

Ali Podrimja
Happy ending
[*Fund i gëzuar*].
Prishtinë. Rilindja. 1988. 72 pages.

The Albanian-language poet Ali Podrimja was born and raised in Gjakovë (Djakovica), a dusty but beautiful oriental town in the southern Yugoslav autonomous region of Kosovo at the foot of the northern Albanian Malësia e Madhe range, known for its artisans and the purity of its Albanian. Like many other Kosovo Albanian literati of his age group (he was born in 1942), Podrimja studied Albanian language and literature in Prishtinë. Author of over a dozen volumes of verse since 1961, he has now found his niche in the literary establishment of Kosovo and is recognized both there and in Albania itself as a leading and innovative poet. His 1982 collection *Lum Lumi*, in particular, is said by some to have marked a turning point in contemporary Kosovo verse.

Fund i gëzuar (Happy ending) constitutes yet another outburst of Podrimja's Sisyphean obsession with the destiny of mankind, his unceasing and ironic attempt to grasp the needle of existence in a haystack of allegorical dichotomies - the past vs. the present, the peripheral vs. the nuclear, myth vs. reality, the specific vs. the general. The present volume, pursuing, though no doubt not concluding this quest, contains fifty-four poems divided into five cycles.

The first cycle, *A ju kujtohet* (Do you remember), evokes elements of Albanian history and mythology and the protagonists thereof. Here, as so often, resistance to foreign tyranny and the defence of freedom enter the realms of the allegorical. The figure of Scanderbeg, the Albanian national hero (1405-1468) who dared to oppose the Turks in the fifteenth century, has lost none of its vitality as a source of inspiration in Albanian literature.

The second and third cycles, *A ju dëgjon harrimi* (Can oblivion hear you) and *Rekuiem për pyllin e prerë* (Requiem for the felled forest), which form the core of the volume, search out the haunts of the Albanian diaspora in Italy and Greece. The poet, having sung the symbols of resistance and traditional village culture, is acutely aware that the heritage of the Albanian-speaking Arbëresh of Calabria and Sicily and of the Arvanites of Epirus and the Morea is now awash in a sea of global media and high technology, against which opposition is regarded by many as poignantly futile, to say the least. Rarely has a modern Albanian poet, with the exception of Arbëresh writers themselves such as Vorea Ujko, been able to express the historical and cultural experience of the Arbëresh with such profundity.

The fourth and fifth cycles of Happy Ending, *Këngë shendi* (Song of joy) and *Hija ime* (My shadow) delineate the social, economic, political and ethical crisis of contemporary society with a variety of themes, casting an often ironic glance upon the throes of fate, upon longing, suffering and utopia.

Podrimja is a laconic poet. His verse is compact in structure, and his imagery is direct, terse and devoid of any artificial verbosity. Every word counts. What fascinates the Albanian reader is his compelling ability to adorn this elliptical rocky landscape, reminiscent of Albanian folk verse, with unusual metaphors, unexpected syntactic structures and subtle rhymes. Metaphors indeed abound in his work. Dritëro Agolli, head of the Albanian Union of Writers and Artists in Tiranë, once said of Podrimja that he spreads metaphors as you would spread sugar over a plate of baklava.

Form and structure have not ceased to evolve in the work of Ali Podrimja, but it is primarily the introduction and treatment of new themes, though firmly anchored within the

context of his classic obsession, which make 'Happy Ending' more like a new beginning to contemporary Albanian verse on the dusty and troubled plains of Kosovo.

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