

Luan Starova (ed.). *Faïk Konitza et Guillaume Apollinaire, une amitié européenne*. Paris. L'Esprit des Péninsules. 1998. 239 pp. ISBN 2_910435_37_7. FRF 130.

Though Alphonse de Lamartine and Gabriele D'Annunzio may, in their day, have sent polite words of encouragement to their budding Albanian counterparts, the student of comparative literature would be hard pressed to discover many literary contacts between Albanian writers and the Western world which go beyond such superficial greetings. This said, there is one extraordinary exception, to which the present volume is devoted.

Faïk Konitza (1876-1942) was one of the great figures of Albanian intellectual culture in the early decades of the twentieth century. He wrote little in the way of literature per se - some prose pieces and an unfinished novel - but as a stylist, critic, publicist and political figure he had a tremendous impact on the Albanian literature and culture of his time. Konitza studied in France (Dijon and Paris) and in the United States (Harvard) which enabled him to acquire and adopt the patterns of Western thinking as no Albanian intellectual had ever done before him. In September 1897 he moved to Brussels, where at the age of twenty-two he founded the periodical *Albania*, which was soon to become the most important organ of the Albanian press at the turn of the century. He transferred to London in 1902 and continued to publish the journal there until 1910.

It was in London that Konitza made friends with poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918), initially through correspondence on an article published by the French poet in 1903 in *L'Européen*. Apollinaire stayed with Konitza at the latter's Chinford home in 1903 and 1904 while endeavouring to regain the affections of his beloved Annie Playden. Konitza not only hosted the poet, but seems also to have served as an intermediary in the 'affaire de coeur.' Some forty letters from Konitza to Apollinaire have been preserved. Contacts between the two writers were finally lost in 1909, when Konitza emigrated to the United States. Apollinaire endeavoured to find the Albanian publisher, now in Saint Louis, Missouri, but received no response to his letters.

Une amitié européenne chronicles the friendship and literary ties between Konitza and Apollinaire in what editor Luan Starova calls an 'unfinished symphony' (p. 7-46). The volume also includes texts by Apollinaire on Faïk Konitza and Albania (p. 47-84) and a number of texts by Konitza himself. Among the latter are the essay *Sur l'Albanie* (p. 87-98), originally attributed to Apollinaire, and the treatise *Essai sur les langues naturelles et les langues artificielles* (p. 121-221) which was published in Brussels under the pseudonym Pyrrhus Bardyli. Also reprinted is Apollinaire's review thereof, published in *Pan* in 1909 (p. 225-231).

While the present work cannot compare in scope or depth to the many volumes of European comparative literature and biography which appear on the book market every year, it will be well received to those interested in this tiny Balkan culture or in Apollinaire for that matter. It is the first work of its kind for Albanian literature.

Editor Luan Starova (b. 1941) is an Albanian writer of note in his own right. Born in Pogradec and raised in Macedonia, he worked as professor of French literature at the University of Skopje and is currently serving as the Ambassador of the Republic of Macedonia in Paris. Three of his novels have been translated into French in recent years: *Le temps des chèvres* (Paris 1997), *Le livre de mon père* (Paris 1998), and *Le musée de l'athéisme* (Paris 1999).

Robert Elsie

[Written in May 1990. Unpublished.]