criticism.*

Introduction

This paper consists of an overview of the Albanian literary criticism in the period 1912-1944. It is designed to focus on aspects relating to:

- Socio-cultural historical context that accompanied the development of Albanian literary criticism from its origins until its maturation;
- The most prominent representatives of time;
- Writing used for criticism;
- Problems that characterized the emergence of literary critical thinking.

Socio-cultural context

Albanian Literary criticism, in the modern sense of the word, has a century of tradition, and literary writing has even four centuries more. These two processes have been inexorably linked with each other; both are dependent on the socio-cultural context.

Most ancient manifestations of the aesthetic sphere are seen in Popular Proverbs, and had been spontaneously passed down from one generation to another. Folklore was the aesthetic monument itself, where concepts of peoples' ideas of aesthetic beauty was found.

The first elements of thought and criticism appeared in old Albanian literature, with the first works of Albanian humanists and Albanian writers. Whereas in the early phase of literary criticism development critics discussed issues related to poetry and matters of theological humanist rhetoric, during the Renaissance period they were more focused on historical thinking, aesthetics and in literary criticism.

The Renaissance, which historically in the field of social thought and Enlightenment starts with Veqilharxhi works and in literature with "Milosao" of De Rada (1836), activated social and cultural development. Although the renaissance's activity developed abroad without a strong cultural tie to Albanian literature there was, nevertheless, a unity in the general orientations.

Historical events such as (the League of Prizren) gave the possibility to organize activities based on a Renaissance ideology and common platform, such as the national constitution, release and strengthening of Albanian unity, the independent formation of an organized society within the Albanian state, as a example of an organized Albanian existence.

The main accomplishment of this ideology was seen from the Renaissance in cultural development, so all efforts were focused on the constitution of a common culture. As a result from Renaissance ranks, ideologues and politicians emerged, thinkers and historians, artists, and critics

It was necessary to set up the conditions, besides literature, which evolved as a tribute to the awakening of a national consciousness, furthermore it generated the opinion for literary aesthetic, which was dictated by the large patriotic purposes of Enlightenment ideas. This aesthetic opinion knew patriotic literature and social mission, and gave priority to the content of literature.

The 20th Century created an Albanian literary consciousness. This meant not only great works, but the birth of the inner awareness of these values, reasoning, and literary phenomena. This has brought awareness to the originality of the particular as the supreme literary value and increased the quality of criterion for literary evaluation. It was the time of great literary discussions that took the form as strong dialogue and eventually recorded for the transformation of literary efforts, which sought new models of literature, creating a new model of a writing culture.

Literary criticism gained a special status in this context. Konica was recognized as its founder with his important writings in the magazine "Albania". As R. Qosja stated, he had merited to be the first criticism raised the "public institution of literary and culture", beginning a milestone for aesthetics and critique in Albania.

In the 20-'30's this awareness, as a result of socio-cultural context, underwent new developments. Rugova defined so that context: "After completion of one of the most sought ideals of the Renaissance, which was the independence and the formation of the Albanian state in 1912 and its constitution, different cultural centers of the Renaissance, were rather busy in the transfer within an overall process of integration that offered new terms".

After the declaration of independence, with the focus on problems of the country, cultural activity began to be visible. The nation starts to function as a society within the self-organization. These were difficult years, not only in terms of social history, but also in cultural terms. It should be emphasized that due to the impact of negative factors acting in the national reality, the pace of change was slow. Literature, relying heavily on the printing press, became the voice and the mirror of time, expression of the progressive aspirations, being followed naturally from a literary thought and new aesthetic concepts which spoke of evolution and enrichment of national consciousness. Albanian aesthetic opinion appears to some limited extent, distributed and heterogeneous, but nevertheless present in the two decades prior.

In this period the press, as one of the most active media culture, experiences a certain development. The contribution of the press can be seen in two directions¹:

- Newspapers published abroad
- Newspapers published locally.

'30s can be called years of establishment and consolidation of the Albanian press in place. During these years, the press continue to publish previous publishing and established new ones, mainly in Tirana.

The Shkodra's Catholic press continued to play a major role in spreading ideas. Papers mentioned here:

- "Hylli i Dritës" (the founder of the Franciscan monthly Fishta George, which resumed publication in 1930 to 1944) "Zani i i Shna Ndout " - (although literary material provided with great religious orientation, closed in 1944), "Leka" Shkodër (1924-1939), "Zâni i naltë" (the monthly magazine for the Muslim community, Tirana, 1923-1939), "Tomorri" etc.

Among the journals that contributed to this period may be mentioned:

- Laberia (since 28 November be named Democrat), Leka (1929), Minerva-Tirana (1932-1936), (Zavalani T., N. Çika, O. Pascal, S Shundi), Iliria (Tirana 1934 -1936), Rilindja(Korce, 1934), Perpjekja Shqiptare (1936 -1939) B. Merxhani, ABC (1936), Bota e Re (1936-37) etc.), Bota e re (1936-37) Korçë etj. " Shkëndia" (1940-1943), Fryma (1944), "Revista letrare" (1944), "Kritika" (1944).

Education developed rapidly. Education developed for 20-30 years and during this time there many high schools opened, which were considered the highest type of education. Many essential textbooks, that were needed at the time, were published. A special phenomena in the second part of the 1920 was Fan Noli's introduction that accompanied his important translations of world literature. Their significance lay precisely in the fact that they directly affected a new point of view for Albanian society. Various writers and critics have dealt at length with issues of translation theory by considering a very important aspect of the culture of a nation.

¹ These magazines are published abroad "Albania" Bruksel (1896), "Kombi" SHBA (1906), "Dielli" Boston (1909), "Lirija-Diturija", "La nazione albanese" (1897), Djalëria" e Vjenës (1920-1929), "Shqipëria e re" e Konstancës (1920-1934). These newspapers were published locally: "Përlindja shqiptare" Shkodër, "Hylli i Dritës" (1914), "Koha" e Mihal Gramenos, "Leka" in Shkodër (1929)

Besides Noli, there were other critics that contributed to translation like, Faik Konica, Tajar Zavalani, Ernest Koliqi, Gjergj Fishta, Vangjel Koça, Lumo Skendo. Important masterpieces of world literature were translated, such as Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Omar Khayyam, Petrarch, Dante, Tassos, Hygoit, Manzoni, Goethe, etc.. There were numerous discussions in the press of time on the translation, role, and its quality.

Intellectuals had a key role in this development period the Albanian literary thought. Their position had already been changed without the dual role of leader and creator. Concerns and preoccupations of intelligence found suitable terrain to be covered in the press of time. In thirty years, with the formation of branches, a process of grouping ideologies appeared which affected the process of the intelligence orientation. A part of them remained attached to the tradition.²

The emergence of the magazine "Perpjekja Shqiptare" opened new quests for intelligence, as it raised many issues raised in all fields of culture, philosophy, etc. of various sciences. Branko Merxhani and Vangjel Koça, proponents of the idea of "Neoshqiptarizma" expressed their ideas through it.

Rugova defines thus the contribution of this magazine: "Within its program of culture or culturisation of the Albanian society, this magazine was open to the currents of science and the positivist philosophy, because for social progress a platform and mental progress related to intellectual positivist philosophy is necessary. Thus, in its pages there were enough articles for psychoanalysis to sociology, various issues of modern civilization. All of these articles in the magazine were trying to reflect the organic needs of society, so there wasn't an opening unwary opening to Occidentalism. "

In numerous discussions in intelligence circles had begun to prevail the concept of separation between the "young" and "elders", between "Anatolian orientalists" and "Westernizers" who sought an open and modern Western civilization without any limits, thus an atmosphere of extreme lack of tolerance between them. In this context, intellectuals Branko Merxhani³, Vangjel Koça, Nebil Cika, Ismet Toto would form a new formation, which proclaimed a new Albanian ideology, "Neoshqiptarizma". It was born in late 1920's and developed further in the 1930 's.

Intellectuals who supported this ideology were building their theories on sociological definitions. Robert Elsie defined "Neoshqiptarizma" as a philosophical intellectual spring that relied on nationalist ideology, fighting for social progress as the foundation of the current process without supporting a direct path of political commitment to social transformations or the disappearance of traditional political and social structures. In its initial form, it was a cultural movement, non-political, which also expressed its Merxhani's motto, "Politics no! Only culture!" However, Neoshqiptarizma itself, who became a stronger counterweight to the political ideologies of socialism and internationalism of the left, should be seen in the context of other ideologies that emerged in Europe.

Most prominent representatives in literary criticism

Besides Noli⁴ who was the first, in the mid 1920's a range critics were inspired like: K. Maloki, E. Çabej, M. Kuteli, Koça, Dh. Shuteriqi, in the 40s A. Pipa. As representatives of sociological criticism in the '30s were highlighted: S. Shundi, K. Kokoshi, in the 40s V. Kokona, N. Hakiu, K. Ashta, F. Ndocaj, P. Gjeçi. Writers, like Fishta, Koliqi Haxhiademi, Spasse, or individuals Varfi profiles of different orientations, as F. Noli, K. Cipo, Z. Kodra, J. Kodra etc.. would be involved with criticism.

Literary criticism was characterized by the phenomenon of diversity. This is due to the education and culture that many critics and thinkers of various schools of European popular culture had at that time. "It is not difficult - Nasho Jorgaqi claims - to discern the writer's position on the attitude of the Catholic clergy of young writers of the" New World "or the latter from Neoshqiptarizma group."

The press network helped and led to this development. It must be said that these publications regularly transmitted the literary productions of the time, and at the same time, dealt with research and study of literary tradition. The publishing of the volume edition of "Naim Frasheri" by Albanian students in Graz, Austria on the occasion of 25th anniversary of the death, was the starting point of the publishing of texts of literary criticism, opening a new space to criticism, which, in addition print publications, began the publication of critical books. Later one it would later be followed by important publications in the field of literary and historical criticism⁵.

² The magazine "Hylli I Dritës" and "Leka" continued their activity based on concept "Fe and Kombësi" (religion and nation). They insisted in ethno-psychological and ethno-historical values. These magazines, especially "Hylli I dritës" proceeded in a strong religious line.

³ Branko Merxhani (1894-1981), a noted Albanian intellectual, a leader of the Neoshqiptarizma school.

⁴ Note: Noli had started his activity at the end of the Renaissance.

⁵ Note: I am referring here to all publishings not only books made for critics, for example from the volume "Naim Frasheri" published from students of Graz University. From these articles came many important ideas for the critique of the time but even in the literary

Albanian forms of criticism

This entire panorama of development naturally leads to an overview of such questions as:

What forms of criticism were more developed in this period?

Because of the conditions, literary criticism had its foundations set in the publication of numerous articles with the features of the magazine editor of the time. Little was cultivated in literary study and a good part of literary criticism was written by the writers who dealt in the form of essays or treatises.

The object of criticism was not only specific texts of writers, but it was an attempt to view the works and their whole personality of the writers who belonged to different time periods of Albanian literature. Mentioned articles for Naim Frashëri written by: Sterjo Spasse, "Naim Frasher as an Albanian Natural Singer", Namik Resuli, "Naim Frasher" etc.; For Fishta, written by Koliqi, "Fishta Interpreter of Albanian soul", A. Pipa, "Fishta, Man and Work", Kole Ashta, "Fishta's Dramatic Production"; for Lasgush Poradeci, by Dhimiter Pasko "Lasgush Poradeci poet", K. Maloki "Is Lasgush Poradeci a poet? ", for Mjeda: Kole Prela "Is Mjeda the Most Famous Lyric " for Migjeni: Qemal Draçini "Migjeni's Poetical Works" to Faik Konica A. Pipa, Faik Konica, etc.

As seen from the titles, these texts become objects of various aspects of the creativity of writers in general:

- Dealing with the ideology, principles, feelings, elements of authenticity, the context of building work or aspects related to the personality of the character of the Albanians.
- The creativity of different writers of various literary genres is taken into consideration.⁶ There was awareness of the function of criticism by shifting the text in such phases: more like descriptions and interpretations and rarely as a rating (this function will be applied more criticism in 1944).
- As far as critical genres goes it was dealt with a shorter essay.
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Problems of Albanian criticism in the '20s - '44

Given that issues dealing with criticism of the time was extensive and affected various aspects of critical thinking, inside it a range of issues are distinguished.

Issue of the evaluation criteria of criticism

The critics, besides using theory to evaluate literary works and phenomena, they also used some criterias that were based on subjects outside the sphere of literature.

First of all, a big issue for the critics was the National Issue. The criteria of the National Issue appeared as a new perspective⁷ around the 1930's .

The attention of the critics focused on the author and ethnographic concept for the evaluation of the work in the national regional plan, enabling the imposition of non-literary criteria in the evaluation of the work. Albanianism problem as a value concept became the assessment criteria for literary works in different ways⁸.

The most genuine Albanian writer" was the common discourse of the time. Controversies between Kuteli Spiro Belkos and Krist Maloki arose above the writers figure treated theoretically by Asdreni⁹ , who said that a new "meshtar i ri" (new spiritual leader) in Albania, was perceived in different ways.

historical field of critics, critics started to take important steps with the publishing of the Gaetano Pertrota's work "Popolo, lingua a letteratura Albanese"

⁶ I am referring here to the critical articles :about Fishta "Prodhimi dramatik I Fishtes" Kole Ashtes taken from the collection "Gjergj Fishta" under the care of the magazine "Shkendija", published house Luarasi, Tirane, 1941.

⁷ Note: For the Renaissance, the national issue was connected with all the artistic efforts and contributions in Albanian language. The critics of the 1930s decided to put national issues over artistic issues.

⁸ Note: Referred to the debate between Kutelit and Malokit for Lasgushit's work where national were discussed as criteria for the evaluation of works.

⁹ Note: Asdreni claims that a poet or writer is a kind of spiritual leader. Asdreni, Dy fytyra Meshtari dhe vjershetari, "Leka", 1937, June, Nr.6

Literary-theoretical issues

Theoretical issues of literary criticism were dealt by critics in its consolidation circa 1940-1944. In these issues critics discussed the perception that they had about poetry and its impact on the spiritual and social life.

The contribution of the Albanian Romantic movement was treated, in comparison to the role that it played in Europe. "Albanian Romanticism, they claim - realized its mission - patriotic political independence. The lack of national literature was a concern for critics. They saw that national literature was inspired by folklore, so only this way the national could form into its true profile."

Matter of literary criticism

In controversial articles on issues of literary criticism critics discuss the need and necessity of criticism because its presence avoided uncertainty in literature. There are those who did not deny the presence of criticism, but they discussed the way it proceeded¹⁰. While other critics, supposing that criticism was present, noticed that the lack of a reading culture and simultaneously raised the problem of the undisciplined relationship between writers and critics.

Controversy was the most common form of discourse for many critics. The educational awareness of the critic was a delicately discussed issue; because the quality critique of that time was characterized was poor and aggressive and taken personally. This was accompanied by strong feelings of intolerance to criticism and was seen by critics as lacking a culture of criticism".

The critics discovered that the critique must transcend individuality and bias towards issues, but rather aiming at the ideal truth and good will.

Literature development issues

The development of various aspects of literary criticism was the object of observation. Critics investigated certain relations such as: Albanian language, that is, which dialect should prevail "Geg or Tosk", pretending that the use of dialect is connected with literary production, even with the author's local affiliation and value of literature of that time.

A part of critique, connected literary sterility with the poorness and the wrong orthographic use of the language. Others did not accept the idea of literary sterility but tried to justify the development of literature as a result of the small number of populations, historical-political events and the cultural framework. There were also optimistic critics, who did not support the idea of literary sterility given that a lot of books were going to be published.

The critic controversy affected the confusion issue that characterized the development of literary criticism. It was called confusion because of the lack of a real object for criticism at that time. Critics tended to do infinite evaluations of different writers' values because there were no professional critiques (critique ran in irrelevant debates about the author and their values without reaching the fundamental essence of issues that needed to be addressed).

Issue of connections of literature to society

Critics discussed the direction that literature should take. "Should it stay in the direction of the Renaissance literature or would go towards new horizons?"

It was noticed that literature and society must be connected at the time that Albanian literature changed its course, forgetting the Romantic spirit, and focusing on the current problems of that time. "This historic mission will lead a new generation of writers, who got the image of poetry in Albanian choral leader, De Rada, Naimi and Fishta."

Society itself needed to be fed spiritually with realistic literature¹¹. This focus of a real reflection of life in literature was discussed by critics. The intellectuals saw this reflection a duty to have a spiritual union with the civilized countries of Europe, so they discussed the reflection of real life in literature that served the practicalities of life.

¹⁰ Note: "the problem that the author discussed in this article is connected with the idea that the critics did not focus the evaluation of the literary works based on the values that they have but they were analyzed according to the authors birthplace." Ar Kastri, Issue of Critique "Tomorri I vogel" Tirane, 1943, Nr. 2-3, 1 Freur, p.11

¹¹ Note: Even N. Bulka dealt with the problem of the connection of literature with real life in his article Horizonte te reja per letersine kombetare 1932

Matters literary models

Where should the literary model be sought? There was another issue that critics discussed. Their dilemma was related to the model which should be part of the identity and at the same time the importance of literary trends.

Critics debated if new writers should find the literary model in traditional literature. Within this framework, other issues dealt with were "the magnitude complex" and the position held within the historic-literature rank by the writers of that period.

In this respect, the creativity of the writers of tradition was a delicate issue addressed by critique, because it was related "especially with the rehabilitation of the figure of some writers of this time", as Mjeda, Noli, Migjeni etc, which critique was addressing as new topics, formerly closed or narrowed down by power structures or certain groups within different magazines".

Conclusions

New literary forms that were explored in the early twentieth century, which focused attention on the drama of the individual and the surrounding reality, did not suit the admirer and the evaluating attitude in eternity. Therefore, it was naturally accompanied by the birth of literary criticism, whose initiator was Konica.

Due to socio-cultural context it was possible to create awareness about literature, a process that was followed naturally from awareness to criticism. The trend used by Konica with his texts about critique, was conveyed even to other critics (Çabej, Maloki, Pipa, Kuteli, Koliqi etc.)

Consolidation of criticism was accompanied by a series of processes; the most important among them was the awareness for critique, in which knowledge for critique was codified. Further development was accompanied by the creation of critical individualities, who were diversified in the application of methods and in search of critical writing forms.

Research of literary criticism relied, thus, on these methods which identified broad issues, and which was related to the development of different literature genres as well as theoretical codification of literary criticism and aesthetic concepts constitution of literature and art in general.

These complex processes identified the need to cultivate a culture of critique and for critique in cultural districts of that time. Readers also needed such a culture.

Besides national tradition, literary- theoretical opinion of this period was closely developed with European traditions, being open to different aesthetics, literary schools and trends, especially western schools. (B Croce, Bergson, the positivism of H. Ten, Hegel's aesthetics, the psychoanalysis principles of Freud's etc.)

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