

AGOLLI, Dritëro

Albanian poet and prose writer. b. 13 Oct. 1931 Menkulas.

A. was born of a peasant family in the Devoll region near Korça and finished secondary school in Gjirokastra in 1952. He later continued his studies at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Leningrad and took up journalism upon his return to Albania, working for the daily newspaper *Zëri i Popullit* (The People's Voice) for fifteen years. A. was a deputy in the People's Assembly under the dictatorship and has continued to be active in politics as a member of parliament. From 1973 to 1992, he was also president of the Albanian Writers' Union.

A. made his name originally as a poet before turning to prose in later years. He is still widely admired in both genres. His first verse collections: *Në rrugë dolla* (1958; I went out on the street), *Hapat e mija në asfalt* (1961; my steps on the pavement), and *Shtigje malesh dhe trotuare* (1965; mountain paths and sidewalks), introduced him to the reading public as a sincere and gifted lyric poet of the soil and demonstrated masterful verse technique. In this early verse, one senses the influence of his training in the Soviet Union, the spirit of Eduard Bagritsky (1895-1934) and Dmitri Kedrin (1907-1945) in particular.

The recent collection *Pelegrini i vonuar* (1993, the belated pilgrim), is A.'s first book printed without an eye to the invisible censor. It is an impressive collection of 217 previously unpublished poems in which we encounter a new chapter, not only in the life of the poet, but also in the struggle of his people for survival.

Like Ismail Kadare (b. 1936), A. turned increasingly to prose in the seventies after attaining success as a poet of the soil. His strength in prose lies in the short story rather than in the novel. Sixteen of his short stories, not all of which are particularly enthralling, have been published in English in the volume: *Short stories* (1985). One early collection of tales, the 213-page *Zhurma e ererave të dikurshme* (1964; the noise of winds of the past), had the distinction of being banned and 'turned into cardboard.' Its author was accused of Soviet revisionism.

After two rather conformist novels of partisan heroism, the standard theme encouraged by the party, A. produced a far more interesting work of prose, his satirical *Shkëlqimi dhe rënja e shokut Zylo* (1973; the splendour and fall of Comrade Zylo), which has proved to be his claim to fame. Comrade Zylo is the epitome of the well-meaning but incompetent *apparatchik*, director of an obscure government cultural affairs department. His pathetic vanity, his quixotic fervour, his grotesque public behaviour, in short his splendour and his fall, are all recorded in ironic detail by his hard-working and more astute subordinate and friend Demkë who serves as a neutral observer. Comrade Zylo is a universal figure, a character to be found in any society or age, and critics have been quick to draw parallels ranging from Daniel Defoe and Nikolay Gogol's *Revizor* to Franz Kafka and Milan Kundera's *Zert*. It is doubtless the Eastern European reader who will best appreciate all the subtleties of the novel.

While it is true that A. made a name for himself while serving as a high political figure of the *ancien régime*, recent publications of poetry and prose have suggested that he can maintain his momentum as a writer without the trappings of public office. And perhaps better so.

FURTHER WORKS: *Devoll, Devoll* (1964); *Komisari Memo, roman* (1970); *Njeriu i mirë, tregime* (1973); *Nënë Shqipëri, poemë* (1974); *The bronze bust, a novel* (1975); *Mosha e bardhë, dramë me tri akte* (1975); *Njeriu me top, roman* (1975); *Fjala gdhend gurin, vjersha dhe poema* (1977); *Poezi* (1979); *Trëndafili në gotë, roman* (1979); *Të pagjumet* (1980); *Vepra letrare* 11 vol. (1980-1987); *The man with the gun, a novel* (1983); *Mother Albania, a*

*poem* (1985); *Udhëtojt i menduar* (1985); *Jeta në letërsi, artikuj dhe shënime* (1987); *Splendeur et décadence du camarade Zulo* (1990); *Dështaku, roman* (1991); *L'Homme au canon* (1994); *Çudira dhe marrëzi, fabula, epigrame* (1995); *Lypësi i kohës, poezi* (1995); *Njerëz të krisur: novela, tregime* (1995); *Kalorësi lakuriq, roman*. (1996); *Shpirti i gjyshërve, 101 këngë* (1996); *Vjen njeriu i çuditshëm, poezi* (1996); *Arka e djallit, roman* (1997); *Baladë për tim atë dhe për vete* (1997); *Teshtimat e lirisë: njeriu, politika dhe kultura* (1997).

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Vinca, A., *Orët e poezisë* (1990): 135-163; Miracco, E., "Agolli, dalle macerie una speranza nuova," *L'Altra Europa* (1992. 2): 75-79; Elsie, R., *History of Albanian Literature* (1995): 570-572, 590-592.

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