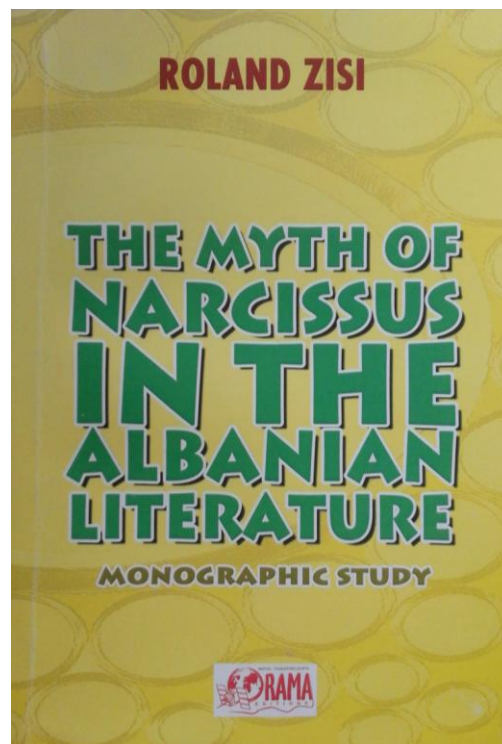


## REFLECTING A MYTH OF REFLECTING

Review of the volume *The Myth of Narcissus in the Albanian Literature. Monographic Study* by Roland Zisi, Rafina, Attica, GR, Orama Editions, 2011

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**FIG.1** Roland Zisi, *The Myth of Narcissus in the Albanian Literature. Monographic Study*. Front cover.

Issued from an article prepared for a conference held in Pristine in 2006, under the influence of the Albanian journalist and writer Ernest Koliqi's work *Pasqyrat e Narçizit* (The Mirrors of Narcissus), the book of Professor Roland Zisi<sup>1</sup>, *The Myth of Narcissus in the Albanian Literature. Monographic Study*, revisits the homonymous myth of Ancient Greece in a cultural space that still preserves some of the charm and depth of the Homeric world. Focused on emphasizing the echo, the reflection and the influence of the myth in Albanian literature, Professor Zisi's work, translated into English, transcends the limits of the language and aims at a higher goal, namely of opening gates to a literature known in Romania unfortunately only through one of its values, Ismail Kadare:

<sup>1</sup> Professor Roland Zisi, PhD, is the Rector of "Ismail Qemali" University, Vlora, Albania.

Our aim in this case lies in the fact that the foreign reader, interested in our culture and literature, could find a new door in order to understand and enjoy our literature or the literary and cultural Albanian processes (Zisi, 2011:8).

Having such a target, the book does not only reflect the myth, but also the description of the socio-political context of the appearance, the representative works for the topic of study. Thus, after a first chapter treating the conceptual clarifications and a second one assuming a hermeneutical approach of the original network of the myth of Narcissus, Roland Zisi directly reports to the Albanian literature that reflects this myth, less frequented and exploited than others. The author builds his monographic study on four pillars, of different consistencies and structures: the work that has been the pretext of the present one, Ernest Koliqi's *Pasqyrat e Narçizit* (The Mirrors of Narcissus), published in 1936, Ismail Kadare's short story *Konkurs bukurie për burrat në Bjeshkët e Nëmuna* (Male Beauty Contest in the Accursed Mountains) published in 1996, Koço Kosta's novel *Ata të dy e të tjerë* (Those two and others) written in 1984 and published in 1994 and Agron Tufa's book of poetry *Kënga e Narcisit* (The song of Narcissus), 2002, each of them related to different politico-cultural stages of Albania in its inner quests. In As a rule, the Albanian writers preferred references to and reflections of Ancient Greece's "heavy myths". This is why they made use of the quaternary structure of the applied analysis of the work, made up of the existing material: the four most important books of the Albanian literature where Narcissus' myth is reflected directly or through psychoanalytical interpretations, symbolically or associatively, as architext (and pretext) or as an explicit reference.

The first of these books, the one signed by Ernest Koiqi, was originally published in 1936 in *Gazeta Shqiptare*, Bari. Koliqi's book contains seven short stories, deflecting a Narcissus taken from Freudian psychoanalysis, multiply mirroring in water (in various fluid media, from spring water to sea waves), in the depth of an ordinary Scutari (from Shkodër) mirror or in the transparent surface of a window. The seven short stories (or poems in prose, as author himself calls them) reflect, from previously mentioned mirroring and from reflections in the text waters, seven different themes: the Self, national Myths, Childhood, Homeland, Longing, Freedom and Knowledge. The work does not move away from the line of the myth, but the positioning is radically changed: "Koliqi initiates the stories as a real Narcissus and ends them as an Antinarcissist" (Zisi, 2011:32-33). The call to reflection does not belong to the Self as in the Greek myth, but symbolically to the spirit (*the request of spirit face*). The mirror is the meditation itself. Through such a position, Koliqi succeeds, according to Professor Zisi, to propose a palimpsest of the Albanian literature through Narcissus' myth. *The Mirrors of Narcissus* move the context of interpretation into a different symbolic space, reflecting the pride of the Albanian origin.

*Konkurs bukurie për burrat në Bjeshkët e Nëmuna* is a short novel of disturbing beauty written by Ismail Kadare, placed in a mountain area in Northern Albania (Malësi), where Lekë Dukadajini's *kanun* still produced effects late into the mid-20th century, as Marius Dobrescu pointed out (2006). The short story was written in 1996, in the context of Albanian liberation of dictatorship. Its action, placed in the North governed by *kanun*, takes place in a "time without time". The work is more complex than Koliqi's one, bearing successive semantic layers, suggesting the myth, motivating ethically/morally its action and describing, in hypertextual key, the social setting and the atmosphere of the delayed socio-cultural change.

The (fugitive) reflection belongs to a human Narcissus, as tragic as the hero of the ancient myth; it implies the action of nature (and of human nature, alike). There is, as Roland Zisi suggests, a case of the Greek myth transfer into the typical Albanian reality of a *kanun* still producing effects, doubled by Freudian complexes and desires, in a “typical literary Kadarean alchemy”.

A passing suggested reflection implies a suggested reflection in text of one of the main Kadarean themes, the Albanian vendetta. The narcissistic beauty of youngster Prenk Curri continues to be mirrored in the eyes of Gaspër Cara. But here,

Behind the invisible relationship Gaspër Cara – Prenk Curri there is something far deeper, the author confesses: something about changing the face of this people, about changing anachronistic traditions that act hardly on the individual, limiting his personal freedoms. But people are not prepared for this, it seems to be the message of the short story,

writes Marius Dobrescu in the Romanian edition afterword of the Kadarean work (in Kadare, 2006:232).

The third work, *Ata të dy e të tjerë*, is a short story published in 1994 by Koço Kosta as a novel. It has a history anchored in the communist realities of an Albania that had already made the transfer from the dictatorial authority of Enver Hodja to that of Ramiz Alia. The first part of the work was published in *Nëntori* magazine in 1986, and the second one was rejected by the communist censorship in 1987. The main character of this book, the Handsome Guy, named after different standards than the one of the classical literature, is physically described in an impeccable manner, being a man of meditation and doubt. The myth of Narcissus is suggested by the text, without the name of Narcissus being mentioned at least once. The interpretation implies a fine association. Only a trained reader and a well connoisseur of the Albanian literature is able to do it: “so to say that only an ideal reader may put in formal-semantic co-accompaniment of these two figures to match the Handsome Guy to Narcissus” (Zisi, 2011:67-68). Unlike Kadare’s work, a complete and intentioned Narcissus is reflected in the pages of Kosta’s text; unlike Koliqi’s work, a Narcissus taken from the Greek myth enters the pages without Freudian mediation (even if the work bears psychoanalytical interpretation). The Handsome Guy, differently set up from the new Man in the Communist party design, could not be brought to the light of a work, especially as long as its author refused the realist-socialist norms imposed on the Albanian creation. Through *Ata të dy e të tjerë* Koço Kosta does not rewrite or recreate the myth, but acts on its universal substance. The freedom is reflected into the face of an antihero, the Handsome Guy, as Professor Zisi suggests.

The fourth work, *Kënga e Narcisit*, is a collection of poetry written by Agron Tufa between 1988 and 1989 and published in 2002. As in the case of Koliqi’s work, the reference to Narcissus is direct. Unlike Koliqi, Tufa changes the focus from the original semantics of the myth (whether in classical or psychoanalytic interpretation) onto the dialogue between the myth and the contemporary reality. The poetry collection is in itself a frame of reflection of the Albanian context of years of writing, in which literary existence and poetry itself could be considered a luxury. The myth, reflected in tragic and ironic traces, relies in text on a powerful allegoric apparatus. It is about the awakening, three centuries after, in Albania (and of Albania) that, as in the myth of Narcissus, isolated itself by watching its own inner beauty: “while the aim of the antique Narcissus is autoerotism and autosuggestion, the aim of the modern poet is literary and human perfection, the poetical ideal” (Zisi, 2011:96).

The four interpretative projections are followed, in Roland Zisi's work, by examples from the commented works (texts translated by Robert Elsie and Merita Isaraj). The myth of Narcissus in Albanian literature is more than a theme reflected into the textual waters of a literature. The myth reflects a vivid Albania, its identity, becoming, delaying, stunning, but mainly, its inner beauty in the waters of a European literature.

Upstream, the literary Albania, wanders through pages with the beauty of Kadare's *Prink Curri* or of Kosta's *Handsome Guy*, with the depth of meaning from Agron Tufa's poetry: "Albania is greater than its soil,/ Than the sky stretching upwards above it. /(...) / It is not a part of this planet, but a star,/ A tear fallen from the eye of Lord" (Tufa, *Albania, apud Zisi*, 2011:121). The monographic study of Professor Roland Zisi succeeds to reflect not only the architext canvas, the Greek myth taken in layered exposure into the Albanian literature, but also this literature itself, in its own depth, rendering the whole in a fractal manner, despite language barriers.

### REFERENCES

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