

Hasan Hasani
Lexicon of Albanian writers 1501-1990
[*Leksikon i shkrimtarëve shqiptarë 1501-1990*].
Prishtinë. Shkëndija. 1994. 350 pages

Up to now, Albanians in search of a monograph containing biographical and bibliographical information on their own literature have had to consult foreign-language works: the *Dictionary of Albanian Literature* (New York 1986) by the present reviewer and *Anafora stên albanikê logotekhnia 1500-1986* (Iôannina 1987) in Greek by Lambros Malamas.

With publication of his long-delayed and much-awaited 'Lexicon of Albanian writers 1501-1990', Kosovo writer and poet Hasan Hasani (b. 1947) provides a great service not only to the Albanian reading public at large, but also to domestic and foreign specialists. The monograph includes basic biographical and bibliographical material on no less than 1,381 Albanian writers and literary figures of note, and includes numerous photographs. The abundance of data which Hasani has managed to gather and compile is impressive, given the circumstances under which he was forced to work. Literature from Albania was not and, for political reasons as yet, is not widely available in Kosovo. Books still have to be smuggled into the country just as they were during the Ottoman Empire. Despite this inconvenience, Hasani's treatment of writers from Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and abroad is surprisingly complete. No authors have been excluded for political reasons, which, in itself, is refreshing for Albanian publishing.

Literary lexicons are 'works in progress' and, even without such unforeseen delays, are usually outdated by the time they are published. A thousand details could be discussed and criticized, and no doubt will be by a flurry of commentators in Tiranë and Prishtinë. The present reviewer will confine himself to one general remark of criticism in what is otherwise a valuable contribution to Albanian scholarship.

In their latent nationalist conflict with the southern Slavs, Kosovo Albanians long had a tendency to ignore the fact that the People's Socialist Republic of Albania was not the paradise on earth they had dreamed it must be. Any open criticism of Enver Hoxha's regime was considered unpatriotic in intellectual circles in Prishtinë. Authors proscribed in Albania, such as Gjergj Fishta and Ernest Koliqi, were never republished in Kosovo, which might otherwise have served as the site of a free press in exile. As such, scholars in recently liberated Tiranë have reservations about their Kosovo brethren, regarding them in many cases as responsible for intellectual collusion with the Stalinist regime.

While Hasani exercises no direct censorship, and notes some cases of arrest and imprisonment, he ignores or politely glosses over the vast majority of the heinous crimes committed against writers and intellectuals during the long decades of Stalinist rule in Albania. The execution or death in prison of noted figures of early twentieth-century literature, such as Kristo Floqi, Ndoc Nikaj, Vinçenc Prennushi, Lazër Shantoja, Terenzio Tocci, and Ndre Zadeja, were well known in the eighties to any observer wishing to know. Equally unmentioned are the imprisonment in concentration camps or otherwise barbarous treatment of post-war writers such as Jorgo Bllaci, Mustafa Greblleshi, Minush Jero, Halil Laze, Petro Marko, Zyhdi Morava, Mehmet Myftiu, Fadil Paçrami, Frederik Rreshpja, Kapllan Resuli, Bashkim Shehu, Ibrahim Uruçi, to note but a few. A cold and scholarly neutrality is not reprehensible in itself, but in this case, the innocent reader is vastly misled about the realities of modern Albanian literature.

While Hasani's lexicon has many merits and is certainly a welcome addition to Albanian studies, it may only serve to exacerbate the latent conflict. One wonders, nonetheless, whether

the critics in Tiranë who will take him to task severely for his omissions will be the same individuals who, five years earlier, would have denounced him as a traitor for the very mention of many a non-conformist author.

First published in: World Literature Today 69.1 (winter 1995)