

Albanian Literature since World War II

ROBERT ELSIE

After the Stalinist purges under Koçi Xoxe (1917-1949) and the elimination of the first postwar minister of cultural affairs, the liberal Marxist Sejfulla Malëshova (pseud: Lame Kodra, 1901-1971), intellectual life in Albania had been virtually wiped out and literary production, as a consequence, had come to a standstill. The early writers of SOCIALIST REALISM in the 1950s, Dhimitër Shuteriqi (b. 1915), Shevqet Musaraj (1914-1986), Jakov Xoxa (1923-1979), and Aleks Çaçi (1916-1989) could not demonstrate any particular talent under the unabating terror of the Hoxha regime.

From 1961, the year of Albania's break with the Soviet Union, a new generation of more talented writers arose, represented by Ismail Kadare, Dritëro Agolli, and Fatos Arapi (b. 1930). Kadare, in particular, did much to emancipate Albanian literature gradually from the shackles of the past and in the 1970s and 1980s came to dominate the literary scene. After the French-language publication of his first major novel, *Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur* (1963; *The General of the Dead Army*, 1971), his international reputation grew, giving him confidence at home to continue his subtle attacks against the otherwise all-pervading doctrine of socialist realism. Among his pioneering novels to have appeared in English are *Kronikë në gur* (1971; *Chronicle in Stone*, 1987), *Prilli i thyer* (1978; *Broken April*, 1990), and *Nëpunësi i pallatit të ëndrrave* (1981; *The Palace of Dreams*, 1993). At the end of October 1990, a mere few months before the collapse of the dictatorship, Kadare sought political asylum in Paris, where he has been living and writing ever since. Other noted prose authors of the period include Petro Marko (1913-1991), Kasëm Trebeshina (b. 1926), Dhimitër Xhuvani (b. 1934), and Bilal Xhaferrri (1935-1986). Of the poets of the 1980s and early 1990s, mention can be made of Xhevahir Spahiu (b. 1945), Natasha Lako (b. 1948), Bardhyl Londo (b. 1948), Visar Zhiti (b. 1952) who survived seven years of prison and concentration camps, and Mimoza Ahmeti (b. 1963).

Albanian literature in Kosova was put into motion by poet Esad Mekuli (1916-1993) with the founding in 1949 of the literary periodical *Jeta e re*, but did not produce much of note until the 1960s. Exceptions must be made for the novelist Adem Demaçi (b. 1936) who was to spend the next twenty-eight years as a political prisoner of the Belgrade regime, and of the verse collections *Nji fyell ndër male* (1953; a Flute in the Mountains), and *Kânga e vërrinit* (1954; Song of the Lowland Pastures) by Martin Camaj, later to become a leading scholar of Albanian studies in Rome and Munich. The Yugoslav constitution of 1974 gave Kosovo Albanians more freedom and a semblance of equality for the first time, and literature flourished on the Plain of the Blackbird in the decade to follow. Of leading prose writers, mention can be made of the experimental Anton Pashku (1937-1995), Rexhep Qosja (b. 1936), notably for his explosive political novel *Vdekja më vjen prej syve të tillë* (1974; *Death Comes with Such Eyes*), the prolific Nazmi Rrahmani (b. 1941) and Teki Dervishi (b. 1943). The poetry of Kosovo has been far more experimental and creative than that of Albania. Among its leading proponents are Din Mehmeti (b. 1932), Besim Bokshi (b. 1932), Azem Shkreli (b. 1938), Rrahman Dedaj (b. 1939), Ali Podrimja (b. 1942), Eqrem Basha (b. 1948), Sabri Hamiti (b. 1950), and Basri Çapriqi (b. 1960). Since the military occupation of Kosovo and its forceful annexation by Serbia, the Albanians have returned to their status of second-class citizens. Economic, cultural, and literary life in Kosovo have been virtually destroyed in the process (suspension of Albanian-language secondary schooling, closing-down of the University of Prishtina for non-Serbs, takeover of the

Rilindja publishing company, and the paramilitary occupation of the Institute of Albanian Studies in Prishtina). The future of Albanian literature in Kosovo is uncertain.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Mann, S. E., *Albanian Literature* (1955); Bihiku, K., *History of Albanian Literature* (1986); Elsie, R., *Anthology of Modern Albanian Poetry* (1993); Elsie, R., *Dictionary of Albanian Literature* (1995).

[published in: *Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th century*. Third Edition. Vol. 1: A-D. General Editor: Steven R. Serafin. (St. James Press, Farmington Hills MI 1999), p. 35-36]