

**Berisha, Anton Nikë: Ernest Koliqi, poet e prozator.** Diadia, Rende (Italy) 1995. 107 pp. [Ernest Koliqi, poet and prose writer].

As Anton Berisha rightly states in his introduction, Ernest Koliqi (1903-1975) is among the greatest figures of Albanian culture in this century. "He was noted as a poet, a prose writer and dramatist, a scholar of written and oral literature, an essayist, a founder of periodicals, a publisher of works of major significance, a talented translator from Italian into Albanian and vice versa, an anthologist, long-time professor holding the chair of Albanian language and literature at *La Sapienza* University in Rome..., Minister of Education (in the Albanian government of 1939), and an ardent patriot..."

Ernest Koliqi served as a distant voice of opposition to the cultural destruction of Albania under Stalinist rule. Because of his activities and at least passive support of fascist rule and Italian occupation during the Second World War, Koliqi was virulently attacked by the post-war Albanian authorities - more so even than Gjergj Fishta who had the good fortune of being dead - as the main proponent of bourgeois, reactionary and fascist literature. The 1983 party history of Albanian literature refers to him only in passing as "Koliqi the traitor" and as late as 1990, Ismail Kadare wrote of him, though in a slightly more differentiated manner: "Among the reactionary writers of the north, Ernest Koliqi of pro-European (i.e. pro-Italian) orientation was a typical example of the harmful effect produced on a genuine talent by adhesion to fascist ideas. His erroneous choice of political camps, which took him progressively from initial pro-fascist sympathies to the acceptance of a ministry in the collaboration government, was to prove fatal."

Preceded by the above-mentioned bilingual (Albanian/Italian) introduction (p. 7-15) and a bio-bibliography (p. 17-24) prepared by the veteran Petro Vuçani of Grottaferrata, Berisha's monograph, *Ernest Koliqi, poet e prozator*, centres on two literary studies: the first (p. 25-68) on Koliqi the poet and the second (p. 69-99) on Koliqi the prose writer. The volume concludes with an Italian-language summary (p. 101-104). In these two essays, Anton Berisha (b. 1946), who now prefers to call himself Anton Nikë Berisha, delineates the sources of Koliqi's literary inspiration: his native town of Shkodër, the fabric of his national identity woven in a foreign land and, in later years, the realization that the Italian exile, in which he found himself, was to be definitive.

Although Berisha gives more extensive treatment to Ernest Koliqi as a poet, it is more likely that this imposing figure of a minor European culture will be remembered for his prose. The tales in Koliqi's second short-story collection, *Tregtar flamujsh*, Tiranë 1935 (Flag merchant), are considered by many observers to rank among the best Albanian prose of the pre-war period.

Despite the political compromises Ernest Koliqi was forced to make in a troubled age, he was and remains a literary and cultural giant, in particular in view of his role in the development of northern Albanian prose. Literary production in Geg dialect reached a zenith in the early forties from every point of view - style, range, content, volume - and much credit for this development goes to publisher, prose writer and scholar Ernest Koliqi. The northern Albanian dialect as a refined literary medium, and indeed Scutarine culture in general, had achieved a modest golden age, only to be brought to a swift demise at the end of the Second World War.

Anton Berisha's approach throughout the book is more panegyric than critical, but this is understandable after half a century of communist disinformation. For reasons of political culture, the time has not yet come for an objective and rigorously critical evaluation of the long silenced and now re-emerging Albanian classics, such as Ernest Koliqi.

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