



## Shadows of the Night: The drama of two brothers, at the beginning of the dictatorship in Albania

Eriola Agalliu

New York High School, Linze, Dajt, Tirana, Albania

### Abstract

Vedat Kokona's drama "Hijet e natës" (The Shadows of Night), (1949) is written 5 years after the dictatorship was established in Albania and is published for the first time nine years later in the literary magazine "Nëntori" (November). The communist regime in this period has completely installed the standard of social realism in the art and consequently the scheme is known: the national - liberation war was made by the communists, with their victory all the class enemies who did not help in this war should be punished.

The text of Kokona shows us the drama of the two brothers: one gendarmerie captain, a determined opponent of the communists, and the other a high school professor, dreamer, and disappointed with the reality within which he lives. In a distant relationship with each other, the two brothers remain so uninvolved in the struggle for freedom of partisans and communists in the country. To counteract but also to coordinate, in this way, these characters help and destroy the experiences and the dramatic action of each other. We will try, in our analysis, to see how the characters of the two brothers are shaped in a psychological way, and how, the absence of a main character, precisely by distributing the emotional burden, gives the text more dramaticity in each of them. Given the fact that the two brothers have differing views on life and the world in general, in the face of the communist regime, they show the duplication of a human being who, faced with dictatorship, bows under the weight of the long night that came down to Albania, for almost half a century.

**Keywords:** socialist realism, psychological drama, human being

### Introduction

#### Socialist Realism in Albania and Unrecognized Writers

*Literature of socialist realism is very useful but, unfortunately, it is only useful to the Party* <sup>[1]</sup>. This is claimed by Ceslaw Milozc in his work *The Captive Mind* and now, after about 30 years from the fall of communism, we can affirm, without fear, that time was fully upheld. The establishment of socialist realism, as the official method in art, quickly became the most powerful propaganda tool of the party-state, the Soviet Union, and then in all the satellite countries of the East. The Middle Ages, this time, uncovered by, not Christianity, but, Stalinist ideology. A. Izetbegović makes such an analogy on this subject: *Zhdanovism and Inquisition are parallel phenomena, 'one at a time'. Zhdanovism is an inquisition against artists and thinkers in the name of state atheism, whereas the Inquisition is Zhdanovism against scientists in the name of the Church as an organized religion. Zhdanovism is the opposite inquisition* <sup>[2]</sup>. This seemingly simple analogy denounces the terror that prevailed in the Soviet Union, despite massive preaching of popular power. The Ghanaian spirit was accompanied by pressures, repressive measures, arrests and fights for those who did not show willing to embrace, from the beginning, the New Faith. Suicide of Yesenin, Mayakovsky, the sad eyes of Gorky in the last years of life, the imprisonment of Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva; all these talk about the modern Bolshevik inquisition and his first martyrs. *The socialist realism* <sup>[3]</sup>, imposed in all the countries of the East, brought to Albania its methodological, aesthetic and

ideological pressure. The 1950s speak of a literature already engaged in the formation of revolutionary man. Collective repression would begin in Albania in January 1945 and, gradually repeating itself from time to time, with the hostile groups being beaten and punished, whenever power needed strong reprimands over the people, especially on Albanian intellectuals. Understandably, internments, prisons, rifts became an integral part of this process, which lasted until the fall of the dictatorship in the 1990s. At best, the ban on publishing works and the relocation from the public life of intellectuals became part of this situation which was devastating for the country.

Famous figures of the literary and public life of the 1930s such as Vedat Kokona, Mitrush Kuteli, Lasgush Poradeci, Ali Asllani, Gjon Shllaku, Eqrem Çabej, etc., belong to the large group of those authors who, in relation to standardized literature would take their place in *silent genres* <sup>[4]</sup>. To these silent dissenters, not spiritually associated with the communist movement, the regime recognized the merits in fields that were far from public attention, leaving them in the shadows with different translations from foreign languages to Albanian and vice versa. In our judgment, V. Kokona is among those intellectuals who, despite the fact that he was a well-known university professor and translator, always had flickering reports with the regime. In 1949, he created a realistic psychological drama titled *Shadows of the Night* written on the occasion of the 5th anniversary of the Liberation of the Homeland.

**"Shadows of the Night" - a sad metaphor**

The drama is divided into two acts and the scenes take place at the home of a wealthy merchant who hates the communist movement. There are the last days of the war in Tirana which is divided between two camps: Partisan forces have taken its eastern side and the Germans guard the western part of the city. In the home of the merchant Tefik Rizai (located in the area occupied by the Nazis), is missing his wife, Zehraja, who has gone to the other side of the city to meet her daughter and her family. At home, the trader has two sons, Selimi who has been the gendarmerie captain and aims for military career as well as the second son Haliti, a professor at the gymnasium, an idealistic nature that spends time between books and that seems to have a feeling of reluctance in the face of the war. Even after the mother returns home, the war anxiety continues to be stronger with the news that she brings from the other side of the city about the victory of the Partisans. The war feels real, and it feels like it is becoming closer when from the window is seen murdered partisan girl from the German invaders who left her body on the side of the street. The poor girl's body now splits the family into two camps: her mother and little brother, Halit, are sorry for the young girl. Father, Tefik, and the older brother, Selim, are merciless in the hatred they show against her. The two of them spend the time playing poker with their two neighbors, constantly worrying about the fate of trade and hoping the communists will not be the victors of this war that has already reached their backyard. At the end of the second act, the situation is completely changed. Three partisans enter the merchant's house and seek to arrest Captain Selim Rizai as a former collaborator with the invaders. The latter, Selim, though trying to hide in the basement of the house, is arrested by the Partisans. Thus the drama closes with absolute silence and the darkness that falls on all the remaining people. The fate of the murdered partisan girl stands like a black shadow of misfortune in the lives of the characters. It is a reflection of what they feel in their hearts. The shock before her death warns the characters' fear of their own death. Even the end of the drama, with the arrest of Selim by the partisans, does not seem to bring to the reader the resolution of the conflict. According to this point of view, the real drama has just begun.

V. Kokona's attempt to write a drama must be seen within the tendency of the era as a need to adapt to the ideological demands of the system. Kokona tends to donate a drama that stands, even in terms of the subject, in between the two epochs. Let's not forget that the war finished only five years ago, and such a scenario was a real life picture of a reality whose witnesses were still there in Tirana, Albania during the first years of the communist dictatorship. The ideological model inspires the idea that partisans are always victorious, and those that were associated with the enemy or former King Zog's power should be punished, both in real life and in works of art. In this sense the two brothers of Rizai family, by never being idol of Bolshevik ideas, become the first victims in this reality.

According to the standard of socio-realism, the *The Shadows of the Night*, in title, carry the denigrating meaning of the characters it describes. They are destined to lose and the own weave, from the first floor of the house to the basement, shows the lack of light, under the conditions where they

already are. It is Halit the one who gives the explanation of the title, according to this context, in the work: *The evening and the shadows of the night are covering the land where the partisan girl died. We are like these shades, but soon the day will come, and the shadows of the night will disappear and leave the sun that gives life* <sup>[5]</sup>. We understand this autocratic critique of Halit, about himself and his family, who did nothing for the national liberation war, for the dictatorship of the proletariat that would be put in place by the end of World War II. And yet, we also recognize the fatality doses that accompany this character, in his weaving, during shocking situations. Being a man more of thought than of acting, he appears stunned before any situation that requires reaction. This nihilistic attitude comes from his childhood. Rebelled, first to his father and then to his older brother, Halit appears in this approach, with repeated nihilism doses, in continuity, to war and concrete ideologies. The idea of communism itself appears vaguely and forcefully to convince us, in itself, of its moral superiority, in the face of the populist demagogy that this ideology trumpets.

On the other hand, the title confirms us, once again, the dark side of this terrible reality in the early days of the red power. The Shadows of the Night are the creatures that, over the years, will be interned, raided, violated and humiliated in prisons and forced labor camps in our country, according to the model of Soviet gulags, but also with the blind readiness of Albanian propagandists. They are the representatives of the social elite who, with the great revolutionary overthrow, will be transformed into its invisible part and, over the years, will experience communist hell. The arrest of the older son, the confiscation of shops and property, the expulsion from home, all these repressive measures can be only imagined. The author does not know how to endorse the implied end, while the reader himself, sees some unhappy human beings very near destruction. The shadows of the night depict the calvary that has just started.

**Two brothers, with a common drama, facing the coming terror**

Selim, the older brother, is a complete character depicted with the hatred and strength that sometimes tends to reach the limits of savagery in relation to his opponents. He is happy in his marriage and seeks to preserve at all costs his position in society that will ensure that happiness. In relation to their brother, the links between them have been those of two enemies who apart from genetic connections, do not have any kind of chemistry for healthy communication. Selim is the male heir to the family, the firstborn who, in other circumstances, would inherit the father's strength and the material benefits that come from him. In the conditions where he is now, he can have absolutely nothing, so in being between the two possibilities he is willing to provide everything to preserve his territory. Selim's hate is at the same time his strength. He appears persuasive and has a born eloquence of a soldier when analyzing the war and its victory by the Russians. His logic is cold in the causes and consequences he takes into consideration, and if we think about the time the work is written, Selim becomes the voice of many historians who would do their analysis of the end of World War II.

According to him, the victory of the Soviet Union is attributed more to the Russian winter than to the Soviet courage against the German army. Selim is a reliable character in the hatred that he feels. He understands and reacts naturally, depending on the situation. Selim is a phlegmatic kind of person that, with the same pathos that loves his wife, hates the Partisans, fights by his brother, and also wins in the poker game. The timeline recorded in the drama is November 12, 1944 and he, with his wife, recall with pain that 4 - years ago they went for their honeymoon in Venice. As it is seen, Tirana will be free in a few days <sup>[6]</sup>. And yet, in this drama, we do not find the enthusiasm of what will be recorded as a historical event. In the last scene it is depicted the arrival of the partisans, and it is Tushja (the housekeeper) that shows where Selimi is hiding and where his automatik is. This finding is understandable in the spirit of the era. Being representative of the common people, Tushja is the one that helps the new government. She remains the only one who gets out of this unimpeded situation but does not possess the awareness of the social progress that is expected to happen. For the women of the Rizai family (Selim's mother and wife), the situation is tense and follows the anxiety that she has accompanied throughout the drama. This is noticed in short sentences and in their tones. The only one who seems to keep cool in this situation is Selimi. He knows that, with the arrival of the Partisans, he has to face them, his weapon and his position during the war. Aware of his hate, Selim, behind the rage he has shown throughout the drama, now carries the stoicism of the military in office. Others are stuck with panic and create the tragic chariot of antiquity, brought to our era. The murdered partisan body was just a warning sign of the tragedy that was expected to come. The foretold of evil is now predestined by the new gods who are coming to power.

Halit is the youngest son of the family who lives physically in his little world and intellectually between books and philosophers. Thus, between two realities, he realizes his own character, not understood by others and, consequently, feels like a strangers in relation to them. If all the other characters, in drama, love, hate, fear, and act motivated by social as well as psychological pressure, Halit is the one who remains silent in most of the work. His rebellion appears implicit, with books that others can not endure at home, lack of poker, indifference in decision-making. Halit has idealism and culture but is not able to determine his course of action. These contradictory feelings make him feel exaggerated in his environment. Haliti does not speak but preaches on the expected justice. The spirit of pessimism and melancholia prevails, as a domestic trend, in the character of Halit Rizai. As foreign to the environment where he lives, he suffers from being misunderstood. In confrontation with his brother he begins a long monologue <sup>[7]</sup> talking about lost dreams, about love for nature and for humanity as a comprehensive concept. And according to Halit, there is nothing worse than when man, this perfect creature of nature (coming to the world to fulfill his mission) disappears without realizing desires and dreams. This loss he felt when, years ago, he aspired to be initially poet and novelist, but he only managed to become a simple high school teacher.

In Halit's words, where lyrical tone prevails, Kokona creates a confrontation between the worldview of the two brothers. This

lyrical spirit is derived from the emphatic tone spoken by the professor. We see in his words the effort to legitimize his pain. Guided by the ideals as much as his nihilism over the years, as a result of the conditions offered by the Albanian reality, the little boy of the house, unfolds all its frustration. He realizes that the transition from poet to novelist, to teacher, is the regression of his dreams, from the early youth. There is no point in thinking in this case of Schopenhauer's view that art is the one who frees us from the chains of illusions <sup>[8]</sup>. As can be seen, within the dramatic social conflict, Halit suffers an even stronger individual conflict: eternal separation from his illusions. Based on these experiences, Halit feels today more lost than ever because the frustration within him has started years ago, since he realized that he could not be an artist who through aesthetic feelings could neutralize human vices (according to the thought of the Schopenhauer) <sup>[9]</sup>. The literary professor has already revealed what he has concealed for years. The expected arrival of partisans only reinforces this fatality, personalizing the pain Halit feels.

And yet let's not forget that the figure of the little boy of the Rizai family is a product of literature under the communist regime. In this sense, in the freezing of Halit, on the one hand, we do not clearly define his character during the years since his early childhood. From the sidethe other is the feeling of self-righteousness <sup>[10]</sup> that the author finds with the purpose of the ideological spirit of the work. Halit has moments of mental clarity when he speaks and moments of unexplainable fear when he expects what will happen. By the end of the work, he remains a spectator of the family drama he sees. Meanwhile, deep within it, plays the drama of the intellectual who has seen crashing, all the dreams he trusted for years. This figure, in its essence, protects the eternal idealism, the dream of mankind for a better world, without wars and without violence. As such, with his natural pessimism but on the other hand with his soul so great, Haliti is the mature figure of an intellectual who, in the face of evil, chooses the lack of reaction by force. In his report to reality, his image is losing the contours of a concrete being because it carries those traits of the human soul that remain eternal in various generations and which are the genetic components of mankind.

Can we say that Halit gets more victorious than his brother at the end of the drama? We believe that in this drama there is no winner. Socio- realism would have identified Halit as the most likely hero of the work because, according to this model, he approaches, mostly, a positive hero. Yet, we understand that this drama carries a whole set of heroes that, with the same intensity, suffer the same tragedy. In his current situation, with the imprisonment of his brother and the arrival of the ruling Communists, Halit fails to change anything, within this vicious circle, where his existence now exists. The only thing he can hold is the moral values he has gained over the years in the personality and the figure of the professor.

### Conclusions

The dramatic conflict in *"Shadows of the Night"* focuses on a family whose members are far from the scheme of heroes of a popular character of socialism. The end of the drama quickly comes out of the weight necessary to emphasize the strength of the partisans and the virtues they carry. The drama has an acceptable solution for the time, if Captain Selim's capture by

partisans can be called such. But, on the other hand, it does not cause, to the spectator, the joy and the optimism of the long-awaited partisan war victory. The drama in two acts, leaving the characters in their anguish and hatred, does not give rise to trust in the bright day of Albania, communism. The end of the work marks the beginning of their true drama. There is, pain, and sorrow over this happiness. These characters are lamenting their fate, whose striking force proves first, Selim, precisely because he stands in positions of antagonist with communist power. These characters, in the last scene, melt together, exactly, to give the full abyss where they are falling. The shadow of the approaching night, stretched, mighty, over them.

## References

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2. Izetbegović A. Islami ndërmjet Lindjes dhe Perëndimit, (Islam Between East and West) Logos – A, Shkup, 2009, 103.
3. Përpjekjet për ta zgjeruar ‘bazën teorike’ të socrealizmit me idetë e ‘tabanit popullor’ (në fund të viteve ’30), të ‘socializmit humanist’ (në fund të viteve ’50) ose me parimet e estetikës së ‘sistemit të hapur’ (në vitet ’70), nuk e ndryshuan statusin zyrtar dhe natyrën ideologjike të nocionit. Në fund të viteve ’80 socrealizmi shndërrohet në term historiko – letrar.” Tufa A., “Letërsia dhe procesi letrar në shekullin XX” SHBLU, Tiranë, 2008, 85.  
Efforts to expand the 'theoretical basis' of social realism with ideas of 'popular traditions' (in the late 30s), of 'human socialism' (in the late 50s) or with the principles of 'open system' aesthetics (in the 70s), did not change the official status and the ideological nature of the notion. In the late 1980s the socialist realism became a historical - literary term. Tufa A., Literature and literary process in the twentieth century SHBLU, Tiranë, 2008, 85.
4. Zhanret e heshtjes, vjelë nga ligjërimi ironik e vetëmbrojtës i Isak Babelit në kongresin e shkrimtarëve sovjetë të vitit 1934, mund ta shohim si emëruesin e përbashkët të mbijetesës letrare edhe për shumë emra të rëndësishëm të letërsisë sonë, të cilët, për arsye letrare (mosbindje estetike) dhe jashtëletrare, u ndjenë të përjashtuar (apo, si pasojë, edhe u vetëpërjashtuan me ndërgegje) nga e drejta e botimit të krijimeve gjatë të ashtuquajturit realizëm socialist. Osja V., Realizmi socialist dhe ‘zhanret e heshtjes, botuar në Studime albanologjike ‘Letërsia shqiptare dhe realizmi socialist’, UT, Tiranë. 2010; 2:239.  
The genres of silence, picked up by the ironic self-defense of Isak Babel at the congress of the Soviet writers of 1934, we can see as the common denominator of literary survival also for many important names of our literature which, for literary reasons (disobedience aesthetic) and extraterrestrial, felt excluded (or, consequently, even consciously expelled) from the right to publish the creations during the so-called socialist realism. Osja V., Socialist realism and 'genres of silence', published in Studime albanologjike- Albanian literature and social realism, UT, Tiranë. 2010; 2:239.
5. Kokona V. Hijet e natës, (Shadows of the night) Shtëpia Botuese Kokona, Tiranë, 2011, 95.
6. It is about the liberation of Tirana, the capital of Albania, by the Nazi - fascist invaders on 17 November 1944. Only two weeks later, Albania is completely liberated from the invaders, and the end of World War II (29 November 1944) marks the establishment of the communist regime in the country. (our note: E. A.)
7. Kokona V. Hijet e Natës, (Shadows of the night) Shtëpia Botuese Kokona, Tiranë, 2011, 31-33.
8. Uçi A. Universi estetik, (Aesthetic Universe) Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Tiranë, 2007, 279.
9. Uçi A. The same, 281.
10. In some passages it is noticed that Haliti blames himself for his indifferent attitude towards the war and this guilty feeling we believe is due to the censorship and the inspiration of the revolutionary spirit of the time. (our note: E. A.).