

Jorgo Bllaci
The voices of the night
[*Zërat e natës*].
Tiranë. Lidhja e Shkrimtarëve. 1993. 207 pages

Jorgo Bllaci is a poet of classical proclivities whose refined and engaging verse remained hidden from the public eye for almost a quarter of a century. Born in Gjirokastër in 1938, he worked as a modest teacher and translator before his arrest and imprisonment in the early sixties. Bllaci was one of the many scapegoats sacrificed at the time by the Albanian Party of Labour to terrify the intellectual community into submission. Following his release in 1967, the poet was graciously 'permitted' by the communist authorities to make his living as a construction worker and was unable to resurface as a writer until 1990. It is therefore a two-fold delight to note the appearance of the present volume after so many years of silence. *Zërat e natës* (The voices of the night) offers a collection of elegant flowing verse composed by the poet between 1957 and 1990.

In his youth, during the years of the Soviet-Albanian alliance, Jorgo Bllaci was able to study Russian, a language which at the time provided the Albanians with their only window on the outside world. Steeped in the poetic visions of Pushkin, Lermontov and Esenin, Jorgo Bllaci now finds himself to be one of a dying breed in Albanian culture. The classical meters and form of many of the sixty original poems included in the present collection are a lingering reflection of one of the few positive influences Holy Mother Russia may ever have had upon Albania.

As a lyrical appendix to 'The voices of the night' are Bllaci's felicitous renderings of Chinese (Tu Fu), Persian (Rumi, Sa'adi), Russian (Pushkin, Blok, Esenin), Ukrainian (Shevchenko), Polish (Tuwim), Modern Greek (Solomos, Zalokostas, Paraschos, Krystallis, Palamas), Italian (Carducci), German (Heine, Goethe), British (Burns, Keats, Byron) and American (Longfellow, Frost) poets. Both his original verse and his meticulous translations evince Jorgo Bllaci as a resonant and perceptive poet undaunted by a long night of oblivion.

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