

Ferdinand Laholli

Enough of this bitter paradox. Poetry 1980-1990

[*Mjaft ky paradoks i hidhur. Poezi 1980-1990*].

Tiranë. Pasqyra. 1992. 95 pages

In July 1990, one of the most dramatic events of recent Albanian history took place. About 5,000 starving refugees who had sought asylum in the German, French and Italian embassies in Tiranë arrived by boat in the port of Brindisi in southern Italy. They had camped out on the embassy compounds for over a week with little food, water and medical care in order to gain their freedom and to bring the forty-six-year-old Stalinist dictatorship in Albania to its knees. In both objectives they succeeded. They were simple people for the most part, unskilled workers, farm labourers, the dregs of Albanian society as they were to be called, people who were now about to embark on a gruelling 48-hour train journey to Germany and who had no idea of what awaited them in the outside world. Among them was a poet.

Ferdinand Laholli (b. 1960) was born and raised in the mournful internment camps of the muddy plain of Myzeqe around Lushnjë. His father had escaped from Albania fifteen days before the poet's birth. Laholli and his remaining family were, in accordance with Albanian custom, automatically declared enemies of the people and consigned to spend the next thirty years of their lives in internment, without the benefits of normal education, housing and jobs. Of his father, Laholli learnt only that he had managed to get to America, the promised land, and had died there.

Savër, Gradishtë and the other internment camps in Myzeqe, though primitive, were not completely devoid of intellectual stimulus. After all, many of the most talented people in Albania were in prison or in internment. Of their cherished possessions, all that these innocent victims of Stalinist repression had been able to take with them into internment were their dreams, their thoughts and their language.

Ferdinand Laholli spent his first year of freedom at a refugee centre in Lower Saxony. There, he spent most of his time in his room writing, and liberating himself from the anguish of his past. The result of this year of monastic contemplation is the poetry collection *Mjaft ky paradoks i hidhur* (Enough of this bitter paradox). It is Laholli's first collection of verse after a good number of poetic contributions to the numerous little Albanian-language periodicals now appearing in Western Europe.

Ferdinand Laholli is a representative of a new generation of poets in Albanian literature. They are young writers who, for the most part, have never had the benefits of formal literary training or of a thorough education for that matter. But what is important, is that they are poets who are free to express genuine sentiment and emotion without self-censorship out of fear of what the editor at the state publishing company might have to say.

First published in: *World Literature Today* 67.3 (summer 1993)