

Teodor Laço
All the rivers flow
[*Të gjithë lumenjtë rrjedhin*].
Prishtinë. Rilindja. 1988. 380 pages.

The Albanian uprising in the southern Yugoslav autonomous region of Kosovo in 1981 put an end to cultural relations between the region and Albania itself. Before that date, the Albanian-language universities of Prishtinë and Tiranë exchanged publications, professors and lecturers, and (occasionally expurgated versions of) books from Albania were widely available in Kosovo reprints just as (occasionally expurgated versions of) Kosovo authors were republished in Tiranë. Since 1981, however, political, economic and cultural relations between the two halves of the Albanian nation have been virtually frozen. The situation is especially difficult for intellectuals in Kosovo since the very possession of literary publications from Albania is dangerous, and listening to radio and television programmes from Tiranë is a crime subject to imprisonment, both activities being regarded by the authorities in Belgrade as signs of rabid "Albanian nationalism", the so-called cause of the Kosovo problem. At the same time, Kosovo novelists and poets cannot survive and maintain their cultural identity and integrity without contacts with the motherland. If the present political stalemate continues much longer, Albanian literature may very well divide into two separate literatures, each going its own way. The first signs of such a division have already become evident. Writers on one side of the border for instance now often have no idea of what is going on '*përtej malit*' (over the mountain).

For the present, Rilindja publishing company in Prishtinë is allowed to republish one novel from Albania per year. This year's choice has fallen upon Teodor Laço's latest work *Të gjithë lumenjtë rrjedhin* (All the rivers flow).

Prose writer and playwright Teodor Laço was born in 1936 in Dardhë near Korçë in southeastern Albania. He studied agricultural science in Tiranë in 1958 before devoting his energy and talents to literature. His first novel, *Tokë e ashpër* (Rough land), published in Tiranë in 1971, dealt with the problems of the collectivization of agriculture in mountain regions. He has since published nine collections of short stories and four other novels, two of which have been badly translated in Tiranë, one into English (*The face-up*, Tiranë 1980) and one into French (*Le pré des larmes*, Tiranë 1985). Together with Ismail Kadare, Dritëro Agolli, Nasi Lera, Zija Çela, Skënder Drini and Agim Cerga, he has gained a reputation as one of the most widely read contemporary Albanian novelists.

Të gjithë lumenjtë rrjedhin focuses on the construction of Soborë reservoir and dam needed to irrigate 7,000 hectares of land. Arsen Morina, a hydraulic engineer, has been entrusted with planning the project which requires daring solutions, innovative thinking and a good deal of courage to counter the timidity and conformism of local officials. His main opponent throughout the novel is Bani Bashari, president of the District Executive Committee, who after some initially minor differences of opinion, begins to fight him tooth and nail in order to preserve his own status. Their conflict is symbolic of that between creative activity and the impediments placed upon it by bureaucracy and traditionalist attitudes. Despite a number of setbacks and failures during the various stages of construction and the perils to the very existence of the project from the scheming of Bashari and the other engineers, the young Morina succeeds gradually in gaining the confidence of Besim Golemi, First Secretary of the Party, and of his colleagues, and the reservoir and dam are completed with success.

Laço's work is a classic novel of Socialist Construction, not unlike Soviet literature of industrialization of the thirties (Ehrenburg, Gladkov, Leonov). The parallel is no particular

surprise if we bear in mind that Albania of the eighties has, with a minimum of foreign assistance and know-how, begun the same painful industrialization process that Soviet Russia initiated in the twenties.

The broad outlines of the novel and the portrayal of the main characters are faithful to this tradition: Arsen Morina, a thoroughly positive hero representing all the virtues of the New Man, and the classic bad guy and weakling in the figure of Bani Bashari, the infallible guidance of the Party and the standard happy ending. With respect to its basic plot structure, it cannot be denied that *Të gjithë lumenjtë rrjedhin* is highly conformist, though the work does provide us with excellent insight into conflict-solving and decision-making processes in contemporary Albanian society.

The aforementioned conformity is compensated for to some extent by certain details of character portrayal. In his delineation of the two main antagonists, Laço shows that he is eminently skilled in analyzing and highlighting traits of character and in maintaining dramatic tension, but his characters never actually exceed the good-guy vs bad-guy stereotypes sufficiently to make them credible human beings with both virtues and flaws.

The title "All the rivers flow" is symbolic. It reflects not only the significance of hydro-electric power stations and irrigation for the development and survival of the tiny Balkan country, but also the flow of creativity and courage, the coming of age, of a distinct society and culture.

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