

Ali Podrimja

Défaut de verbe. Édition bilingue. Tr. Alexandre Zotos. [Lack of Verb. Bilingual Edition]
Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. Cheyne. 2000. 109 pp. ISBN 2 84116-047-5.

One critic recently described modern Albanian writing in Kosova and western Macedonia as a literature with more poets than readers. Certainly there is no lack of poetry collections on the Balkan book market, and they range, as one might expect, from the abominable to the sublime. As Kosova emerges from decades of oppression and suffering to form a new (and dare one say soon independent?) European country, its writers are beginning to make their mark on European literature. Still best known among the contemporary poets of Kosova is Ali Podrimja, whose lyric production has been in evolution for forty years now.

Alexandre Zotos, professor at the University of Saint-Etienne, whose *Anthologie de la poésie albanaise* (see. WLT 72.3, p. 662) recently introduced the essentials of classical and contemporary Albanian verse to the French-reading public, has now presented a selection of forty-two of Podrimja's poems in translation. The book offers the reader a good introduction to the work of Ali Podrimja, from the early years of dynamic optimism in the sixties, to the haunts of anguish and personal solitude in the seventies and eighties, and finally to the long shadows of the apocalypse which smothered the country in the late nineties.

Although he has much to tell us, Ali Podrimja is oddly enough a laconic poet. It is this very "dépouillement de l'écriture," as Alexandre Zotos notes in his brief introduction, which constitutes the essence of his vigilance and poetic devotion. Words for Podrimja are the cold and ponderous stones of his poetic landscape, and the symbol of his taciturn mountain people: "God gave them nothing, not even grass / Only snakes / and stones."

The forty-two poems of this bilingual edition are ordered thematically rather than chronologically. This makes the evolution in Podrimja's work somewhat less apparent, but does not detract from the value of the volume. Unfortunately, there is no indication of sources or even a table of contents which might have helped orient the interested reader, but these are matters of editorial preference.

Défaut de verbe is the first French-language poetry volume devoted entirely to one Kosova Albanian poet. Together with the earlier German editions and the new English-language translation (*Who will slay the wolf*, New York 2000) by the present reviewer, this modest selection will now help Ali Podrimja, and indirectly the contemporary literature of Kosova, towards the international recognition he and his new (and dare one say soon independent?) country deserve.

Robert Elsie
Olzheim / Eifel, Germany

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