

Dritëro Agolli.

Un grondement de vents lointains. Alexandre Zotos, tr.

Paris. Le Serpent à Plumes. 1998. 264 pp. ISBN 2-84261-056-3. 129 FRF.

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L'Homme au canon. Alexandre Zotos, tr.

Paris. Le Serpent à Plumes, 1988. 221 pp. ISBN 2-907913-24-7. 39 FRF.

With a literary career spanning some forty years, Dritëro Agolli (b. 1931) is still going strong and seems to be publishing more nowadays than ever before. In Tirana, where he lives in pseudo-retirement, having withdrawn from the muddy and muddled field of Albanian party politics, he has founded his own *Dritëro* Publishing Company and continues to make a major impact on literary and intellectual life in the country.

Among his many recent literary monographs in Albanian are: the verse collections *Lypësi i kohës* (The time beggar, 1995), *Shpirti i gjyshërve* (The spirit of our forefathers, 1996), *Vjen njeriu i çuditshëm* (The strange man approaches, 1996), *Baladë për tim atë dhe për vete* (Ballad for my father and myself, 1997), *Fletorka e mesnatës* (Midnight notebook, 1998), and *Kambana e largët* (The distant bell, 1998); the short story collection *Njerëz të krisur* (Insane people, 1995); the novels *Kalorësi lakuriq* (The naked horseman, 1996) and *Arka e djallit* (The devil's box, 1997); and the 919-page volume of political writings *Teshtimat e lirisë* (The sneezes of freedom, 1997). Agolli is no doubt the most prolific author in the country.

Dritëro Agolli's literary significance as a writer of European stature has been reflected by two recent prose translations into French by Alexandre Zotos (see WLT ... forthcoming). *Un grondement de vents lointains*, a collection of seven short stories, takes up the title of Agolli's one-time short story collection *Zhurma e erërave të dikurshme* (The noise of distant winds), which was published in Tirana in 1964 and then withdrawn from circulation by Communist party apparatchiks. Included here are two tales from the 1964 edition: *Le troisième d'entre nous* and his formerly much published *L'adieu au kapëdan*, as well as a number of other stories originally published in the above-mentioned volume *Njerëz të krisur* (1995). The tales focus upon life in rural Albania from the years of the partisan resistance and civil war during the German occupation of the country to the rigours and inhumanity of the subsequent Communist regime. Agolli offers a multitude of lessons in human geography, portraying with icy observation brief moments of heroism, sacrifice and generosity in a background of cowardice, egoism and despair. One senses why the emotional wounds of his people will not heal.

L'homme au canon, the French translation of *Njeriu me top* (Tirana 1975), was the second novel of Agolli's early career. Mato Gruda is a simple peasant 'at blood' with the clan of the Fizis, i.e., caught up in a sanguinary vendetta passed on from one generation to the next. In the forest one day, he discovers a cannon abandoned by the retreating Italian army and hides it in his shed, obsessed with the idea of revenge. His personal conflict with the Fizis and their patriarch, old Mere, blinds him to the increasing political dissension in the village caused by the presence of rival resistance movements and to the urgent needs of the partisans in their struggle against the invading Germans. Disillusioned by his own ignorance and his failure to blow up the house of old Mere, and saddened by the murder of a friend, Mato Gruda, described on occasion by critics as an Albanian version of Zorba, he comes to realize the overriding interests at stake and hauls his lonely cannon out to come to the aid of his partisan allies in their ambush of the arriving Germans. With the author's co-operation and approval, translator Zotos removed many of the burdening elements of communist propaganda in the original publication, managing thereby to preserve and highlight the air of

sober grandeur for which the novel is remembered. Accordingly, it makes much better reading than it did in Albanian at the time.

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