

THE LYRIC POETRY OF ZEF SKIRÒ DI MAXHO

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ABSTRACT

Despite the large number of books published while in Italy, Zef Skirò Di Maxho is not a well-known writer in Albania, where his published books are a few. Originally he was presented in Albania with separate poetries from his editions of poetry published in various newspapers of 80s, mainly on “Drita” newspaper. The first edition of poetries published in Albania is “Pertej maleve prapa Kodres” (“Beyond the mountains behind the hill”) (1985) with poetries selected by Nasho Jorgaqi, who, on several articles, has also contributed to the criticism versus the writer’s poetry. The creativity of Zef Skirò Di Maxho, as an essential part of the Arbëresh poetry system, is an important contribution to the enrichment of the Arbëresh culture. His bilingual poetry, in Albanian and Italian, due to the way of perceiving the world and its phenomena, the contemplation and the concerns, due to the explication and the established expressive artistic and semantic system, is a poetry that distinguishes Zef Skirò Di Maxho amongst contemporary authors, and in the same time it is a coherent and related to the tradition poetry. Taking into consideration the reasons mentioned in a comprehensive and general way, the selection of this topic was done in the context of further enrichment of the studies dedicated to the creativity of the writer. Remarkably, the values of bilingualism in the writer’s creativity consist primarily on his lyrical poetry, because the translation or adequately identical reproduction of lyric poetry is impossible. There should be emphasized that the bilingual lyric poetries of the Arbëresh poet are almost identical and have their indisputable values in both relevant languages, Albanian and Italian.

Keywords: structure, vocabulary, syntax, history and heroes in the lyric poetry of Zef Skirò Di Maxho

INTRODUCTION

General features of the lyric poetry of Zef Skirò Di Maxho

Lyric poetry editions of Zef Skirò Di Maxho perform successfully their function, where not only coexist, but are also merged “the tones” of enjoyment and advantage. His lyric poetries make the reader feel and understand what he sees, and imagines what he already know in theory or in practice. The lyric poetry of the Arbëresh poet has got the attribute to elaborate such an organized system of real life material and through this material derives the meaning of the poetic works.

Distinctively in the works of this poet the bilingualism values extend primarily in his lyric poetry due to the fact that the translation or adequately identical reproduction of the lyric poetry is impossible. There should be emphasized that the bilingual lyric poetries of the Arbëresh poet are almost identical and have got indisputable values in both relevant languages Albanian and Italian. The degree of language intellectualism in his lyric poetry is quite diverse: philosophic, mystic, social, problematic, etc.

Structural Aspects

In the short lyric poetries of Zef Skirò Di Maxho, the verse, the rhyme, the stanza, the rhythm, and the metric scheme break all the rules of the classical model poetry. The poetries are generally short, free verse, and the rhyme serves to the expressive requirements of the poet.

Lexical and Syntactic Aspects

In relation to the construction of the lyric poetry of Zef Skirò Di Maxho, it belongs to the modern poetry. The discourse of bilingual poetries serves the polemic that the poet raises occasionally, addressed to a cultivated reader but perceivable by all readers. The difference between the ordinary meaning and the poetic meaning of a word is emphasized semantically. This occurs even due to the rhetorical figures by which the words get a meaning that goes beyond the ordinary one. In his poetries rhetorical figures are densely found, in such manner making the word exceed its ordinary meaning. The stylistic figures encountered frequently are the metaphors, the comparisons, the metonymy, the symbol, etc. The poetries are synthetic and have not a descriptive, embellishing, or oratorical style, yet they are not based on folk elements. The syntax of lyric poetry of Zef Skirò Di Maxho is not complex. Its modern poetry has a special relation with the sentence which leaves the sentence conceived as a structure consisting of a subject, a direct object, a verb, whereas the verbal forms are rare, as a result it appears in the fragmentary form. There are poetries where the verses follow each other in the form of nominative sentences which are generally long. The fragmentation occurs not only in the context of the sentence but also on the syntax. There are broken many punctuation rules and word placement in the sentences. The punctuation is missing where it is necessary, or is rarely used. One of the features of the modern poetry is to focus on the style which becomes of great importance, and the poetry content becomes less important, while in the poetry of Di Maxho although it is paid great attention to the style and his versification technique is modern, the content is not neglected at all. However, there are a few cases where the poet pays more attention to the versification style leaving the content secondly, which is not direct, but more hidden. We may mention the poetry collection “Sunata” (“Sonata”) where the poet omits the clarity content. Generally, the poetic technique of Di Maxho is equally important and stands on the same degree with the content. The lyric poetry with realistic content of Zef Skirò Di Maxho is a social poetry interested on the behavior of Arbëresh people in the society. The themes are drawn from the reality and the poet makes a detailed overview of the reality of the ethnic Arbëresh identity and of the causes that threaten it. The description in this case is objective and logical. The purpose and the social commitment are subject of the target to produce a useful art for the community where he belongs. The poetry discourse differs in such way abandoning the expressiveness and the subjectivity of romantic poetry.

The lyric poetry of Zef Skirò Di Maxho, from the construction point of view is a modern poetry, whereas from the content point of view is realistic and romantic. In 1990, professor Italo Konstante Fortino gives several estimations on the poetry of Zef Skirò Di Maxho on an article published in the newspaper “Drita” entitled “Katundi si metaforë” (“The village as a metaphor”). In this article the writer considered reflected “*the Arberesh community in two precise stages: first, when the community lives everyday moments harmoniously, simple, but meaningful, namely the social and cultural values retain their place and role within the microcosm; secondly, when the community lives a stage of concern, precisely at the moment of social and cultural relations changes that occur as a result of changes in the dominant culture, in this case, Italian. Two very interesting moments: harmony time, poetically the art*”

time facing the imbalance time, the uncertainty that causes anxiety to the poet and disorient the community.”ⁱ

The first stage professor Italo Konstante Fortino refers to, belongs to the past and reaches nowadays to the older generation (Mas Rushi), while the second stage belongs to the present, to the young generation which is even more endangered to lose the Arbëresh identity under the influence of the modern Italian society. The first stage is characterized by realistic tones and the second stage by romantic tones. It is characteristic of the entirety of the lyric poetry of Zef Skirò Di Maxho overpassing from one poetic situation to another. We find these overpassings even within the same edition, yet, even within a single poetry like in the following verses, by establishing in such way the permanent contrast of his poetry:

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|---|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Ne kemi një e shkuar</i> | <i>We have a past</i> |
| <i>sa më e shkuar nuk mund:</i> | <i>that can't be more:</i> |
| <i>kemi heronj që ndritin</i> | <i>we have shiny heroes</i> |
| <i>gra me lartësi të paharruar</i> | <i>memorable noble women</i> |
| <i>burra me qëndrim legjendar</i> | <i>legendary attitude men</i> |
| <i>lavdi të gjata në shekuj...</i> | <i>in centuries lasting glory...</i> |
| <i>E sot</i> | <i>And today</i> |
| <i>Këtu</i> | <i>Here</i> |
| <i>Kështu</i> | <i>Thus</i> |
| <i>Jemi</i> | <i>We are</i> |
| <i>e tashmja arbëreshe</i> | <i>the present Arbëresh</i> |
| <i>tepër herët</i> | <i>too soon</i> |
| <i>për të kuptuar</i> | <i>to realize</i> |
| <i>se ç' të kaluar është...</i> ⁱⁱ | <i>what is the past...</i> |

While the future, since there are two emotional states, realistic and romantic, once appears uncertain, realistic situation (*The future looks tunnel / still no light / where we hope / not entering / with a small torch*)ⁱⁱⁱ, once certain and with logic consequence of the romantic state (*we will use / roots to work / gifts made of roots*)^{iv}.

Romantic Lyric Poetry

In some poetries of Zef Skirò Di Maxho, belonging to the first stage - we described above - the content is romantic. This romanticism is related to the ethnic identity and is conditioned from the purpose of the poet to magnify the Arbëresh past in order to show to the members of his community that they have an history, and on its behalf should preserve the future. Zef Skirò Di Maxho brings a rich and inexhaustible romantic creativity even though the time that separates him from his romantic predecessors is significant. The power of its poetry is felt

ⁱ Italo Costante Fortino, “Katundi si metaforë” - Gazeta “Drita” 28 January 1990

ⁱⁱ Giuseppe Schirò Di Maggio, “Vjeç të tua 500”, Edizioni Mondo Albanese 1988, p. 10

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 10

^{iv} Ibid., p. 44

when it enters the heart of art and reveals the lyricism that derives from the romantic symbols of his poetry the village and its history and heroes.

The Village

In the poetry of Zef Skirò Di Maxho a powerful romantic symbol, representative of the ethnic Arbëresh identity, is the village, which is the last homeland preserving the Albanian identity of the Arbëresh. The romantic village of Zef Skirò Di Maxho is the poet's escape from the reality, in a different era and village from the current ones. The poet emphasizes the love feeling towards the Albanian identity of the Arbëresh to challenge the modern lifestyle that has converted the human being into a rational being. In his romantic poetry the village is an ideal world, with other spiritual characteristics. The poet describes people with special love, and the lifestyle yet unspoiled by the modern civilization. The romantic village of Di Maxho is a colorful world full of virtues, spiritual purity, and noble thoughts. A book entirely dedicated to the village is the poetry collection "Metaforë" ("Metaphor"). The village spiritualizes in this summary. It has got feelings like a human being, that is definitely a romantic feature. Zef Skirò Di Maxho "exaggerates" it with the poetries dedicated to the Arbëresh villages in the poetry book "Metaforë". At these villages he looks beautiful buildings "of stone man" as "power of the past over the future", buildings that have resisted the past, will resist even to the future, unfortunately he looks even bungalows "of stone woman" abandoned by the owners, because of poverty, which of course will be more vulnerable to assimilation. "The stone man" symbolizes the resistance in its territories, probably this is correlated to the Albanian habit of marriages according to which it is the woman who leaves her home to live in her husband's house being converted to his religion, and respecting the traditions and customs of the new house. Similarly the faraway Arbëresh marries the language and the culture of the new country in which he lives. But there are not only "females" who leave the village, there are "men" who stay. Despite the abandonment from the female residents, the Arbëresh villages exist, being the basis of the Arbëresh identity.

| | |
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| <i>Megjithatë, nga mjegulla</i> | <i>However, from the fog</i> |
| <i>që të mbështjell në vjeshat</i> | <i>that covers you in autumn</i> |
| <i>dëgjova një mbrëmje të iknin për rrugë</i> | <i>I heard an evening to start leaving</i> |
| <i>fjalë arbëreshe si zjarre llumineresh</i> | <i>Arbëresh words like furious fires</i> |
| <i>të sinjalizojnë identitetin tënd</i> | <i>signaling the identity</i> |
| <i>që ende nuk ke humbur.^v</i> | <i>you haven't lost yet.</i> |

It is undoubtedly romantic the idea of the poet who believes that a village is the appropriate place to spread the inextinguishable Arbëresh identity and where may born a new Arbëresh world without weaknesses, a new Arbëresh world having the Albanian identity solid along with that Sicilian and Italian Arbëresh. In the poetries dedicated to the village the poet does not avoid the emotive stand. The sensitivity, the dream, and the visions about the future become of special importance:

| | |
|---|--|
| <i>Ndoshta është ky vendi</i> | <i>Perhaps this is the place</i> |
| <i>ku mund të shuhen pasionet</i> | <i>where passions are quenched</i> |
| <i>ku mund të mbyllen sytë si një perde</i> | <i>where the eyes can be closed like a</i> |
| <i>curtain</i> | |

^v Giuseppe Schirò Di Maggio, "Metaforë", Mondo Albanese, p. 36

mbi kronikën e përditshme e dhelpërinë on the daily chronicle and slyness
e mund të hapen me përpjekje për t'u lindur and can be opened with efforts to be born

në një botë jo të sëmurë nga të metat...^{vi}
in a world that doesn't suffer
from disadvantages...

The village, homeland of the Albanian identity of the Arbëresh, has been less affected by the factors that risked the ethnic Arbëresh identity like: loss of the language and the culture, the migration, the marriages outside the community, etc. In the village the “progress” arrives later than in larger centers. Residents of the villages are more skeptical to accept them. Supporting of the modern times threatens the ageing of the village. In the following verses the poet expresses his belief that the aging will never come and he is sure about the survival, and the future of the Albanian ethnic identity to the Arbëresh:

...por mban ende shpirtin djalë ... but still keeps the spirit young
ashtu si përjetësia ta dha...^{vii} as eternity gave thee ...

The History and its Heroes

A famous attitude of the romanticists authors is recreating in their works the history of their people, dealing mostly with the glorious moments, the ideal past is regarded with nostalgia. These are some romantic features that are found also in the poetry of Zef Skirò Di Maxho. He highlights the ancient origin of his community and the most glorious era in his poetry is the Arbëresh romanticism.

Even the new homeland has its history and heroes who made it (*We have a past/that can't be more:/ we have shiny heroes.*^{viii}).. This history is built from the Arbëresh as soon as they arrived in those lands and was revived from their voices. In those lands were told the legends of their ancestors accros the sea and were born new legends. The history of the second homeland and the characters who have written it, are evoked by the poet to remind to the Arbëresh their origin and after all their first homeland.

...E megjithatë e dimë Nevertheless we know
se edhe të shkukur that even removed
nga vizatimet në palcë të drurit from the drawings on the wooden core
shihet it's evident
nga cila trëve vijmë the land we come from
shihet it's evident
nga cila tokë e morëm ushqimin.^{ix} from which land we were fed.

In the poetry of Zef Skirò Di Maxho distinguish the personalities of the Arbëresh art and culture, such as: Jeronim De Rada, Zef Skiroi (elder), Serembe etc. They are the heroes and the protagonists of the Arbëresh history, but there are also common people present, there are almost all the Arbëresh people present, and all the Arbëresh villages, including his Hore. A

^{vi} Ibid., p. 48

^{vii} Giuseppe Schirò Di Maggio, “Metaforë”, Mondo Albanese, p. 25

^{viii} Giuseppe Schirò Di Maggio, “Vjeç të tua 500”, Edizioni Mondo Albanese 1988, p. 10

^{ix} Ibid., p. 16

typical example of romanticism and the ideal country is the poetry where the poet urges the residents not to abandon Hora, their hometown, because there is the history of the Arbëresh ancestors, it has got a tradition and offers all the opportunities for the Arbëresh. The poet notes these opportunities through the common people.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>... këtu banonte lalë Gjergji</i> | <i>...here used to live Gjergj</i> |
| | |
| <i>Ai me vete solli</i> | <i>He brought with him</i> |
| <i>bagazh të pasur me fjalë</i> | <i>rich background in words</i> |
| <i>që i përkasin bujqësisë:</i> | <i>pertaining to agriculture:</i> |
| <i>krasitjes së drurëve</i> | <i>trees pruning</i> |
| <i>mbjelljes</i> | <i>planting</i> |
| <i>kohëve të rritjes</i> | <i>growth period</i> |
| <i>korrijes e tjera.^x</i> | <i>the harvest and others.</i> |

Likewise, in Hora there were merchants, master carpenters, musician artists, honored teachers, who are the simple heroes of their homeland. Everything could be found in Hora. Why its residents do not find all these even today, but prefer to leave their homeland instead!

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