

Fatos Lubonja and John Hodgson (ed.). *Përpyjekja / Endeavour, writings from Albania's critical quarterly*. John Hodgson, tr. Tirana. 1997. 154 pp. USD 6.00.

More books are being printed in Albanian this year than ever before and publishing houses in Tirana, Prishtina, Tetovo, Elbasan and Shkodër are flourishing in their modest way. This is something of a surprise in view of the political, economic and social collapse of the Albanian nation in March 1997 and of the continuing harsh repression of Albanian culture in Kosovo. In contrast to the book market itself, organized literary, cultural and scholarly activity is, however, definitely on the back burner for the moment. Tirana's once burgeoning film industry has all but disappeared, but there are no movie theatres left in Albania anyway. Live theatre and concert performances are at their lowest point in years. All that has replaced the traditional structures of cultural intercourse in Albania are the thousands and thousands of cafes and bars, built for the most part without authorization, which defile the last remaining parks of the cities. The Kosovo newspaper *Rilindja*, published in exile in Tirana and Frankfurt, is the only daily with a regular literary supplement, though the dull Tirana fortnightly *Drita* does continue to inform its readers of some recent publications and of the vague activities of what remains of the Albanian Writers' Union. This being said, there are now only two intellectually challenging periodicals of literary and cultural affairs in Albanian. One is the excellent *MM revistë mikste*, published in Prishtina, an open window on contemporary world culture. The other is the critical journal *Përpyjekja* (Endeavour), issued in Tirana.

*Përpyjekja*, published quarterly by Fatos Lubonja (see WLT 69.2, p. 412) since the winter of 1994, was pretty much a one-man show until recently. Financed in part by the prestigious Soros Foundation, the journal soon became a major voice of intellectual opposition to the increasingly authoritarian Berisha regime. Publisher Lubonja was denounced in the Tirana tabloids as a traitor and 'enemy of Albania' and, in the chaotic spring months of 1997, was forced into hiding. Indeed, he would have fled the country entirely, had it not been for his cat.

A representative selection from the first ten issues of *Përpyjekja* has now appeared in English in the present volume, prepared by British writer John Hodgson, translator of Ismail Kadare's *The three-arched bridge* (see WLT 71.3, p. 630). The editors chose to publish the anthology under its original name *Përpyjekja*, in an 'endeavour' to revive the spirit of the pre-war periodical *Përpyjekja shqiptare* (The Albanian endeavour), a short-lived but influential journal published by Branko Merxhani from October 1936 to 1939. Indeed, the critical spirit of Merxhani, Faik bey Konitza and other authors from the two decades before the communist takeover is well reflected throughout the journal. *Përpyjekja* has endeavoured to give direction to a now imploded society, the remains of which are completely adrift, like the thousands of clandestine Albanian refugees aboard rusty, leaking vessels, trying to cross the Adriatic.

As the editors stress, it is a critical journal, with contributions from the fields of literature, politics and social affairs by a wide range of contemporary Albanian enfants terribles, many of whom in exile. Among them are painter Edi Rama in Paris, writer Bashkim Shehu (see WLT 71.1, p. 196) now in Barcelona, commentator Ardian Klosi in Munich, Rexhep Qosja (see WLT 69.1, p. 200) and Shkëlzen Maliqi, both in beleaguered Prishtina, Costantino Marco in Calabria, Fron Nazi in New York and of course Fatos Lubonja himself, who in November 1997 was awarded a Human Rights Watch prize.

Contributions chosen for this English-language anthology include critical essays by Lubonja such as 'For a critical spirit' and 'Albanian culture and pilot fish'; a controversial exchange by Costantino Marco, Bashkim Shehu and Lubonja over the role of Ismail Kadare as the 'foremost' Albanian writer; prose pieces by Fron Nazi and Lubonja; as well as a number of articles on Albanian politics and critical observations of Albanian society in

general. Presentations and translations of foreign literature, philosophical essays and articles on Albanian history have been appropriately excluded here.

In contrast to the above-mentioned cosmopolitan *MM*, the quarterly *Përpyekja* does not go beyond the Albanian world in its search for solutions, at least not in this English anthology. It criticizes, attacks and endeavours to heal from within in order to overcome what the editors call the ideology of national-communism. For the foreign reader with an interest in what critical Albanian intellectuals have to say about their own culture and society, it provides rare insight.

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