

Ornela Vorpsi, an interesting way of making literature

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Abstract

Albanian literature after the 90s has had significant changes. A new element of it, is the literature written by authors who emigrated to different countries of the world. The uniqueness of this literature stands in the fact that these writers choose the language of the host country to write their works. Of course, the motives are diverse. The case of Ornela Vorpsi also belongs to this typology of literature. Born and raised in Tirana, she reflects in the entire work, parts that connect her physically and spiritually to this city. Her books written in Italian have often been awarded important literary prizes, thanks to the characteristics they contain, the fragmented composition, and the style very close to surrealism; and her own formation in modern arts, leads in this direction. The stories are connected to each other with the cadavre exquis technique, based on coincidence and chorality; coincidence as they are the stories that she knows, corrality as all the stories together present Albania in the 90s, a country that seeks to shape itself among many difficulties facing an unknown world. She follows the procedure of "automatic writing" according to which the style immediately corresponds to the flow of thought and image, which is accurately transferred to paper. Her books have been translated into eighteen languages. She has been reported among the 35 best European writers in the anthology Best European Fiction¹

Keywords: Ornela Vorpsi, automatic writing, surrealism, immigration literature, fragmented composition.

Introduction

After the 1990s, Albanian literature has undergone significant changes and new phenomena have been observed.

One of them is the tendency of Albanian authors to confront the world. This is accomplished through the translations of their works into different languages. Obviously the literary world reacts to this phenomenon with due criticism of Albanian authors, who are awarded by the most important international institutions. A specific case is that of the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare. In 1993 he won the Mediterranean Prize for

foreigners with *La Pyramide*, in 1996 he was a life associate member of the Académie des sciences morales et politiques, in 2005 he was awarded the first edition of the International Booker Prize, while in 2009 he won the Prince of Asturias for literature. In the same year he was awarded the Honoris Causa Degree in Social and Institutional Communication Sciences by the University of Palermo, strongly desired by the arbëreshë of Piana degli Albanesi and "Jerusalem" award in 2015. He has been nominated several times for the final selection for the Nobel Prize.

¹ <https://dalkeyarchive.store/products/best-european-fiction-2010>

Another phenomenon is the publication of dissident writing. They enter the homes of the Albanians, authors such as the specific case of Kasëm Trebeshina. Prose writer, playwright and poet, he contested the method of socialist realism right from the start, pointing out the consequences. So from the 1950s he wrote his own works in contradiction to the rules of publications of that period. The philosophical depth of his works and the taboo subjects interact with the talent of the writer who writes according to his nature without considering the consequences. Trebeshina's work, even if it was never published during the regime, was properly appreciated and valued after a few decades. His works began to be published in the early 1990s. Works such as: *Stina e stinëve* are published in Prishtina, 1991; *Mekami, melodi turke*, 1994; *Historia e atyre që s'janë, dramë*, 1995, *Tregtari i skeleteve*, 2006, *Këngë për Kosovën*, 2007, *Shtigjet e shekujve*, 2007 and in Tirana: *Legjenda e asaj që iku* (a republication of *Stina and stinëve*), in 1992; *Koha tani, vendi këtu*, 1992; *Qezari niset për në luftë*, 1993; *Rruga e Golgotës*, 1993; *Lirika dhe satirë* 1994; *Hijet e shekujve*, 1996; *Ëndrra dhe hije drama*; 1996 etc. In Italian it comes with the work *Allori secchi* in 2007, in the translation of N. Tonziello edited by E. Cali from the publisher Aracnem.

Another phenomenon is the abundance of a certain type of literature written very quickly. It seems that our writers want to write all their stories in a short time that doesn't allow for quality writing and even sometimes lacks seriousness and nobility.

The fourth phenomenon is that of writing which deals with the "new", "forbidden" themes before the 1990s and which are now free to deal with; themes such as love, sex, new phenomena of Albanian society such as prostitution, drugs, and all the borderline characters. In my opinion, perhaps they are the scarcest lines of our literature.

Many writers emigrate all over the world. At first they are confronted with the literature of the host country. They try to understand it, to read it, and in the meantime they write their first works which are generally autobiographies. Over time, they integrate into the society where they live, and thus begin to reflect in their works, first the life of the emigrant and then try to describe from two points of view (that of the country of origin and then that of what hosts them) phenomena of a society that seeks more and more to be global.

Then there are the second generation writers in these host countries that will certainly be a very interesting phenomenon in terms of the quality of literature and the topics they will bring through life experience in their books.

Among all the Albanian writers, scattered all over the world, I would like to speak and analyze some of them who write in the Italian language. There are several reasons why they choose this language: perhaps because it is the language of their life partners, of their children, perhaps because in the Italian language they find all the necessary expressiveness that can worthily accompany their stories, or just a personal choice of writing.

The case of Ornella Vorpsi also belongs to this literary typology. She was born and raised in Tirana, she reflects in her entire work, parts of her that bind her physically and spiritually to this city. Her books written in Italian have often been awarded important literary prizes, thanks to the characteristics they contain, the fragmented composition, and the style very close to surrealism; and her own formation in the modern arts leads in this direction. The stories are linked together with the cadavre exquis technique, based on randomness and chorality; coincidence as are the stories she know, coherence as all the stories together represent Albania in the 90s, a country that tries to shape itself amidst a thousand difficulties in the face of an unknown world. It follows the process of "automatic writing"

according to which the style immediately corresponds to the flow of thought and image, which is accurately transferred onto paper. Her books are translated into eighteen languages. She was reported among the 35 best European writers in the anthology Best European Fiction.

Method

The writer begins her story with a panorama of her country in a specific period, that of the communist regime but also describing the peculiarities of a people such as the way of life, the food and the way in which it nourishes the spirit within a surreal situation, full of convicts for political reasons, spies of the regime, above all the male wickedness, which, as Vorpsi mentions, is in the center of the universe of the Albanian man with regard to a beautiful woman. Then the story becomes more personalized and details come out that tell of a large family with uncles and grandparents who take care of, but also protect, a little girl who, in a certain way, supervise her so as not to do something illegal. In an atmosphere that transmits restlessness, the school life of the girl is described who, between an important stain and a beautiful mother, pays surreal consequences, such as the persecution of the teacher Dhoksi from the most senseless questions about her mother, up to the macabre punishment. She is the only daughter of a couple in crisis. The arrest of her father, the meeting with him in the terrible prison of Spac, the subsequent separation of her parents, mark the life of the now twelve-year-old girl.

Grandparents, aunts and uncles are always present in the background, but in her story she describes a world that surrounds her, and through the stories of the characters in the neighborhood, she represents Albania in the 80s between water shortages, death, abortions, the "bad women",

corpses hidden in the garden, and the evolution of Darwin's species. Meanwhile, her father released from prison, tries to see her, but more than her, he wants to establish contact with his ex-wife; an attempt in vain because both do not feel the desire to accept him as part of their lives. Now grown up, she has a dream, to study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana, something very unlikely for the daughter of a political prisoner. The years go by bringing changes. It's the 90s and in the epilogue entitled Terra promessa, we see the girl who is now called Eva, before leaving for Italy. The little girl's journey ends mirroring another face; she is now a woman who chooses to take an important step in her life, emigration. As always, in her steps there is always the figure she loves most in her life, her mother. With notes of pungent sincerity, she describes the feelings of all the emigrants of the world; what, in a land far from yours, you can die, the remedies of Albanian grandmothers don't work there; loneliness takes the form of an ulcer, light-heartedness gives way to anguish; no longer want to know about the promised lands; we understood that people die there. It is here that the story finds a link with the fairy tale from which the title of the novel takes its title. The real country where you never die, is the one where you find yourself galloping on the white horse, from which absolutely for any reason in the world, you must not get off².

Results

Il paese dove non si muore mai

The main structure of the novel is very peculiar. It tells the story of a girl from when she was little, as she grows up, and then we see her grown up, at the age of twenty-two. But it is a fragmentary structure, the whole story is told in an unorganized way, but according to an emotional bond, she weaves completely different stories.

put your feet on the ground for any reason, otherwise you will die!"

² As long as you live here, you won't die, take the white horse that runs as fast as the wind and be careful: don't

For example, while she talks about the lake, she remembers the lack of water, and the difficult awakenings in the early hours of dawn to get it. The connection between the stories is the water. Even if they seem irregular, these stories have a common thread, which is the story of the girl. The writer chooses a name for each period of the main character's life, Ornela, Ina, then Eva, but all three make up one person who is the narrator of this story.

The fourteen chapters have no numbers but titles such as: *La macchia*, *Bel ami*, *Albania sensuale*, *Corona di Cristo*, *Tuorli d'uovo*, *Campa campano e non crepa l'albanese*, ecc. On the other hand, the chapters are short and the story is told in a very synthetic way, without a psychological analysis, insights, puns, etc.

Style

Regarding the style, Ornela Vorpsi extends her story using different elements, such as those of the fairy tale, starting already from the title, it reminds us of the Italian fairy tale *Il paese dove non si muore mai*; then the fairy tale of *Ali Babà*, that of the *Serpent* etc. Sometimes she just uses fairy tale clichés like: it takes seven days and seven nights; to cross seven mountains or seven seas; go through seven sufferings. There are also oneiric elements in the text, such as that: of her father's teeth, the dream; that of his grandfather *Selman's* friend, etc. In her story we also encounter elements of urban legends, such as the case of the story of *Bukuria* and *Ganimete*. Mysticism, part of his narration, is represented in the dialogue with the teacher, while the girl observing the stars argues that the universe cannot be without end, or in the story of the dervish of wonders. The fragmentary composition helps her to collect all the details that the narrator needs to represent her truth, in a simple narrative, to complete the puzzle of her

story. The sincere story of the little girl often gives way to irony, as in the episode of the amphora, specifically in the sentence: the poor fellow did not know that one does not have the right to leave the paradise; It all begins with a simple amoeba and ends up with human beings dreaming of ideal conditions for themselves, the supreme state of being-in-the-world, of being in the world: communism.

Within the personal story of a little girl who tries to explain the world, the narrator in a very natural way introduces an autobiography of Enver Hoxha's Albania, economic and moral poverty, the deprivations that lead to misfortune, the difficult life of the families of political prisoners etc. All of this is done in a direct style. The scenes look like paintings, painted with simple, ambiguous, mystical even surreal words, between fairy tale and reality. In the deciphering of spoken-written Vorpsi, it is based on a radical staging of oral communication as a structural and complex reality and therefore, on the mimesis of the dimension of speech, of its characteristics of fragmentation and involvement, of its reduced degree of textual planning and its particular connection rules (or the luck of the connection). This can be recorded above all in those parts of the novel which constitute the highest points of the recreation of speech³. For example, the simulation of a saying that fails to achieve a complete form or that avoids, filling the reticence with the tones of allusion. Here are some examples:

No...But you were violent; look...Look how your hands are then...; but not at all...I'm not afraid of anything⁴.

The insertion of these pauses, tools of a lively and "natural" representation of the "unnatural" forms of the word, falls entirely under the responsibility of whoever holds the thread of the discourse in

³ Testa E., 1997 *Lo stile semplice*, Einaudi, p. 28.

⁴ Vorpsi, O., *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, p. 100.

his hand, truncated in order to elicit a reply or a understood in who is listening at the moment. From the various interjective forms present in the novel, she deals with the most indicative ones for the fictio of oral speech. The survey, aimed at the sector of primary and secondary interjections, confirms a stylistic tenor and a particularly important recurrence. Here are some examples:

Ah, intended for characters of low social extraction, characterized by a strong contextual dependence, which in our case expresses the emotional charge of pleasure and anger; or in expressing wonder in an ironic way, determining an intonational module susceptible.

For examples: Ah, my beauty; Ah! Ingrid, Ingrid; Ah, you, you are just terrible , Ah with you , Ah yes.⁵

Oh is also present in Vorpsi's speech and writing, above all in humble characters, but it also occurs quite frequently in Ornela's speeches, especially in oneiric scenes. Oh joins strongly interjectivised terms such as yes in order to detect the transport and unconditional adherence to the word of the dialogical partner Oh yes; she frequently leans on an invocation of the divine and Marian figure, thus representing the emotional states of fear, anguish. The most attested is the value of pity, addressed to oneself or to the listener⁶.

Here are some examples: Oh I see...I see; Oh! What a beautiful thigh! Holy God! my God! Oh bacchus!

⁵ Idem, p.. 109.

⁶ Testa E., 1997, *Lo stile semplice*, Einaudi, Torino, p. 40-41.

⁷ Idem, p. 41-42.

⁸ Nencioni G., 1983, *L'interiezione nel dialogo teatrale di Pirandello* 1977, p. 242. In *Tra grammatica e retorica*, Einaudi, Torino p.. 210-53.

Eh, it is perhaps the most complex interjective phenomenon of the novel, one of the most widespread secondary interjections that express an emotional and subjunctive disorientation and the request to repeat information already received but not yet assumed. It can indicate impatience, surprise, reproach: Eh, we know it well; an affectionate and mild envy: Eh my dears , or a dissent⁷. It is combined with semantically determining terms⁸, to set a tone of reticence: Eh, what do you want my dear!⁹ Fulfills the functions of a reminder signal with interrogative intonation at the end of the sentence Who takes care of all this, eh?¹⁰ Eh is also used for enunciative forms in which questioning assumes aggressive, ironic, suspensive or reticent attitudes You're just terrible, eh!¹¹ Did you like it, eh? it occurs both in a double form –You will become a great...,eh...eh They range from surprise to reproach, to calling and shouting, interspersed with a pause: eh, you can not, eh... you have a heartbeat, eh?

Uh, the tone of disappointment, of contempt is perceived¹², Uh è fatta¹³, of offensive wonder and of the verse of ridicule, interpreted.

Bah, another interjection indicating an indignant rejection of the fears expressed by the interlocutor, occurs in the joke of the women who peek into the Ganimete and Bukuria's house.

How, one of the most widespread secondary interjections that expresses an emotional and subjunctive disorientation and the request for

⁹Vorpsi, O., 2005, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, Einaudi, Torino, p.7

¹⁰ Vorpsi, O., 2005, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*. Einaudi, Torino, p. 19

¹¹ Idem, p 31. 59, 9, 86.

¹² Testa, E., 1997, *Lo stile semplice*, Einaudi, p. 44

¹³ Vorpsi, O., 2005, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, Einaudi, Torino, p.87, 48.

repetition of information already received but not yet assumed. It is therefore used above all to give an inkling of a dialogue counterpointed by information gaps Here's how they die.¹⁴ and by invitations to resume within the communication circuit. It has a very regular distribution: it occurs in the speeches of the characters, with different social roles. In this context, the episodes in which the interjective datum signals the attitude of a word that aims to "follow" the previous line, soliciting a new expression are especially significant. As you know¹⁵ as if he didn't believe. The high points of this simulation of the growth of the voice, coinciding with the manifestation of stupor But how! o with its emphatic pretense, they are achieved when how (with a questioning tone how will I do; how you do it or exclamation) it is presented in an iterated form or in combination with another interjection, or when it opens up to an echoed statement, highlighting the dissent reaction with what the interlocutor said But how.

In Vorpsi's writing forms we encounter Albanian phraseological expressions which, translated into Italian, do not lose the meaning of the mother tongue. Here are some examples: *Vivi che ti odio, e muori che ti piango; Mangeremo la vergogna con il pane; I tuoi ti mangiano la carne, ma ti conservano l'osso; magre da buttarle al cane.*

The belonging of the Albanian soul of a writer who writes in Italian is also seen in the use of Albanian words to mark objects that lose their expressiveness if written in Italian. So we have the word *llokum, raki* etc. Even the names of the characters and those of the streets brings back to the Albanian reality like: *Diella, Shaqir, Selman,*

school Avni Rustemi, street Durazzo, to better place her story about and of Tirana. But there is no lack in Vorpsi's narration of Latinisms such as: *amor perpetuus; nervosa gravis;* which generally, or express exactly the name of an illness, or a state of mind.

In conclusion I would like to say that Ornela Vorpsi uses all her Fine Arts baggage to paint in words, a true, touching, sobering story, the story of her life. And she does this through a prose of effective simplicity, with a clear and evident form, founded on a solid and intimately connected framework like an organic body¹⁶.

Analysis of *Bevete cacao van Houten*¹⁷

This novel does not have a protagonist but fourteen; Denata, Petraq, Gazi, Sabrina, Arti, the image girl, Lumturi, Teuta, the girl suffering from a mental illness, the image girl in the ring, the girl with the platinum blonde hair, the homeless, the girl and the tea, the girl and the language of shoes, etc. Thanks to their stories, Vorpsi represents to the reader, characters always in, mental, sentimental crisis, and even madness. Denata tells the story of her grandmother and her obsession with not writing the age in her obituary. Petraq represents the figure of a mad painter, made fun of by the neighborhood kids. Gazi, fill the Vorpsi character puzzle; A cocky, womanizing, self-confident boy; a bad character that pushes him in the 90s into the hands of the criminality. Sabrina, on the other hand, represents fatality with almost oneiric brushstrokes, a walk by the sea, on the rocks that ended in tragedy. Arti, completes the fragmented story, with the image of a boy with mental problems. The 19-year-old is described

¹⁴ Idem, p. 7

¹⁵ Vorpsi, O., 2005, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, Einaudi, Torino, p. 67, 74, 7, 86, 100.

¹⁶ Lettere raccolte e ordinate da Prospero Viani, *Epistolario di Giacomo Leopardi*, Leopardi, Lettera a Jacopsenn 23 giugno 1823, Napoli, 1860, pag. 222.

¹⁷ Vorpsi, O., 2010, *Bevete cacao van Houten*, Einaudi, Torino.

with a sense of dark humor, as is the case with sweets soaked in haloperidol. The trail of crazy characters continues with the story of the girl who wants to become a model, but to survive she works in a nightclub, as an image girl, in love with Edgar, with his perfection, his teeth, his fish-eyes. The story of Lumturi represents the fate of an Albanian lady who admired France, and in order not to go back, she gets lost forever in Vienna Airport. Instead, Teuta's story summarizes the fate of all those Albanian girls who, trusting the words of scammers of all kinds, made the craziest step of their lives. The theme of nervousness is taken up again, in the story of the girl who suffers from insomnia and depressive crises. She tries to fight her illness, but she is defeated and, now dying, she sees herself on the ground and then loaded into an ambulance.

The story of the death of the Italian boxer is told by the image girl in the ring who at the end of the match sees a young man die, a fact that he cannot tell anyone, even the earth.

Another element of madness is told in the story of the girl who experiments with her hair, and at her worst moment, with the strange platinum-blond hair, she meets the man of her life. The same theme also deals with the story of the madly happy girl, who wants to help the whole world and only the words of her homeless bring her to reality.

The fairy tale elements, occupies again an important place in the narration with the story of the philosopher's stone, having it was equivalent to having God on his hands. The young man passing from one country to another rubbing the stones on his copper chain, in a moment he realizes that it was turned into gold. So also the

search for eternal beauty is, according to the girl, in taking care of oneself rather than in miraculous solutions.

The novel ends with the epilogue of the strange girl who knows the language of shoes. They make our narrator's troubled soul tremble when she sees the shoes of her subway neighbor who cannot be classified in any category.

The structure

The book is structured in thirteen chapters, plus the epilogue. The different events move from Albania to France between life and death, between the real that mixes with the oneiric scenes. The chapters are short. The narrator is concentrated in the flow of events and does not stop to comment on them. In this book, the psychological matter is not subjected to the principles of the precise rules of rhetoric, it does not have a "rational" procedure, which strives to adapt the style to the content, it does not have the aesthetic effect as its purpose, but is at the service of the deepest and sharpest truth.

The style

Ornela Vorbsi tells her story in this book from a point of view very close to surrealism. The stories are linked together with the technique *cadavre exquis*¹⁸, based on randomness and chorality; randomness because the stories are the ones she knows; chorality because all together they tell and represent Albania in the 90s, a country that tries to show off amidst the thousand difficulties of opening up to an unknown world. She follow an "automatic writing" procedure.¹⁹ in which the style immediately corresponds to the uninterrupted flow of thought and images, immediately transferred to the page. The

¹⁸ http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cadaveri_eccellenti.

¹⁹ Margoni, I., (a cura di), 1976, *Per conoscere Breton e Il Surrealismo*, trad. It. Di L. Magrini, Mondadori, Milano See also Breton A., *Manifesti del surrealismo*,

trad. it., Einaudi, Torino 1966; Fortini, F., 1971 *Il movimento surrealista*, Garzanti, Milano 1963e Binni, L., *Breton*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze.

condition is that of complete abandonment, like the person who is between wakefulness and sleep, and corresponds to the emergence of the memories of who is on the psychoanalyst's couch. The relaxation of consciousness produces a disorder foreign to any calculated procedure. Vorpsi proposes to translate, in its spontaneity, the chaotic and absurd language of the unconscious. But the absurdity is only apparent, the procedure allows to reach a deeper reality, thus also assuming a cognitive and practical meaning, capable of contributing to the "resolution of main problems of life".

Each story, like that of Teuta, of Gazi (who live emigration between deception, adventure and even death), like that of Petraq's madness and that of Arti, is a subject in itself, and finds almost no connection with the other stories. The thread that binds in a unicum this book is, the only witness of all these facts, the narrator.

The main themes are: love, dream, madness and the liberation of the individual from social conventions.

The concept of love, understood as the fulcrum of life, is reflected in the story of all the characters that in a certain way are looking for it.

The theme of dreams and madness is very recurrent in Vorpsi's book. Madness is represented in the model's love for Edgar, who bites his teeth, wants to eat his flesh, his marrow; the madness that leads her to fall from the fifth floor of her building; in panic attacks, for a pair of shoes seen on the subway; in the decision to dye her hair strange colors. All this is described in an oneiric atmosphere between reality and dream.

The liberation from social conventions is a theme present in Vorpsi's writing. All the characters are

autonomous and act according to their way of conceiving the world. Petraq, the painter calls people with the names he prefers; Arti imposes his particular tastes on others. The narrator, even if she comes from a closed country, works as an image girl, a Cubist to survive, and studies during the day. Every action of the characters has nothing to do with conformity.

In conclusion, these fragmented stories of people with completely different problems create, thanks to a simple and carefree style, a general picture of an Albania that is opening up to the world. Its various truths and absurdities mark the communist projection of Albania in the eyes of the world; A "splendid country where all are equal, where peace and harmony reign". All the characters come from this country, but strangely they are all suffering like a condemned man. This is where Mayakovsky's verse is placed: Drink cocoa Van Houten!²⁰ which becomes the title of this book.

Discussion

Albanian literature written in Italian is not a new phenomenon for both Albanian and Italian literature. These literatures have always exchanged literary experiences with each other. In this regard it may be useful to think of the literature of the Arberesh, Albanians present in Italy since the fifteenth century. It has been a point of reference in the development of Albanian literature.

After the 90s with the opening of Albania towards the world, new phenomena occur in all areas, including also in the field of literature. The writers who emigrate begin to write their works in Italian. This choice is very interesting to be analysed. They write in Italian, surely for not to be excluded. Writers are people who wish to integrate their past with a choice of life in another

²⁰ Majakovskij, V., *La nuvola in calzoni*, traduzione di Remo Faccani, Marsilio, Venezia 1989.

country. Often their first works are autobiographies. The works of Dones, Ibrahim, Kasoraho, Vorpsi tell life under dictatorship, but each of them from a different angle. If Kasoraho tells the life of a political prisoner, Ibrahim the life of a family with a "candid biography" under the Hoxha regime, Dones conveys its nuances and the life of a career woman, a TV presenter, while Vorpsi, in his story describes the dictatorship through the innocent eyes of a little girl.

In this paper I have tried to analyze the books of the writer Ornela Vorpsi, Albanian but that writes in Italian even if she lives in France. A writer who writes in a style different from all albanian writers inside and outside of Albania. Her unmistakable style with the fragmented composition, brings new characters. They are non-conformists, they do not live by the "rules" of society; and this they do either by choice or because of their madness. For this very reason, they live between waking

and dreaming. in this way, through the fragmented stories Vorpsi brings the surreal into the pages of her novels. Themes such as: madness, insecurity, borderline life are the leitmotif of his strange but very interesting stories.

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