

Namik Ressuli

*Albanian literature.*

Boston. Pan-Albanian Federation of America Vatra. 1988. 105 pages

An informative and readable history of Albanian literature is one of the desiderata of all those interested in Albanian culture. For those who can read Albanian, the *Historia e letërsisë shqiptare*, Tiranë 1983 (History of Albanian literature), is by far the most extensive literary history to date. The English-speaking reader has had to content himself with several differing and incomplete histories of Albanian literature and will have to continue to do so. Stuart E. Mann's *Albanian literature, an outline of prose, poetry and drama* (London 1955) is outdated and Koço Bihiku's *History of Albanian Literature* (Tiranë 1980), falsely subtitled 'Albanian literature from its origins to the liberation of the country from the Nazi-Fascist occupation', does include the present-day literature of socialist realism up to 1977 from a Marxist-Leninist perspective, but excludes both the authors of the twenties and thirties ostracized from the Albanian Parnassus and the literature of Kosovo.

The present monograph, translated from the Italian and edited by Eduard Liço, is a short (42 pages) introduction to Albanian literature by Namik Ressuli (1912-1985), noted Albanologist and former professor at the Oriental Institute of the University of Naples. It surveys Albanian literature from its origins to 1943 with emphasis on the Catholic tradition of Shkodër, plus a cursory overview of post-war and Italo-Albanian writing. Appendixed to the work are commemorative lectures on four major literary figures: Naim Frashëri, Gjergj Fishta, Faik Konitza and Fan S. Noli. Ressuli's work serves its purpose as an introductory survey of Albanian literature up to the Second World War. Major detractions of the book are, however, the numerous, often critical printing mistakes and the translation, with confusing sentences such as: "But often these facts, brought into a picture infinitely larger by reference to known personalities, who had already attained universality, reached beyond a closed environment, thus they too become pure universal poetry" (p. 37) and, more amusingly "Motivated and encouraged by all Albanians without distinction of faith, he died tragically in 1623..." (p. 13).

Although Ressuli's critical remarks about the quality of much of early post-war literature may be valid, and though it is his perfect right to laud the undoubtable artistic merits of Gjergj Fishta and other mostly forgotten writers of the Catholic tradition who are usually ignored or scathingly treated by Marxist critics in Tiranë, it is distressing in a book published in 1988 and a sign of a lack of touch with reality to ignore the quarter of a century following the war, the very period in which Albanian literature in Albania and Kosovo came into existence for more than a very small class of pre-war intellectuals. Like it or not, this is the only literature which has ever actually been read by the Albanian people.

In all fairness though, it must be noted that most literary histories, as with dictionaries, are outdated by the time they appear. Despite these drawbacks and restrictions, Liço is to be commended for having made Professor Ressuli's short though informative historical survey of Albanian letters available to the English-speaking public.

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