

Agim Vinca  
Poetry hours  
[*Orët e poezisë*].  
Prishtinë. Rilindja. 1990. 561 pages.

Since the abolition by force of the government of Kosovo (Kosova) in the summer of 1990, the firing of virtually all Albanians in management and executive positions (even Albanian medical staff from the hospitals), the banning of 'Rilindja', the only Albanian-language daily newspaper in Yugoslavia, and the suspension of all Albanian-language radio and television broadcasting in Kosovo, the future of Albanian culture and literature in Yugoslavia would seem precarious. Critic and poet Agim Vinca has noted:

*"In the atmosphere in which we Kosovo intellectuals are living, we simply have no more time to deal with literature or to enjoy books... We languish in Kosovo like a wounded eagle."*

That Agim Vinca, (still) professor of modern Albanian verse at the University of Prishtinë, has nonetheless found time and energy amidst what the Irish would euphemistically describe as 'the troubles' to publish a masterful 561-page collection of essays on Albanian and foreign verse is a tribute not only to his own perseverance, but also to the level of maturity that Albanian culture has attained in Kosovo, the poorhouse of Europe. *Orët e poezisë*, which can be translated either as 'Poetry hours' or 'The Muses of poetry', follows the author's *Struktura e zhvillimit të poezisë së sotme shqipe (1945-1980)*, Prishtinë 1985 [The structure of the development of modern Albanian poetry (1945-1980)], as one of the clearest statements on modern Albanian verse to date. In his essays on modern classics and contemporaries we encounter studies on the Albanian poets: Ismail Kadare (b. 1936), Dritëro Agolli (b. 1931), Fatos Arapi (b. 1930), Koçi Petriti (b. 1941), Ndoc Papeleka (b. 1945) and Natasha Lako (b. 1948), and on their Kosovo Albanian counterparts: Din Mehmeti (b. 1932), Azem Shkreli (b. 1938), Rahman Dedaj (b. 1939), Ali Podrimja (b. 1942) and Qerim Ujkani (b. 1937), as well as on foreign authors ranging from Rabindranath Tagore to Charles Baudelaire, Federico García Lorca, Yannis Ritsos, Bertolt Brecht and Vladimir Mayakovsky. The volume also includes probing essays on poetic theory (typology and symbolism), various speeches and book reviews, three 'talks on poetry' and a complete bibliography of Albanian verse in Yugoslavia from 1981 to 1988. Professor Vinca's language is concise and concentrated, but it is the poet in him that makes his criticism such a delight to read.

Agim Vinca was born in 1947 in the Albanian village of Velešta near Struga on the Macedonian side of Lake Ohrid and studied in Prishtinë where he finished his doctorate. In addition to criticism, literary studies and translations, he has published five volumes of popular lyrical verse firmly anchored in the soil of his native land. He is noted among other things for his astute judgments and in recent years, in particular, for his polemics with Serbian and Macedonian intellectuals on the future of the homeland they (still) share.

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