

Koço Bihiku (ed.)

Studies in Albanian literature 2. Problems of the Albanian literature of socialist realism
[*Studime për letërsinë shqiptare 2. Probleme të letërsisë shqiptare të realizmit socialist*].
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Contemporary literature in Albania is referred to simply as the literature of socialist realism. Just as government in Albania is in the hands of one omnipotent party allowing for no alternatives, literature falls within the scope of one all-encompassing doctrine, that of socialist realism. There are no 'hundred flowers blooming' as Mao Tse-Tung once put it, but rather one sturdy young plant, centrally watered and fertilized, which can be quite captivating at times as its blossoms open one by one. There is nothing accidental about this flower and about the direction modern Albanian literature is taking. It is planned in advance, as far as possible, as is all social and political change in the country. In view of this, it is no wonder that theoretical and practical studies on literature are at least as essential to an understanding of contemporary writing and thought in Albania as actual literary production itself. Whereas critics in Western countries play a secondary role in that they (in theory) simply react to literary publications as they appear, it is the writers in Albania who have been the ones to react to the road paved for them by critics and theoreticians.

Volume 2 of *Studime për letërsinë shqiptare* (Studies in Albanian literature), published by the Institute of Linguistics and Literature of the Albanian Academy of Sciences, is devoted, as its subtitle indicates, to the "Problems of the Albanian literature of socialist realism." It constitutes a major collection of studies on contemporary literature in Albania, prepared by critics and specialists in Tiranë under the direction of Koço Bihiku. Known outside Albania primarily for his *History of Albanian Literature* (Tiranë 1980), Bihiku also edited volume 1 of "Studies in Albanian literature" (Tiranë 1981) which was devoted to the "Problems of Albanian literature of the period of national renaissance (Rilindja)".

The first section of the present volume investigates various aspects in the evolution of modern Albanian literature, such as the 'reflection of socialist realism in novels of the seventies and the first half of the eighties', the 'formation of poetry in modern literature' and 'characteristics of short stories in the sixties'. It also attempts a 'theoretical generalization on the experience of Albanian literature under socialist realism'. The second section of the work contains studies analyzing the creative processes of some of the best-known established writers of modern Albanian letters: Shevqet Musaraj, Jakov Xoxa, Ismail Kadare, Dritëro Agolli, Dhimitër Shuteriqi, Sterjo Spasse and Kolë Jakova.

Of particular interest is the survey given by Tiranë critic Jorgo Bulo of the works and 'creative path of Ismail Kadare' who has been the focus of attention of much modern criticism. Kadare's talents both as a poet and prose writer have lost none of their innovative force over the last three decades and his courage in countering literary mediocrity has given proof that socialist realism in Albanian literature is flexible enough to account for the delicate problem of individuality. Critics of socialist realism have often noted the danger this doctrine purveys of wearing away at the creative and personal impulses of the individual and replacing them with a bland mush of conformity and uniform production. Where would European literature and culture be, for instance, without the spirit of non-conformism, without the individualist whose ideas could provoke and even outrage his or her readers? In Albania's case, edifying voices are distinct enough but the subject matter is often conformist and repetitious by Western standards. Although one would certainly not characterize modern Albanian literature by its surfeit of non-conformists and eccentrics, it is nonetheless providing requisite scope for individual creativity and

originality. Kadare is one case in point and there are others, though not necessarily the established classics of proletarian letters under study in this book.

Volume 2 of *Studime për letërsinë shqiptare* provides a rudimentary overview of the development and pervasion of Albanian socialist realism in the past quarter of a century and thus a key to a better appreciation of modern writing in Albania.

It is to be hoped that a third volume of "Studies on Albanian literature" will follow to venture into the unexplored territory of younger writers of the post-Kadare generation or to come to terms with the diverse and creative literature of Kosovo, much of which is considered beyond the pale of socialist realism and, though read with pleasure in Albania when available, is rarely commented upon publicly.

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