

Kasëm Trebeshina

The season of seasons

[*Stina e stinëve*].

Prishtinë. Gjon Buzuku. 1991. 303 pages

An age of discovery has dawned in Albanian literature. Writers and intellectuals are now rediscovering foreign literature which, with the exception of selected works of the very 'progressive' left, was beyond their reach for half a century, thanks to the watchful eye of the Albanian Party of Labour. What is equally fascinating for them is the rediscovery of the other half of their own literature, works and authors outlawed and expelled from the Parnassus of the nation. Virtually all 'pre-liberation' authors of the thirties and forties, including the sublime national poet Gjergj Fishta (1871-1940), were made to vanish at the flick of a Party wand.

Of the literary *desaparecidos* are also a number of writers from the fifties, among whom was Kasëm Trebeshina. Trebeshina (b. 1926) studied at the Ostrovsky Theatre Institute in Leningrad. A committed communist at the time, but by no means a conformist, he was early to sever links with the Party and later with the Writer's Union in Tiranë. Of his voluminous writing from the late forties and early fifties, only one modest collection of poetry, *Artani dhe Minja*, Tiranë 1959 (Artani and Minja), and an anonymous translation of the plays of García Lorca were ever published.

On 5 October 1953, in an extremely rare act of open dissent in Albanian intellectual life, Kasëm Trebeshina sent a *pro memoria* to Party leader Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) warning him that his cultural policies were leading the nation down the road to disaster. He wrote:

*"... Let us take a closer look at the contents of the literature of socialist realism, even the best of it. A good engineer, a bad engineer, a reformed engineer. A good peasant, a bad one, a reformed one, etc., etc. A good one, a bad one, a reformed one! ... socialist realism is directly linked to the ideas of French absolutism, both in theory and in practice... The Writers' Union itself is organized like an order of mediaeval monks. At the head of the order is a Grand Master and all are obliged to hearken as long as he carries out his functions as such. Do you realize that the distribution of 'functions' and 'privileges' in this manner is mediaeval?... I believe that the greatest destruction to come is going to take place in Albanian intellectual life. The people are going to lose confidence in the State and its leadership, and withdraw into themselves. In order to keep control of them, a need will arise to create a brutal Police State. And this will be but the start... The oppression of opinions, even within the party ranks, is becoming systematic and, in the end, this will give birth to a new monarchy. If things go that far, there will be terrible poverty and only the reign of unparalleled terror will enable you to stay in power. Such a regime will be much more dangerous for itself. A dampening and withdrawal of popular support will shake up the ranks of the leadership, too, which will gradually transform itself into a closed caste like a monarchy with no understanding of the historical realities of the twentieth century. At the end of this historical process you will be obliged to kill one another and the people will be drenched in blood."*

It goes without saying that the Albanian dictator was not particularly amused by the letter. Following this voluntary act of self-destruction, Kasëm Trebeshina, the unpublished author of eighteen volumes of verse, forty-two plays, twenty-two novels and short stories etc., vanished from the literary scene with little trace. After seventeen years in prison, with

interruptions, a comparatively light sentence as he later noted, and twenty years of silence, Trebeshina has now resurfaced from the Balkan Gulags with a handful of other writers and artists to see that his predictions indeed came true.

Scholar and publisher Ardian Klosi (b. 1957) has now edited a number of representative prose pieces for the present volume, *Stina e stinëve* (The season of seasons), which for the first time, provide the reader with a glimpse into Trebeshina's fantasy world. Trebeshina's tales are salted with a good dose of the absurd, or the seemingly absurd, and are in many ways not unlike those of another victim of Stalinist repression, Mitrush Kuteli (1907-1967). His inspiration is drawn from folk tales and from his allergic reaction to the official literary teachings of his age. What could be more innocent and yet more politically revealing than the universe of a child? Is the world an infant discovers around him the same place he will live in as an adult? Where does reality begin and end? The surrealist touch of what the author calls his 'symbolic realism' is one of the consequences of this conscious revolt against the predominant current of socialist realism which stifled so much creative writing in Albania for almost half a century.

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