

Natasha Lako

Quiet nature

[*Natyrë e qetë*].

Tiranë. Naim Frashëri. 1990. 109 pages

The rare foreign visitor who happens to tour Korçë will return with the inevitable impression that this town, nestled in the mountains of southeastern Albania not far from the Greek border, has seen better days. But for the Albanians, Korçë is synonymous with the good life, a solid education, and with relative prosperity. It is perhaps for this reason that many an Albanian bachelor, when choosing a wife, still holds to the old motto *O korçare, o hiç fare* (Either a Korçë girl or nothing). Over the years, Korçë has furnished Albania not only with brides but also with more than its share of writers, intellectuals and people of talent. Foremost among them is poet Natasha Lako.

Born in 1948, Lako published her first poetry in 1964 (already ancient history for Albanian women's literature) and her first collection *Marsi brënda nesh* (March within us) appeared in 1971. She is now the author of five volumes of verse, one novel and numerous successful film scripts for New Albania Film Studios, and is the female poet in Albania to have received the greatest recognition, both nationally and internationally.

*Natyrë e qetë* (Quiet nature) is a selection of eighty-one shorter lyric poems which show Lako at her best. There is a freshness in the metaphors and images of her verse as she travels through the spheres of time and place: Vesuvius, Homeric Athens in a public post office, tortured Prishtinë in the banal but multi-dimensional elevator of the veteran Hotel Bozhur, and inevitably the return to Korçë.

Lako is not only a woman poet but also a women's poet, and this aspect is more apparent than ever in 'Quiet nature', both in her feminist stance and in the said strength of women for sensing nuances of emotion and observing detail. Natasha Lako studies the world from her writing-table, accompanied by, or better, armed with her proverbial sewing needle:

*"My life as a woman*

*Has delineated the expanse of my quiet nature:*

*A library book, pencil, a few sheets of paper*

*And a little sewing needle.*

*Whenever I take up a book to read*

*Or converse with you on paper*

*My golden needle remains alone*

*In the great expanse."*

Albania has never had a 'grande dame' of verse as have its Balkan neighbours. There has been no Elisaveta Bagryana of the Bulgarians, no Desanka Maksimović of the Serbs, to express the nation's soul or to mirror its emotions, and this, for the simple reason that until recently, it had no female writers at all. But a generation ago, virtually all Albanian women were still illiterate beasts of burden. However, times have changed in Albania as elsewhere, and if we hold out a little longer, Natasha Lako may do us the favour.

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