

# The Literary Prose of Ernest Koliqi

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**Abstract**—This paper analyzes and interprets the prose of Ernest Koliqi including his short story collections *Hija e maleve* (“The Shadow of the Mountains”, 1929), published in Zadar; *Pasqyrat e Narçizit* (“The Mirrors of Narcissus”, 1934), published in Bari and Rome; *Tregtar flamujsh* (“Flag Merchant”, 1935), published in Tirana; and the novel *Shija e bukës së mbrumë* (“The Taste of Leavened Bread”, 1960), published in Rome. *Pasqyrat e Narçizit* (“The Mirrors of Narcissus” (1934) is written in a style between poetry and prose. In *Hija e maleve* (“The Shadow of the Mountains” (1929), the author remains truthful about Albanian traditions. The theme of this collection portrays the main elements of the Albanian way of living and their mentality. The central aspect of Koliqi’s works deals with the drama of the homeland, the struggles of the Albanian intellectuals in general and those of Shkodër in particular. Most stories present cohabitation with mythological creatures; however, there is also *Tregtar flamujsh* (“Flag Merchant” (1935) which shows modern symbolism with an element of psychoanalysis. In *Shija e bukës së mbrumë* (“The Taste of Leavened Bread” (1960) Koliqi writes about life, the struggles, and the atmosphere of Albanian life. This novel is filled with patriotic, social, and moral values of the Albanian people, even though the main character of the story lives in Albania and abroad. Ernest Koliqi’s characters are typical Albanian people, and the spirit of his works is also of the typical Albanian spirit.

**Index Terms**—Koliqi, hospitality, revenge, honor, fairies

## I. INTRODUCTION

The motivation to analyze the literary prose of Ernest Koliqi is continuous; however, this analysis does not focus on the man’s words or thoughts. Rather, it stems from the internal desire to see things he portrays through small portions that reveal the more significant issues even more clearly. The title “The Literary Prose of Ernest Koliqi” reveals the subject of this paper, yet it also discloses the literary era of Albanian modernism. This way of contemporary thought responds to its demands, and it sets boundaries around the process of reflecting the world in our consciousness as a form of sustained thinking. This era is not tied to specific dates, but it is transformed into the essence of new processes; however, it differs from the past because of how it uses the means and its expressive features.

Ernest Koliqi constantly strives to get to know his country better and more deeply. He, however, does not ignore the entirety of the views about his country, both in the totality of the people’s achievements or in the social and emotional development of art, which he uses to portray his compatriots. This is how he becomes special and unambiguous. He fully encompasses the originality of his country’s roots, helping the country to change while not going through radical changes. These changes, however, are significant enough that, at some point, they will conform to the new age.

This paper analyzes and interprets the following works of Koliqi who is known for both his poetry and prose: *Hija e maleve* (“The Shadow of the Mountains” (1929), *Pasqyrat e Narçizit* (“The Mirrors of Narcissus” (1934), *Tregtar flamujsh* (“Flag Merchant” (1935), the novella *Gjaku* (“The Blood Feud” (1929), and the novel *Shija e bukës së mbrumë* (“The Taste of Leavened Bread” (1960).

One of his first and best-known works is the novella *Gjaku* (“The Blood Feud” (1929) written with a profound emotional depth. Indeed, it could be argued that this creative work shines with an intense light raising awareness among all Albanians everywhere by trying to radically change the encounter with the last occurrence of human life. Even in the clutches of death, Doda, the main character of *Gjaku* (“The Blood Feud” refuses to take revenge. He keeps rejecting and opposing the revitalized and restored tradition of vengeance even when his family suffers from that same evil. Doda displays a strong emotional shock, but his struggles also bring to the forefront the influence of those who surround him who insist on the killing because “killing in the name of the blood feud is on, and they must kill each other to avenge the dead”.

“As the title [*Gjaku* (“The Blood Feud”] symbolically shows, this story is about the blood feud, the flag, the canon, and let us say, the myth of the Albanian marrow” (Krasniqi, N., Literary Episteme, AIKD, Tirana, 2010, p. 74).

*Hija e maleve* (“The Shadow of the Mountains” (1929) deals with the people and life in the highlands of the Malësi e Shkodrës region. Each story addresses a different theme, but the main one that draws attention is the blood feud or “vengeance”.

The main idea behind the *Tregtar flamujsh* (“Flag Merchant” (1935) collection of stories is false patriotism, anger, and delight. In the story, we meet an uneducated person who hates the educated ones, and we come face to face with the harsh Albanian mentality which always puts the son before the daughter. However, the author also exposes the readers to a range of Albanian values such as hospitality.

The story in *Tregtar flamujsh*/"Flag Merchant" is told through the eyes of two main characters: a poet named Hilush Vilza and a merchant named Gaspër. Hilush avoids Gaspër as much as he can until one day, he can no longer manage that and goes inside his store.

The former fantasizes about the beautiful, the latter sticks to the reality, yet they both are prompted to talk about Albania. The merchant thinks that a person is free if they do not need anyone else; he does not need anything as long as his goods are sold and that poetry has no meaning if it does not bring any profit, but the poet thinks that all people need 'the soul food'. (Hamiti, S. *Albanian Modern Literature*, Albas, Tirana, 2000, p. 117)

In *Pasqyrat e Narçizit*/"The Mirrors of Narcissus" (1934), the main character uses a mirror and water to see his true face. The mirror is part and parcel of this entire collection of stories. Moreover, it tells us that we can all see our reflection in the water. Still, the main character constantly searches for new ways to find himself.

'Pasqyrat' is written in a style and a thematic code developed in variations; however, each of the seven stories maintains its integrity. These are the seven beautiful ways of searching for identity, concluding with the revelation, the finding portrayed in the last story, intertwining with each other in searching the variations. (Shala, K., *The Century of Albanian Literature*, Buzuku, Prishtina, 2006, p. 46)

In ancient times, people had to resort to fantasy in their first attempts to describe inexplicable phenomena in nature and society. Koliqi's story is this type of fantasy, begetting a variety of myths and stories about water.

The novel *Shija e bukës së ëmbrume*/"The Taste of Leavened Bread" (1960) explores the life of the main character in depth. The author investigates the inner world and the mentality of the youth that feels disenfranchised or needless, not only in the country of his ancestors but also abroad where he had lived for some time.

"The novel is situated in the United States of America, in an environment with a different way of living that challenges the Albanian characters' identity and ideology. It presents a challenge in their new life or their dreams to work for their homeland, Albania. The United States encompasses the signs of a dreamland; it is a model for Albania to emulate. The narrative of this work compose the fiction, whereas the ideology brings up Koliqi's projection, which slowly takes on the signs of an ideological lesson for Albanians. '*Shija e bukës së ëmbrume*' opens the issue of Koliqi as the master of short stories versus the author of a long story" (Shala, K. *The Discovery of Modernity*, Ibrahim Rugova Foundation, Prishtina, 2017, p. 127).

## II. RESEARCH SCOPE AND HYPOTHESIS

The theme addresses the Enlightenment, which, after some time, analyses the figure and prose of Ernest Koliqi whose only goal is to spread knowledge and culture among the people so that they would be able to come out of the backwardness and develop and progress further. Koliqi remains one of the most important figures of the Albanian literature. His writing shows how stories develop in the hands of a skilled person and makes the Albanian language feel even more beautiful. As a result, this paper analyses and interprets the collection of stories *Hija e maleve*/"The Shadow of the Mountains" (1929), *Pasqyrat e Narçizit*/"The Mirrors of Narcissus" (1934), *Tregtar flamujsh*/"Flag Merchant" (1935), and the novel *Shija e bukës së ëmbrume*/"The Taste of Leavened Bread" (1960).

Koliqi wrote mainly in prose, and his writings are connected to the spiritual world and to experiences, portraying the reflection of the objective reality in man's consciousness. Moreover, they are a product of his interaction with his surroundings and the level of development of his people. His books expose him fully, showing us who he truly is, what he feels and what he thinks. Furthermore, it also exposes his positions which were created by strong feelings and impressions that different events and circumstances of life leave on a person, the keys of which are the annotations of traces of meaningful content and presented with a whole range of artistic tools and features of a writer's style.

Ernest Koliqi's prose can be summarized around several hypotheses. The paper addresses the main hypotheses or research questions: Who stands in the shadows of these mountains, and what will happen there? *Hija e maleve*/"The Shadow of the Mountains" (1929) is the figurative title that takes us to a place or land, specifically here to the highlands where the natives live their lives according to the way of the highlanders, going through the darkness and remaining dark figures wrapped under the original cloak of the highlanders, portraying directly the way a person or a group of people live even though they dare not to go beyond the mountain norms.

Is the flag a sign of Albanian national identity or personal interest? In *Tregtar flamujsh*/"Flag Merchant" (1935) the stories are situated in the city where the circumstances and conditions are different, and they address the events related to both social and official life. Koliqi brings these stories to life through different protagonists who play a decisive role in the ideological content of his work. His point of view is presented through people we meet for the first time. They sprout up everywhere, and they see everything through their own lenses. Such is the case with the merchant; however, we also meet intellectuals with common sense, will, and ability to create. They use their knowledge to build a better and more civilized life with a new plan.

Could it be the author's soul in seven variations? After all, that is how many compositions and areas of exploration – all different from one another – are explored in the 1934 work *Shtatë pasqyrat e Narçizit*/"The Seven Mirrors of Narcissus"; however, the book as a whole remains true with some of its features and attributions. They are easily found and take us in different directions, producing evidence of, yet still denying the full compatibility of being the same in appearance while also being reflected in other ways.

Is revelation of the intellectual's mentality? *Shija e bukës së mbrumë*/ "The Taste of Leavened Bread" (1960) presents all the events in a particular order in the novel. The author presents to the readers the main interlocutor of the novel and the discourse, encompassing the main features that trace the life of the main character, his inner world, his mental features, feelings, and experiences.

This paper references prominent representatives and figures who have researched Koliqi's work.

Their opinions are the primary reference of the paper and include Koliqi, Hamiti, Shala, Krasniqi, Rrahmani and Shehri. The paper also uses psychoanalytic theories which were influenced by the spiritual wealth, the point of view, and mental generalization of experience, arising from practice and enriched and validated in practice. It reflects the essential phenomena and laws of the development of nature, society, and opinion which explains human consciousness; however, it also explains the entire development of human society.

The paper interprets the stories and analyzes the role these stories played during that time, as well as the interaction of these stories with mythology, coexistence with mythological beings, and patriotic, social, and moral values. The paper further questions modern symbolism with the elements of psychoanalysis, defining the themes of the stories, novels, and dramas, and identifying the best stories.

### III. HIJA E MALEVE, PASQYRAT E NARÇIZIT, TREGTAR FLAMUJSH, AND SHIJA E BUKËS SË MBRUMË

The short story collection *Hija e maleve*/ "The Shadow of the Mountains" (1929) connects us to life in the highlands, in the region of Malësi e Shkodrës and its people. This collection has twelve stories: "Nusja e mrekullueshme"/"The Wonderful Bride", "Gjaku"/"The Blood Feud", "Kanga e re"/"New Song", "Se qofsh"/"If You Were", "Pleqnofsh"/"Deliberation", "Kërcimtarja e Dukagjinit"/"Dukagjini's Dancer", "Miku"/"The Friend", "Andër e një mbasaditje vere"/"A Summer Afternoon's Dream", "Kur orë lajmërojnë"/"When the Sylphs Adulate", "Kopshti"/"The Garden", "Ke tre lisat"/"By the Three Oaks", "Diloca"/"Diloca", and "Zana e fundme"/"The Last Fairy").

In *Hija e maleve*/ "The Shadow of the Mountains" (1929), Koliqi analyzes the themes of morality in Malësi and the tragedy of life there compared to the life and mentality of the city Shkodër. His style is characterized by the analysis of the psychological depths of the human being and revealed through the confusion between patriarchal conditioning and new transformations. He considers his stories novellas and his titles are per the Italian terminology. This differs from the Albanian literary tradition, where a novella is a longer type of prose. "*Gjaku*"/"The Blood Feud" is his only work that comes close to the Albanian definition of a novella. His novellas paint different themes; however, the central theme of *Hija e maleve*/ "The Shadow of the Mountains" is revenge, the feud that results in "taking revenge" for a killing, or "for blood". "*Gjaku*" dwells on the theme of vengeance through Doda, a teacher who is against the whole idea of revenge. However, in the end, we find out that although Doda is educated and has been exposed to new ideas in his spiritual depth and darkness, there is a lifelong culture of the environment that has been dormant for a long time and can only be awakened if its foundation is shaken.

At first, the collection of stories *Tregtar flamujsh*/ "Flag Merchant" (1935) seems like it has only one character who sells flags, but soon we realize that there are many characters. The book portrays life in Shkodër with its wide range of harsh realities by revealing the people's hidden ambitions and their open and rotten souls which rock in the darkness of the past.

The collection has sixteen stories: "*Tregtar flamujsh*"/"Flag Merchant", "A t'a laçë"/"Tag", "Anmiku në shtëpi"/"Enemy in the House", "Dram i vogël"/"Little Drama", "Vena shtatë vjeçe"/"Seven Year-Old Wine", "E gjeti mbas shimshirit"/"Found behind the Boxwood", "Vaji i çitun"/"The Mourning", "Bylbylat e Plepishtit"/"Plepisht's Nightingales", "Duert e nanës"/"Mother's Arms", "Kumbulla përtej muri"/"Plum across the Wall", "Rrokoll"/"Around", "Nji ngjarje në rrugacën Kezenaj"/"A Story in Kezenaj Alley", "Nji ditë prej ditësh"/"Once Upon a Time", "Lumnija"/"Lumnija", "Hanëgjaku"/"Bloodmoon", and "Djepi arit"/"The Golden Cradle".

The main story, "*Tregtar flamujsh*"/"Flag Merchant" (1935) reveals the false patriotism of Gaspër Tragaçi and the enormous anger of Hilush Vilza who is livid because Gaspër Tragaçi does not consider the flag a national symbol but simply an item he can sell.

*Pasqyrat e Narçizit*/ "The Mirrors of Narcissus" (1934) was first published in "Gazeta Shqiptare" of Bari in 1936 and then as a book in Rome in 1963. The author says the collection has "seven mirrors, seven poems in prose," belonging to a period when the so-called "decadent" style was prevalent in Albania. Nevertheless, one must wonder: Where did the author find the motivation for this book? Well, he used the symbolism of the myth of Narcissus, but not in the meaning of falling in love with his reflection, but of love for the arts and the Albanian world. The story is written in the first person. Among these short poems, the author writes about the myth of Narcissus in the symbolic meaning as a way of soul searching through the waves of life. The signs of this identification or reflection are the well, an old mirror in Shkodër, Bardhanjori's fountain, Dukagjini's stream, a creek in Helvetia, and the window glass. The water is the rain that fills the rivers, the lakes, and the streams; it is used for drinking, and it quenches the thirst, and it serves as the mirror where we look at ourselves and see how we look. It can reflect the sunshine and bring light to everything in front of the flat surface of the water that mirrors the light. In this story, the main character uses the mirror and the water to see the true face, which is in harmony with reality. The mirror is part and parcel of this entire story. We can all see our reflection in the water, and the character constantly searches for new ways to find himself. In ancient times, people had to resort to their fantasy as their first attempt to describe the inexplicable phenomena in nature and society, and this type

of fantasy begets a variety of myths and stories about water. The main character in “*Pasqyrat e Narçizit*”/ “*The Mirrors of Narcissus*” does not come from the water and does not want the water to drink, but he uses the water to create a mirror in which he can see himself. The Narcissus of the mythology, though, was born in the water, and he finds his end in the water. Koliqi’s Narcissus, however, only wants to see his true face, to find himself.

The novel *Shija e bukës së mbrumë*/ “*The Taste of Leavened Bread*” (1960) sometimes gives the impression that it was inspired by a legend, a fiction, which was spread on purpose, or it could be that it is based on the reality that exists among Albanians. The book dwells on the thoughts and views of the people living abroad, specifically those living in Italy and America, and it depicts their will to persevere from 1945 through to the 1960s.

The novel was first published in Rome in 1960 under Hilush Vilza, an alias of Ernest Koliqi. He used to write under this name for *Shejzat* (“*The Pleiades*”) magazine.

The novel “*Shija e bukës së mbrumë*” explores the main character’s life in depth. The author explores the inner world and the psyche of the youth which has been discarded or has become unnecessary both in the country of his ancestors and abroad where he lived for a part of his life. The author portrays the intertwining of the conditions and circumstances of people living abroad with their political activity in Albania, Italy, and America, trying to bring the country out of the darkness.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Ernest Koliqi’s stories are linked closely to each other. His stories have helped preserve and protect the spiritual heritage of the Albanian people which has distinguished the nation throughout the centuries. His primary purpose as a writer was to preserve the noble virtues of the Albanian people, but he also wanted to follow in the footsteps of advanced nations. Most of his writings take place in his hometown, the city of Shkodër, a city that is his muse, but also his longing, pain, and anguish. The main themes of his works take place in Malësia e Shkodrës, the highlands, and the people living there. The shifting of the narrative structure from the actions of the event to the emotions and inner experiences of the characters is striking.

In his writing, Ernest Koliqi incorporated so much from his homeland, from the individuality of the social characters of that period, their spiritual side, and their mental activities through events and narrative circumstances. He possessed the ability to portray a whole range of emotions the characters go through, their challenges and struggles in achieving their goals at the time for integration and social development, evolving and refining both in the inner world and the material one. In his stories, the character’s emotional and psychological phenomena take precedence, aiming to separate from tradition and deviate slightly from the wild tradition, focusing on modernity and progress, supported by family and surroundings. Individuality has lost all hope; it has lost all morale and no longer knows how to hold on. It has been immersed in a dark spiritual state and deep sorrow, having lost hope for life. However, they are still searching for the great centers of habitation, which are more advanced and distant from the shadow of the mountains as an environment, but that shadow keeps looming everywhere they go. In these centers of habitation, whether small or large, live people with specific intentions who spread and whisper misinformation and rumors. This news could belong to everyone or only to someone, but these were rules in the place where they lived with inaccurate opinions and baseless facts. However, they confront each other causing many difficulties and misfortunes to the characters which become even more significant despite the great desire of the characters to change their worldview and lifestyle. Therefore, they appear where they live among their families and beyond, in profound disagreement with aims detached from the great goal which they have to put on hold because of their families and surroundings. In the lives of these characters, the authority of patriotic values has a special place, preserved firmly in their lives, carved from earlier times. His texts became the leading cause and incentive for destroying the psychological characteristics and behavior of characters with the necessary circumstances, which were dominant at that time. The characters worry and suffer; they burst with anger and reveal the entirety of the moral values of the individual and the community with the unwavering courage of a highlander, as well as the moral traits of the girls of the Highlands, stemming from certain principles and highly regarded by the society of that time. Families with no means struggle to make a living, and they need to put a lot of effort into surviving the many dangers and calamities that life brings upon them.

In this work of doctoral studies, the researcher proved the hypotheses that were raised at the beginning of the work, such as: 1. ‘Tradicionallja’ in the stories ‘Gjaku dhe miku’; 2. Fantastikja in the stories ‘Kërcimtarja e Dukagjinit’; ‘Nusja e mrekullueshme’ and ‘Zana e fundme’; 3. ‘Pleqnari’, or ‘Gjyqtari autentik’; 4. ‘Flamuri’, as a sign of Albanian national identity, or personal interest? 5. ‘Shpirti i autorit’ in seven variants and 6. ‘Shpalosja e psikes së intelektualit’.

Readers and scholars of Ernest Koliqi’s works will become more familiar with the intellectual characters of his work. These characters persevere despite facing many difficulties that people and the environment cause and cannot do anything to change the circumstances created. Doda, Diloca, Hilush, and others again feel like foreigners in the city, even though, in the past, they thought they could bring about changes through knowledge or revolt.

Ernest Koliqi’s goal was to preserve the noble virtues of the Albanian people, but his desire was also to follow in the footsteps of advanced nations. It is an excellent opportunity for young people to learn more about the Highlands, which may seem archaic now. In particular, his work could help people get to know the Malësia e Shkodrës canon, which follows his characters everywhere, whether in the villages or the cities. There is always something that has not been said or written but can be expressed and written differently.

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