

Agim Vinca.

*Alternativa letrare shqiptare.*

Skopje. Shkupi. 1995. 333 pages. ISBN 9989-720-00-2.

The ‘Albanian literary alternative’ is the first scholarly synthesis of alternative ideas and currents in twentieth-century Albanian literature, in particular phenomena at variance with the official post-war doctrine of Socialist Realism, which so stifled creative thought in Albania for almost half a century. The word alternative would seem well chosen since open opposition or dissent under the iron fist of Enver Hoxha and the Albanian Party of Labor were unthinkable from the start. And yet, Agim Vinca has managed, between the poles of liberalism and dogmatism, to string together enough elements to form a virtual pattern of alternative thought, including elements of incipient dissent, from 1945 to the end of the dictatorship in 1991.

The 333-page monograph is divided into four sections, of which the first, ‘Literature, the times and ideas,’ contains the essence, introducing as it does four leading figures of the literary alternative. The first, and one of the most interesting characters of Albanian literary politics was Sejfulla Malëshova (1901-1971), also known as Lame Kodra, who was initially responsible for cultural policies in post-war Albania. Malëshova followed a relatively liberal and conciliatory course for the times in order to encourage the reintegration of non-communist forces into the new structures of power. He was not one to condemn all pre-war writers such as Gjergj Fishta as reactionaries, nor was he in favour of a total break with the West. Malëshova soon became the spokesperson of one of the two factions vying for power within the party. With the backing of the Yugoslav communists, however, the faction of his adversary Koçi Xoxe (1917-1949) gained the upper hand by early 1946 and Malëshova fell into disgrace. At a meeting of the Central Committee on 21 February 1946, Malëshova was accused of opportunism and right-wing deviationism and expelled both from the Politburo and from the Central Committee. The only prominent figure of open dissent in the 1950s was Kasem Trebeshina (b. 1926) whose *pro memoria* to Enver Hoxha in 1953 (see WLT 66:3, p. 559) became known only four decades later, many years after Trebeshina’s release from prison and internment. As the third major representative of alternative thought, Vinca introduces contemporary novelist Ismail Kadare (b. 1936) who, though a political conformist, was a literary dissident from the early years of his career and who played an important role in the struggle for literary renewal during the early sixties. Last but not least is leading poet Visar Zhiti (b. 1952), more a victim of circumstance than an active opponent of the regime, but nonetheless a poignant voice of contradiction.

The second section, entitled ‘Tradition and portraits,’ returns to the figures of Albania’s literary past between the two world wars, figures who in one way or another offered intellectual leadership and elements of alternative thought. Among those under study here are Luigj Gurakuqi (1879-1925), Fan Noli (1882-1965), Gjergj Fishta (1871-1940), Petro Marko (1913-1991) and Sterjo Spasse (1918-1989).

The third section, ‘Creations, works, authors,’ offers a collection of previously published literary reviews, at which Agim Vinca is a cogent master. The monograph then concludes in a fourth section with an appendix of alternative texts of cultural politics by Malëshova, Trebeshina, Kadare and Rexhep Qosja (b. 1936), plus a short English and French-language summary of the aims and contents of the book.

Kosovo scholar and professor Agim Vinca (b. 1947), known for his poetry, works of criticism (see WLT 65:2, p. 345) and political essays, provides the Albanian reader a great service with this, his most informative book to date. His position as an outside observer has enabled him to tackle highly controversial material with presence of mind and with requisite objectivity, without falling victim to the petty feuding and destructive intellectual climate of

Tirana. It is to our good fortune that this monograph was finished and published in time because Professor Vinca, expelled from the University of Prishtina after Serbian military occupation, is soon to be incarcerated. He was recently sentenced to prison by a Serbian court in Kosovo for the heinous crime of having visited Albania without a Serbian exit visa.

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