

# *Book review. “Metamorphosis of a capital” as a reflection of societies consciousness*

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## **Abstract**

*Background: Literature is the best narrative approach to society. A writer conveys his thoughts through the text he writes, to give some voice to his inner world and change the setting of the reality. The author of this novel tries to tell the story of the individuals whose consciousness is molded by the system and the country itself; a story that goes on for decades in the capital of Albania. Purpose: This article aims to analyze the reason why this topic is still a current phenomenon and how society tries to hide the truth. Conclusion: “Metamorphosis of a capital” is a kind of reflection of our consciousness. It builds the scene of an absurd, grotesque theatre, where the truth still hurts.*

***Key words:** literary work, narrative, civic consciousness*

A book should be an ax that breaks the frozen sea inside us - says Franz Kafka. “Metamorphosis of a Capital” is such a book. The novel written by the writer Ylljet Aliçka, brings to our attention, without resorting to making history, the essential changes suffered by intellectuals, but also society, after the communist

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dictatorship in Albania. Metamorphosis is a strong, sudden transformation, which we have also encountered in other literary works, as a change that affects the individual in his psyche, in the confrontation he has with himself and society. The metamorphosis of beings guided by reason does not always have a positive direction; it is enough to remember one of the most outstanding works of world literature such as “Metamorphosis” by Kafka to agree with this assumption.

The novel introduces from the first pages the main character, the image of the intellectual of the 70s, in Communist Albania, Benjamin Bendo. He is a character that you can easily encounter even today, in the daily life of the transition, who shows the “values” of the time of the dictatorship as anti-values of today’s society, where the characters of the ‘active life’ of Tirana after the 90s, have become the greatest opponents of the previous system, even though they were equally active and zealous towards the monist system.

This novel is a witty parody, with strong doses of irony and sarcasm, which make this book interesting and comprehensive for any reader curious about the past and the time we live in today. The metamorphosis of the individual who was used to serving the party and the system at the expense of the individual himself, through the stylistic analogy of the writer, makes it easier for us to identify the character of that time and the transformed individual, apparently, nowadays.

The author neatly manages to make literature with a human matter that the reader believes he knows, but outside of himself recognizes it as a phenomenon, but does not experience it as its own event; he suffers on a personal level, in his daily encounters, but he does not take it as an identity crisis of the social environment where he belongs. “Metamorphosis of a Capital” builds the scene of an absurd, grotesque theater, where the truth hurts, the spectator/reader sees and knows up to his sixth sense, the deformations of the social psyche of the society he belongs to; he stops to witness how the society of the dictatorship “passed” from a society that had the common “good” at the top of its attention to a society that “slipped” into a so-called chaotic democracy, where it is enough to anathema the past and the wrongdoings of the system - by forgetting the responsibility of everyone who had served him devoutly, not only out of fear but also the desire to suppress those who did not follow the “spirit of the party” and the time - to be a “devout” citizen of the pluralistic society.

In the matter of this novel, you can feel the sharp spirit of the individual who changes his attitudes and worldview according to his “appetite”, time, and situation. “Appropriability” is considered a great success even though, often, it conflicts with the moral ethics of the characters themselves (Vladimir, Sadik, Benjamin, etc.).

Benjamin, the central character of the literary work in question, puts his artistic skills at the service of easy money - writing verses about the death of unknown people, whose families, after losing their beloved ones, seek to perpetuate their memory with some verses sometimes heroic and sometimes hilarious, so that it seems as if they were written for everyone, but not for their relatives. If the dead

man had the opportunity to hear those words that were written just for him, he would think that he had been mistaken for a war hero, a famous artist, or anyone who had a glorious life! An absurd feature of the time when people began to look at the freedom that came thanks to the instant change, to do whatever they wanted, leaving the not-so-glorious past in oblivion.

This novel also brings to our attention the post-communist chaos created by those who served the previous system and who, with vigor and “new energy”, created a new oasis to properly respond to the challenges of democracy. Someone who had been a prominent sculptor during the dictatorship, after its fall, found himself on the streets of Western countries selling his art to survive. Someone else cursed the past outside the house and praised the post-communist present, but inside the family, we mourned the glory of the time of the partisans and the “commander”(dictator Enver Hoxha).

These stories of people from both times, remind us of the absurd past and make us pay attention to the routine present of the capital city, as an entity where every Albanian had his “representative”, which easily passed from dictatorship to post-dictatorship, without making any analysis of the evil and faults of the past and consequently no discernment to draw lessons. The author goes further, delving into the inner world of the characters. He displays human nature and its behaviors changed not only by time, but also by the possibility to change them, without having to testify “in front of the mirror” which in moments of weakness sometimes appeared in the form of tears, and sometimes in the form of collective mediocrity and hypocrisy among themselves.

The void of values, hypocrisy, and disorientation of uncontrolled post-communist openness, subjugation, servility and the courage to lynch those thinking differently, speaks out for the improvised fictitious identities of many intellectuals in the capital, as well as our own society. Each character carries a quality that we easily find in prominent public figures in the country who in some cases have turned into an “anti-communist model” and who have built their careers on the “corpses in the closet” of the past, in complete harmony with the monist regime and now as the greatest anathemas of that time. They continue to analyze those who ruled the country for about five decades but forget the position of the “little ones” and their contribution to the deepening of the struggles of those who thought differently from the spirit of the era.

This literary work also reminds us of the struggles of those who loved the old system for what they had and this new one for what it gives without making any “mea culpa” for the not-so-transparent past and laughing at the present mirror. To sum up, “Metamorphosis of a Capital” can be read all in one breath like a novel, but like any good literature has a deep influence on one’s mindset, building in the reader, and through him for the whole society, an inner gate of catharsis, honest reflection, and deep experience, what anyone could see in the mirror if they stopped for a moment of reflection with themselves.