



Albania's Nightmare of Communism

The Communist regime ruled this tiny nation of around three million souls. From 1946 to 1991. During this time over a hundred thousand innocents were systematically murdered, starved to death and worked to death in labour camps under the regime. Around a third of the population was passed through the brutal slave labour system during the life of the Communist regime. One prisoner who survived the Albania Gulag system wrote the prisoners would state as dark humor, the Cosmonauts could probably see the prison camps from outer space they were so expansive. Many never made it that far, instead dying under the extreme torcher of the state. It was hinted by some who survived the gulags, those were the lucky ones.

The borders of Albania were ringed by armed guards and high electric fences to keep the people in. Thousands of people died trying to escape the cruelty and brutality of life under the Communist Regime. A whole nation turned into one Orwellian prison.

The nature of the Regime:

“Certain clauses in the 1976 constitution effectively circumscribed the exercise of political liberties that the government interpreted as contrary to the established order. In addition, the government denied the population access to information other than that disseminated by the government-controlled media. Internally, the Sigurimi followed the repressive methods of the NKVD, MGB, KGB, and the East German Stasi. At one point, every third Albanian had either been incarcerated in labor camps.”

interroO'Donnell, p. 129.gated by the Sigurimi.

Raymond E. Zickel & Walter R. Iwaskiw. Albania: A Country Study. Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division of the United States Library of Congress. p. 235

“To eliminate dissent, the government imprisoned thousands in forced-labour camps or executed them for crimes such as alleged treachery or for disrupting the proletarian dictatorship. Travel abroad was forbidden after 1968 to all but those on official business.

The justice system regularly degenerated into show trials. An American human rights group described the proceedings of one trial: "...[The defendant] was not permitted to question the witnesses and that, although he was permitted to state his objections to certain aspects of the case, his objections were dismissed by the prosecutor who said, 'Sit down and be quiet. We know better than you.'" In order to lessen the threat of political dissidents and other exiles, relatives of the accused were often arrested, ostracized, and accused of being "enemies of the people". Political executions were common.."

James S. O'Donnell, "Albania's Sigurimi: The ultimate agents of social control" *Problems of Post-Communism* #42 (Nov/Dec 1995): 5p.

Torture was often used to obtain confessions:

"One émigré, for example, testified to being bound by his hands and legs for one and a half months, and beaten with a belt, fists, or boots for periods of two to three hours every two or three days. Another was detained in a cell one meter by eight meters large in the local police station and kept in solitary confinement for a five-day period punctuated by two beating sessions until he signed a confession, he was taken to Sigurimi headquarters, where he was again tortured and questioned, despite his prior confession, until his three-day trial. Still another witness was confined for more than a year in a three-meter square cell underground. During this time, he was interrogated at irregular intervals and subjected to various forms of physical and psychological torture. He was chained to a chair, beaten, and subjected to electric shocks. He was shown a bullet that was supposedly meant for him and told that car engines starting within his earshot were driving victims to their executions, the next of which would be his." *Minnesota International Human Rights Committee*, 46–47.

"There were six institutions for political prisoners and fourteen labour camps where political prisoners and common criminals worked together. It has been estimated that there were approximately 32,000 people imprisoned in Albania in 1985." O'Donnell, *A Coming of Age*, p. 134.

"Article 47 of the Albanian Criminal Code stated that to "escape outside the state, as well as refusal to return to the Fatherland by a person who has been sent to serve or has been permitted temporarily to go outside the state" was an act of treason, a crime punishable by a minimum sentence of ten years or even death." *Minnesota International Human Rights Committee*, 50–53.

"An electrically-wired metal fence stands 600 meters to one kilometer from the actual border. Anyone touching the fence not only risks electrocution, but also sets off alarm bells and lights which alert guards stationed at approximately one-kilometer intervals along the fence. Two meters of soil on either side of the fence are cleared in order to check for footprints of escapees and infiltrators. The area between the fence and the actual border is seeded with booby traps such as coils of wire, noise makers consisting of thin pieces of metal strips on top of two wooden slats with stones in a tin container which rattle if stepped on, and flares that are triggered by contact, thus illuminating would-be escapees during the night." *Minnesota International Human Rights Committee*, 50–53.

"Fatos Lubonja is an Albanian writer who spent a total of 17 years in prisons and

forced labour camps during Enver Hoxha's regime. He is the author of a number of books which have been translated into Italian, German, English and Polish. Among other prizes he received the Alberto Moravia Prize for International Literature in 2002 and the Herder Prize for Literature in 2004."

The below is from his book:

Second Sentence: Inside the Albanian Gulag

by Fatos Lubonja, John Hodgson (Translator)

"Prison camps in Communist Albania were as brutal and claustrophobic as Stalin's gulags, with the additional and unique horror that Albanian prisoners could be charged and re-sentenced while already in prison. In this raw and moving memoir, the prize-winning writer Fatos Lubonja brilliantly evokes life for prisoners of the state as they struggled to cope with the physical and psychological deprivations of imprisonment. Second Sentence opens in 1978 with a vivid description of the author's experiences as a forced laborer in a copper mine in Northern Albania. In the tense camp atmosphere, Lubonja discovers that two of his co-prisoners have written a letter to the Party criticizing "the foremost leader," Enver Hoxha. Shortly afterwards they are spirited away under mysterious circumstances. Lubonja does not make the connection until he is himself re-arrested in the camp with seven others and sent to stand trial as part of an alleged counter-revolutionary organization. With heart-breaking honesty, Lubonja describes the long months of interrogation and solitary confinement as he awaits his second sentence..."

From the final chapter of the book which shows the reality of the regime that thrives on lies, propaganda, slave labour, torcher, murder and fear. Note the Sigurimi were the Albanian NKVD:

I found myself face to face with Kapllan Sako, deputy director of the State Security Service. I had never forgotten the first day of the my initial arrest, and the very first words he had said to me, "We have brought you here to ask about your political views."

I had not seen him since.

Kapllan was standing. He was little changed, still slim, sharp featured, greying—a typical Sigurimi man from the cut of his suit to the parting of his hair. There was also a swarthy character whom I did not know, sitting behind the desk. I noticed a standard sheet of white paper on the corner of the desk.

'Are you Fatos? Kapllan said to me.

'Yes, I replied.

'Do you recognize me?'

'Yes.'

'When did we last meet?'

'In July 1974,' I replied.

He was pleased that I could remember this.

'Why did you take that attitude in court?' He said 'We did not expect this of you.'

'I cannot admit to things I have not done.'

I had no intention of arguing with him, because I was obsessed by the idea that they were devising another sentence for me. I had to watch what I said.

'So our people's court has sentenced you for nothing? His voice rose.

Did this man really believe his own fabrications? It disgusted me to hear him use the phrase 'people's court,' as if it were something sacred, almost the people itself.

'The files are here. Let's go through them together,' I replied.

He did not reply. He was anxious to get to the point:

'You said,"Fadil Kokomani is my best friend..."?'

So this was what got me into trouble.

'I said it in the moral sense, "I replied, 'because of what he stood firm like a man.'

This seemed to take him aback.

'What do you mean, like a man, what sort of man is that?' He grimaced, and reached out for the sheet of white paper on the corner of the desk.

'Look, there's your best friend.'

Under the white paper were several photographs, apparently taken at night with a flash. The faces of Fadil, Vangjel, and Xhelal stared out at me with a gaze more of bewilderment and disgust than of fear. They were sitting on a bank or earth with their wrists handcuffed behind them, all three tied with a rope. They had been photographed a few moments before they were shot.

Kapllan shouted furiously, 'That's where you belong. That's where you'll go if you enter this door again!' and he jabbed his finger at one of the photographs. I could barely recognise Fadil. I saw a swollen face, covered by a stain of blood that spread from the forehead and covered the eyes, part of the nose and the cheeks, and ran in three or four trickles down to the throat. I shuddered. The sight was frightening and weird.. I remembered the photographs of murdered saboteurs exhibited on the display stands of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which had terrified me as a child.

After seeing Fadil, I was too confused to concentrate on the images of the bodies of Vangel and Xhelal. My eyes spilled to the other large photograph underneath, in which the three corpses lay piled on another. There was Iljaz's grey jacket, which

Fadil had worn through the trail.

Kapllan bellowed again. 'And you say, "Fadil Kokomani is my best friend."

'What else can I say?' I replied.

From the words of other Albanians. Life under the Communist system:

<http://www.deshmo.blogspot.ca/>

Communist Prosecutor

By Visar Zhiti

Extract from the book "Trails of Hell"

The prosecutor seemed notoriously oppressive and thick-skinned. In his heavy coat and bushy animal skin collar, he looked like a wild beast. Well, I guess spring hasn't arrived yet. At first I thought they had brought policeman Marku to confront me in case I had broken a rule in the prison cell. I feel bad I was dubious about Marku, but...

"This is the district prosecutor, comrade Avdi Gashi," said the interrogator.

"Explain yourself clearly, or I'll rip off your pants!" brayed the prosecutor. I did not understand what was wrong with him. "They even requested you to be a writer in Tirana," he let out a loud bray like a burp. His cheeks and trachea must have hurt from it. "But we turned them down. And we were right. How could we let an enemy go there? Is he going to explain himself, or should we charge him with an additional crime," he turned his head toward the interrogator, "let's add...?"

"He will talk. He has no way out," the interrogator assured him.

What further accusation is the prosecutor so easily charging me with, as if he is simply adding another ladle of soup in my bowl?

"What did you want with 'rakatakia,'* who you got involved with?" The prosecutor asked with contempt. "Eh?"

Even the interrogator got confused. He asked him in a whisper:

"What do you mean by that, comrade Prosecutor?"

"I don't know! He knows who 'rakatakia' is... the Japanese one."

(Do they want to accuse me of being a Japanese spy?)

"Aha, you are right," the interrogator chuckled. "What is the name of the Japanese poet you translated; since you couldn't stay out of it?" Irritated, he turned towards me,

“Eh, ‘Taketukia?’* Ah! What did you want do with him?”

When I was a student, I couldn’t stand reading passages of Enver Hoxha’s speeches in Russian, which sounded mediocre, gorarçe* translated, and boring, so I found a Japanese poet to read outside of class, Isikava Takuboku. (Did I need to report this to my killers as well?) My friend from Korça, Skënder Rusi, and I decided not to waste our time terribly in vain and chose to translate a poet who would be permitted for exams. We picked a far, far-off Japanese poet who had a lesser known biography. Frankly, he was all we could find. H. Leka from Shkodra lent us the book from his personal library. He was our professor and our friend. We translated the whole book from Russian. But in his notebook Skënder interpreted the tanks more imaginatively and I, perhaps, a little more ironically.

“Talk to us! Why don’t you speak? Vermin! Who gave you rakatakia and taketukia, and why?”

I perceived senseless mumbling sounds.

“What were your relations with critic Xhezair Abazi?” The interrogator asked me abruptly.

“Same as with the others,” I said.

“Is he talking about Xhambazi?”* Howled the prosecutor.

Then they were chatting over something, but the prosecutor could not lower his voice; he would find it easier to unload a heavy bundle of oak twigs from his back than bring down his voice. What? Sparks? What are they informing each other about? What is this Golden Pen...?

“But they also asked you to be a writer, you renegade!” Despite his old age, the prosecutor charged towards me, but the interrogator held him back.

“Wait, don’t you worry about it, I will fix him.”

Translated from The Albanian by Hilda Xhepa

Time to trade places

Visar Zhiti

(Extract from the novel “Torn Hell” by Visar Zhiti)

New prisoners kept coming before we old timers had had a chance to get to know each other, which, by the way, was forbidden. The lack of contact with others lessened one’s self-perception. That poor mass of humanity, seemingly dressed the same, with identical haircuts, equally famished, where another seemed to be you and you someone else; without individuality we were nothing if not empty transparencies, multiplied by a thousand, or two thousand, by a million, by millions. During the age of slavery, three thousand years ago, this setup would have reduced you to nothing more than a slave due to your long years of imprisonment We whispered among

ourselves that cosmonauts could see our jails from afar, from the cosmos, perhaps from the moon, the prison caves, the rows of the condemned, the seemingly endless chain of them, stretching longer than the rivers. There were no prisons anywhere else.

Among the prisoners emerging one day from the police van was a young man with a face paler than those of others who had survived their interrogation period. Around his shoulders he wore a black jacket with a flap in the back. Perhaps that was the fashion outside. He was told to take it to the clothes depot; he would get it back the day he was discharged (or whatever was left of it). He was also to get rid of his shoes and pants and don the prison uniform.

When he was done, he emerged from among the new arrivals and silently, slowly, with the dignity of slow motion, he started climbing the path toward the barbed wire fence, disregarding the prisoners' mounting tension. We had fixed our eyes on him. He walked sure-footed, his head held high. "Hey" – said some voices- "where are you going? There is no exit there. The guards will open fire. . ." These voices caught the attention of the guards inside the compound, where one of them, unexpectedly, rushed toward the newcomer screaming that he stop, as the guards would shoot: "Hey you, prisoneeer! You guards, don't shoooot." The prisoner, however, continued walking, without turning his head, with dignity. He entered the killing zone where signs marked "DO NOT ENTER" were buffeted by the wind like crosses in a graveyard. The soldier in the nearest guard tower, like from inside a wooden monster head and from between its teeth, was aiming his automatic rifle in our direction. "No," yelled the guard from inside the compound, "soldier, don't fire, I, too, am here." He reached the recently sentenced man, grabbed him by his arms and pulled him back. "Turn around," he yelled, "what's the matter with you? Why are you crossing into the forbidden zone, or are you trying to get killed?" Look at the other inmates, be patient!" The former citizen did not open his mouth. "Are you insane?" He nodded in agreement. When he came close to us, he looked bewildered, more terrified of us than of the guns. He probably saw himself like one of us.

I was overcome by sorrow, I didn't know whether for me or for him who wanted to get killed. I not only did not dare kill myself, but had given up thinking altogether. Besides, whom was I supposed to kill, we were no longer human beings. My sorrow turned completely toward the unknown newcomer. It would have been better for him had he been killed. It would have been over for him and a challenge to the status quo. My very thoughts terrified me, for being so merciless toward another's life. I had no right to want someone else's death, even though others felt that way toward me.

I doubt it that from the very beginning we had a psychologist among us. Had there been one, he would have been rejected as a Freudian. More likely, someone among us could have become a psychologist in prison. Chances were slim but psychological anomalies were all around us. A psychologist could have thought along these lines: "The inside guard, no more than a rubber truncheon for the regime, dares to save an enemy's life. That must mean that the dictator is very ill, probably in his death throes; he may even be dead. They may be hiding it as in ancient Chinese dictatorships that were 'led' by dead emperors. Thus, the policeman of the 'class warfare', by saving the life of a prisoner may have been promoting his own future thus extending the life of an evil, even as he prevented death."

Why, are you thinking that the policeman did not save the prisoner's life, just out of human concern . . . ?

"No, no, no way, he was trying to avoid being arrested. Time has come for us to trade places. How could I miss it if the policeman didn't?"

Trading places is not necessarily a change. Can there be no society without condemned individuals, hence without judges, without jails, without prisoners?

Translated from The Albanian by Genc Korça

Unpunished Crime

by Reshat Kripa

It was nearing mid-June in 1985. The summer was unusually cool that year, which seemed to coincide with the political climate of the time. The dictator had died, raising expectations for change in the hearts of the people. They awaited changes from his successor. The people were tired of the camps and prisons spread everywhere and of their lives within the large prison in which the entire population lived, that separated father from son, brother from brother. The Albanian people, who had been isolated for years, wanted to live like other nations of the world. Would this happen, or would it remain an illusion?

Sotir Nastua from Narta was a military soldier in Ravena of Karaburun. When he received three days off, he departed for his hometown. He went out to the street and after waiting a short while, got on a truck that took him to the city of Vlora. There he boarded the shuttle bus that went to his village. When he arrived, the sun was setting and with it, he could see the cooperative's agricultural laborers returning from work in the numerous village vineyards. Among them, he caught sight of his mother whom he greeted and affectionately embraced. They went home together, but he did not stay for long. He washed, changed, and got ready to go out.

"What's the rush son? You just got here. We have not yet seen enough of each other," said his mother. But he acted as if he did not hear her. He went outside and headed for the center of the village. He definitely wanted to meet up with his best friend, Jorgo Shella. They shared a plan they kept secret. He went to his friend's house, but did not find him there. He returned to the center of the village and entered a bar. There he saw Jorgo at a table talking to Aleks, a youth of the village, who was serving in the army as a soldier in Saranda. They greeted each other and Sotir sat down and ordered a glass of wine, like his friends. He wanted to talk to Jorgo, but Aleks's presence prevented him. He couldn't wait for Aleks to leave, when Jorgo suddenly whispered. "I spoke with Aleks about the plan. He is familiar with the place and is willing to help us." Sotir was stunned. Jorgo's act had shocked him. How could he open up to Aleks? How could he trust him with something so dangerous? But now this was a set fact and there was no way it could be reversed. "I would love to come with you," said Aleks, "but you know my situation." He was an only child and his mother was sick. They stayed there chatting until late in the evening, and decided to leave the country the next day. "Your conversation tonight is endless," said the bartender, "Leave now, I have to close." They looked around and noticed there was no one left. They got up, said goodbye to the bartender, and after strolling through

the deserted streets of the village, each went home. The next day they awoke early in the morning and set off for Vlora.

“Poor me, son, I hardly saw you,” said Sotir’s mother, “why didn’t you tell me since last night so I could have baked you some bread rolls?”

“Don’t worry, Mother, we will find everything we need at the place we are going,” he replied as he left. In Vlora, they boarded the bus on the Saranda line. They arrived in the city of Saranda in the afternoon and began to wander the streets, waiting for the hour at which they were to go to the designated place.

Silence had fallen over Pavlo Shella’s home. Their son, Jorgo, had left three days before, along with Sotir and Aleks, and had not returned. Jorgo said he was going to his aunt in the city of Vlora. But no one had seen him there. Pavlo began to worry. He noticed that even the Village Council members seemed to avoid him. “Get up, husband, and go ask the police chief, because otherwise he will question why we have not reported,” said his wife with tears in her eyes. Then it was the custom in every similar case for one to inform the village police chief or the Department of the Interior.

“We will wait. If he does not return tonight, I will go first thing in the morning,” he responded, concerned. That night they heard loud raps at the gate of their home. Pavlo got up and opened it. It was Avni, the locale operative officer, accompanied by Jollanda, head of the United Village Council, and two policemen. “We have come to conduct a search,” they said to Pavlo.

“Why?” he asked, astonished. They did not reply. They pushed him aside and began to turn everything over. They searched everywhere. Pavlo and his wife stood still. When found nothing, they headed out once again. When Avni arrived at the gate’s threshold, he turned toward Pavlo and frigidly said,

“Your son betrayed his country and for traitors there is only one sentence. His body lies in the morgue of Saranda.” The old lady immediately fainted. Pavlo stood frozen stiff. He did not know what to do. Should he cry out? To whom? Should he yell? He did not have enough strength. Once he gathered himself he turned toward his wife and helped her regain consciousness by wetting her face with cold water. She screamed. The village heard her and the people began to come immediately, but when they learned the reason, they left as if there was an epidemic of cholera. Even the brother and sister of the old lady did not dare come. Only Pavlo’s sister and two or three others close to the family came, and tried to console the poor parents as best they could.

The same thing happened in Apostol Nastua’s home. The same search was conducted and the same news of death was given. The same grief erupted. People also began to distance themselves as though there was an outbreak of the plague. Mourning fell over both families. Apostol Nastua did not have the courage to pick up the body of his son. Fear of the consequences of this action forced him to hold his pain inside his soul. In his home they could not even dare cry for the dead. Sotir’s body was buried in Saranda by municipal workers.

Pavlo decided to take on all the consequences. What worse could happen to these

two poor elders? The next day, he alone took the road to Saranda. His married niece lived there. She received him and told him the terrible story that rocked all of Saranda and would horrify anyone who listened to it.

“People say that they were betrayed by the friend accompanying them. When they arrived at the appointed place, they undressed and threw themselves into the sea to swim toward the island of Corfu. Their friend turned around and informed the Department of the Interior. The motor boat of the coastal border guard immediately set off, reaching them in international waters. Communist border guards could have caught and brought them back to Saranda to put them on trial. But they did not do this. They were wild and did not have any human feelings. The criminals, born to kill and massacre people, took out their machine guns and killed both of them. But even this was not enough. Their youthful blood heated the communist sharks even more. They began to hit the young men with the propeller of the motorboat while hurting and disfiguring them all the more. And as if this was not enough, the next day they tied their bodies to a Soviet truck, dragging them through the streets of Saranda to terrorize the people of the city and to scare those citizens who might imagine undertaking a similar heroic act. All this was done under the order of the head of the Department of the Interior. Be strong, Uncle! A dreadful scene awaits you tomorrow. You need to face it with dignity.”

“Yes, my niece, yes. Your uncle is strong and will know how to carry himself,” answered Pavlo, determined.

The next day they went to the city morgue. A horrific scene awaited them there. Pavlo did not recognize his son. The marks of seven bullets were visible on his body. He could identify his son only from the shorts he was wearing. Nearby, his son’s friend Sotir looked the same. Making the most of the kindness of the hospital workers, he washed the corpse and dressed it with clothing he bought in the street market. Then he placed him in a coffin, nailing it so it could not be opened, and left on the municipal van to the village. They arrived home late at night. There he found very few who were close to the family.

After unloading the corpse, the van left immediately.

Llazar, a member of the United Village Council, showed up the next day at the gate of Pavlo’s house. Without coming inside he called to him and warned, “You are not going to bury the dead body in the village cemetery. We do not allow a traitor to rest near the honorable people buried there. This is the decision of the Organization of the Communist Party.

“What should I do?” asked Pavlo, lost. “There lie the graves of my family members.”

“Bury him below in the jalli (a barren piece of salty land by the sea), and do not leave a trace of the grave. I believe you understand,” said Llazar in a commanding tone, and left.

Pavlo remained stone still near the gate. How was it possible for them not to allow any room for his son’s grave, those who just yesterday had greeted and warmly conversed with him? He returned to the room and broke the appalling news to the few people there. “We will complain to the Department of the Interior and if

necessary, to the Party Committee,” said Andoni, Pavllo’s nephew.

He immediately set off for Vlora. But even at the Department of the Interior he received the same answer. He set toward the Party Committee, but no one received him there despite his insistence. Finally the man on duty at the gate told him, “Leave, son; don’t store up more trouble for yourself.”

The village atmosphere was tense. Most people remained locked in their homes to avoid appearing involved with this event. But some shameless others, such as the dentist Nastua or pensioner Apostol, called aloud for no one to attend the funeral ceremony because Pavllo’s son had died as a traitor.

The small cortege of mourners set off that afternoon for the jalli. The few people who happened to be on the street turned their backs to them. Worse, a shameless provocateur began to sing a song that sneered at what had happened. More painful events occurred in the following days. Spirua, a communist and sector supervisor, divorced his wife only because her father had attended the funeral. Whereas Pandeli Andoni, Pavllo’s brother-in-law, who would not consent to the Council’s dictate to divorce his wife, drank poison and ended his life because he could not resist the great pressure.

The year 1990 signaled the beginnings of a huge downfall. Dictators of Eastern Europe began to fall one after the other. Only ours remained. Pavllo thought it was time to bury his son’s remains by the family graves. He exhumed his son’s remains and headed toward the village cemetery. But on the way he was confronted by Jollanda and Antigoni, secretary of the Communist Party, who said, “We are not dead yet. No, no! We are alive and we will crush you. Send back the remains where they were because that is where they belong.” Pavllo was silent and headed back. The remains were placed once again in the jalli. Only after March 22 of 1992 were they able to rest in the village cemetery in their rightful place.

I met with the two elders one day in April of 1993, when I went to their home along with my friends, Mihal and Dino. You could read only mourning in their faces. With tears in their eyes they told the story I described above. They had a huge disappointment in their hearts. Would those who created this tragedy be punished? We searched for Jollanda, Antigoni, Avniu, Llazar and their other lackeys. We were told they had flown to Greece, where only God knows what they were doing and preparing, most definitely new tragedies, like that of the year 1997.

Pavllo had only one appeal. He wanted democracy to bring to justice those who massacred and disfigured his son. Under the pressure of the Political Persecuted People Association and public opinion, the arrest of the ex-head of the Department of Interior in Saranda was made possible. But the trial was a sham. He was convicted and received only three years of prison term for the abuse of public responsibility. Oh, irony of fate! Three years of prison term in exchange for the lives of two 20-year-old young men. Pavllo’s heart was once again let down. The crime was left yet unpunished.

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Translated from The Albanian by Hilda M. Xhepa

Red Holocaust

Dead among the living

by Afrim Imaj

Though shocking, this is true: A resident from Vlora discovers his brother's body after thirty years, bearing the same visage as he did the day they parted.

The central character of this extraordinary narration is seventy-year-old Lavdosh Mersini, from Çeprat of Laberia in Albania. Lavdosh, after many painful attempts to find the remains of his brother, who was executed by a phony communist court, was able to locate them in the anatomy room of Tirana Medical Facility. Just as Lavdosh began to lose hope of ever finding his brother's remains, when every effort seemed wasted, pure chance would grant him unexpected success. His legs took him to where Luan's body resided, appearing as he did when he was twenty-five years old.

"At first I couldn't believe my eyes," said Lavdosh. "It seemed like a dream; like something from those ancient ballads. I had to restrain myself. It was not easy. I stretched my neck and looked him straight in the eye. It was him. Yes, Luan! His eyes longed to tell me something; they were the only things that could talk; everything else, from his head to his feet, was frozen and ice-like. Only his eyesight offered life, warmth, and memories. They were weary and looked far into the horizon, reminiscent of the days when he was in jail, asking about his mother, Hairie. I took my first steps toward him. Was I drawing close to my brother, or close to a ghost? I stretched out to embrace and kiss him, a brother yearning to embrace a brother. He looked young, very young, identical to the day we parted 30 years ago. It was Luan, just the way he had looked that very day, with the same eyes, dark eyebrows, forehead, and full-sized, straight body. Only his hair had been trimmed. A bullet hole on the edge of his nose was mute testimony of the brutal actions of those who had decided his tragic end. He was in formalin, a lot of formalin, which kept his well-built body intact."

Lavdosh had to restrain himself, to rise above his painful shock. He had to bring Luan back home, to remote Çeprat, to be among his brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, friends, and acquaintances, who would rejoice. But first there would be the journey: long, tiring, and deeply moving...

After you have knocked on the door of her apartment somewhere on the outskirts of Durrës city, Lavdosh's sister, Burbuqe, relates an account that sends chills down the spine. She says: "Luan, like Kostandin (1), came back after thirty years. Have you heard the legend of Kostandin? Indeed you have, and I too, though I don't think you have experienced it. I don't know who else had that destiny. Luan's return after thirty years was like that of Kostandin. Yes, yes! While I kissed him, cold though he was, I recalled the ancient legend. The legend of the long wait for the knight leaping over whole mountains to fulfill a promise he had made to his mother. Though Luan had died, he had not perished, and did not have a grave - just like Kostandin! But Luan was not really like Kostandin, because he did not meet his mournful mother, and did not see her fade away, grief-stricken over him..."

She has to force herself to hold back her grief, to stop the tears rolling down her cheeks. Her husband, familiar with the situation, continues the conversation to give her time to compose herself. He begins, "The communists arrested Luan for refusing to collaborate with State Security. They trumped up a case against him - abuse of public funds - during the construction of social and cultural works in the agriculture cooperative. They fixed a shortfall of public funds amounting to 50,000 leks so they could execute him at night with a firearm." The husband falls silent, allowing Burbuqe to resume the conversation. He takes out a pile of papers, discolored by the long, somber passage of time. The papers feature the court's verdict.

The sister of the young martyr goes on thoughtfully, "All of a sudden, they took him from the village where he worked, unjustly handcuffed, and transported him to the prison cells in Vlora. On the way there he met his brother, and confidently handed him the watch for safekeeping. Afterwards we could see him only with the approval of the interrogator. His courage never let him down. He never begged for mercy. The only thing he asked for was cigarettes. His only concern was Mother, who was his first and final worry. He remained that way until October 24, 1968, the day the communists executed him." That was all Burbuqe could say. However, she was certain that her older brother, Lavdosh, knew more. He still lived at the same address, the place where Luan became separated from his heartbroken mother so many years before.

Thirty years after his brother's execution, Lavdosh Mersini still sees the image of Luan making a brave stand against the communist court. "Luan asked the communist judge to look him straight in the eye," says Lavdosh. Each time he tries to visualize his brother's image he remembers Luan fearlessly challenging the false accusations of the State Security people. It is this memory that initiates the conversation...

"After the secret investigations, they took him to court and accused him of misuse of public funds," says Lavdosh. "They rounded up an amount of 50,000 leks in the offices of the State Security. They served it and legalized it in court through the prosecutor, Sotir Spiro, and the judge, Irakli Bozgo. According to them, Luan had inflicted economic damage on the state, an act that would cost him his life. At the time, no one thought it would result in a deadly decision. What's more, witnesses summoned to the court strongly opposed the accusation. The first person who opposed the charge was the key witness, the chairman of the agricultural cooperative of Mavrova, Telo Dana. He disputed all the evidence used by the interrogator and spoke courageously about Luan's good manners. This backlash enraged the communist judge, who arrogantly ousted the main witness from the courtroom. The same thing happened to the next witness, Maliq Hoxha, controller of the cooperative. They ignored his testimony by forcing him out. At that moment, with a powerful and fiery look, Luan rose to his feet on the podium. 'Don't put pressure on innocent people!' he said. 'Cut it short! Do what you have decided to do! I will face you to the end; I will boldly prove your lies. You don't possess valor. You don't have the courage to look me straight in the eye; you work behind the scenes, in the dark, with lies and false accusations.' Luan, in shackles, wanted to continue, but his speech was cut short by the voice of the prosecutor. 'You will get paid for it by bullet, Luan Mersini! You will be rewarded by hanging.'"

This is all he can recall from his brother's trial in Pasha's house, in the Vlora town center. What would come later was obvious at that time. Luan's fate was

predetermined.

The first to receive the grave news was the eldest brother, Bardhyl. He recalls, "When we took his winter clothes to prison, we were told he had been executed." It was a cold October day in 1968, when, on his mother's request, Bardhyl left the house to take food and winter clothing to his brother in the Vlora prison. As he was knocking at the prison door to explain his reason for being there, the officer on duty told him the dreadful news. "Don't you yet know Luan has been executed?" He heard enough to feel weak in his knees.

"I fell on the floor, out cold, and could not remember who brought me back to my feet," says Bardhyl. "I remember how they splashed water onto my face and made me regain consciousness, and the kicks of the officer on the bag filled with clothes and food, which were spread everywhere under his small window. At that moment I thought of our mother. How would I tell her? I left for the village in a state of confusion. I had to hold back my tears. It had been Luan's wish during our last meeting not to shed tears for him. It appeared that he had foreseen his tragedy."

Beyond this act of communist barbarism, Bardhyl Mersini wants to evoke and to give respect to the virtuous life of his brother. Caught in his memory is impish Luan who graduated high school with first-class honors, but "bad biography." He was the son of a kulak, and an obstructionist policy was used to prevent him from attending the university. Heart-to-heart talks about movies and sports with Luan are still very vivid memories to Bardhyl.

Bardhyl says, "Unique was Luan's interest in having his hair western style, dressing nicely, and wearing fashionable ties. Right after graduation he started life in a hurry. He rolled up his sleeves and worked ten to twelve hours a day in construction. 'We have to be ahead of others,' he used to say to us. After work he had another personality. He washed, dressed, and went to Vlora, mostly when there was a soccer match. Movies were his passion. He knew almost all famous actors, and tried to make other young people like them. He was lively and active in his social life, open for help to anyone who knew him. In a few years after school, he was admired by all, a fact that caught the eye of the State Security. They wanted to benefit from his sociability, and used his political "defect", son of a kulak, to put pressure on him. They asked for his collaboration to obtain information about groups in Vlora that were interested in fleeing the country. Though he understood the consequences, he strongly opposed collaboration. He told us, State Security would not easily forget his denial. It was for that reason why the fatal drama took its toll..."

Burbuqe's husband details another aspect of Luan's life, something he will never forget. He recalls, "Mother Hairie refused to give Luan's suit to the police. The security men came accompanied by a dozen police officers. They searched every inch of the house to find and take all his belongings, from books, notebooks, papers, clothes, to nightwear. When they got hold of his new suit, custom made that year for his wedding, mother Hairie stormed upon them. 'You may take my life but not the suit of my son,' she said, and grabbed it from their hands. The police frowned for a moment; but, convinced she would not let it go, they left. She kept the suit by her bed stand until the day she died."

Mother Hairie lived for only a couple of days after Luan's execution. She died at fifty-

five years old, with profound agony that she would never know where her son's remains rested.

According to a former employee of the forensic medical lab, a woman who did not wish to be identified, "They embalmed the body of the young man from Vlora at night." She had tried since then to deliver the news to Luan's family. Lavdosh confirms this fact. He got the message from an acquaintance of hers in Vlora, while he was searching for his brother's remains in Soda Forest, Mezini Well, Olive Plantlet Plantation, Old Beach, and many other places. Her story, connected through work with the cadaver forensic hospital laboratory, does not end here. Something very unusual about this case rooted in her memory. Everything is related to the moment of arrival of Luan's lifeless body.

She remembers, "It was somewhere in the end of 1968. I remember it well because the anatomy faculty was badly in need of cadavers. Following an order from a high ranking communist authority, a group of experts was created in haste with three to four medical doctors and state investigators to search some local prisons. Their prey was primarily from the contingents of political prisoners. One day, early in the morning, the expedition had just arrived from the city of Vlora. I heard one specialist informing the person in charge that in Vlora they had scented prey, "first-rate material", for which they had agreed with the Department of the Interior Ministry to make it part of the laboratory. Furthermore, I learned it was about a young man, twenty-five years old. In the evening of the next day, they informed us that the body was brought in. By coincidence, I saw him the moment they took the body out of the truck. He was a handsome young man with a muscular body. The people who processed him said it was one of the rare cases which would last for a long time in the lab. When I saw the paperwork that came with him, I found the way to send, indirectly, word to his family."

One dead among the living.

The following is what happened to twenty-five-year-old Luan Mersini from Çeprat of Vlora.

They shot him at night, and immediately transported his body to Tirana, the capital. For many hours, and in complete secrecy, medical doctors worked on it. After they embalmed him they placed him in the anatomy lab of Tirana Medical Facility with just basic paperwork. The next day he was placed on the podium of the laboratory, and ever since he had silently 'argued' with the lab coats. Generations of physicians would practice on his body. The dead would coexist with the living for thirty years, until the day 'the silent professor' would abandon his 'unwilling profession' to return home.

Translated from The Albanian by Hilda M. Xhepa

Unspeakable Crime

by Teuta Mema

The Interrogation

Bedri Blloshmi, brother of the executed anti-Communist poet Vilson Blloshmi, recounts how he communicated with his brother by tapping a finger on the wall of a Librazhdi interrogation cell. Vilson told him that Kadri Azbiu himself, the Communist Minister of Internal Affairs, had grilled him in the interrogation cell in Tirana, the capital. After three months of cruel torture, Vilson's left arm was paralyzed. During the night, plainclothes security officers kept him awake. With shackles cutting into his wrists, they forced him to stand on one foot, leaning against the wall. When he collapsed on the cold concrete floor from exhaustion, they raised him back on his foot, and persisted in asking the same question: "Will you accept the proposal of the minister to collaborate with the Albanian secret agents overseas?" Vilson said no; they started the brutal interrogation all over again.

The Trial

On June 7, 1977, outside the Librazhdi movie theatre, a horde of Communists kept screaming at the top of their voices, "Hang the reactionaries! Hang the reactionaries!" Inside, many police officers and numerous individuals carefully selected by State Security operatives applauded the unfamiliar faces that stepped in front of the head judge, Subi Sulçe, to read the false accusations prepared in the State Security offices. Isa Kopaçi, from the People's Army and Todi Bardhi, chairman of the Agricultural Cooperative, read the false charges. The trial went on for six days. In all the proceedings, the judge held up expertise in the form of a written statement crafted by Diana Çuli, Koçi Petriti, and Myzafer Xhaxhiu and screamed: "This will put you to death!" On June 13, 1977, Vilson Blloshmi and Genc Leka were sentenced to death by firing squad. Bedri Blloshmi was sentenced to 25 years in prison.

Expertise (1)

Selim Caka, head of the Communist Interrogation Department in the city of Librazhdi, asked the editor of the newspaper Drita [Light], Diana Çuli, to look into the content of the poems written by Genc Leka. Diana Çuli responded to the request by expressing her expert opinion in a written statement on November 19, 1976. She wrote: "Genc Leka, the author of the poems, is marked with an ideological shake-up. In his poems is sensed a pessimistic spirit; the author does not seem happy, and tries to find happiness somewhere else. Behind the symbols he uses is revealed the desire to stay away from our socialist reality."

Sparrows

Its veil slowly took off the yellow fall.

With frost and blizzard will winter start

Yet birds; in here you endure all,

None can from native land take you apart.

—Genc Leka

After examining "Sparrows" in great detail in order to discover more about it, expert Diana Çuli writes: "Genc Leka uses irony. Our socialist reality looks miserable to him.

Sparrows are personified like unfortunate creatures. It is a reactionary poem.”

Expertise (2)

“On January 1, 1977, in Librazhdi, I, the interrogator of Interior Ministry, Lulo Ymeri, after studying the material about the criminal case number 56, realized that the defendant, Vilson Blloshmi, has written a poem entitled ‘Sahara.’ In order to determine the content of the poem, I decided to ask expert Koçi Petriti, literature teacher at Librazhdi High School, to get to the bottom of the following question: What is the real meaning of the poem, ‘Sahara?’ To answer my question, the poem ‘Sahara’ was made available to him.”

Sahara

Sahara, away is Sahara far,

Sahara of rocks, stones and sand

Only her name befriended by

Having no vision, has no plants.

Sahara has no dreams in mind.

Only stones grind inside her head...

Sahara can't even a song find,

No tears to weep for all her dead.

Sahara in world has no friends,

Sahara has no children to fret

Sahara is a piece of land,

Quarrels all night, the news has spread.

Night in Sahara hates to fall,

It can't stand its stony mat;

There is no love, or chat, or soul;

Her black veil has nothing to wrap.

No one knows why earth was swayed

This injury on its back to hold,

On purpose created was, they state

*To make it a curse to nations all.
When of her, he awfully speaks;
Sahara eavesdrops and snorts;
Sahara feels being so pleased
When among us we curses drop.
And when sunbeam timidly lies
On mossless stones reflecting bright;
Like a veil looks shrouded sky,
To desert lightning with burning light.
Therefore when deep and fiery hatred
Blasting, abusing, someone befalls,
Looms memory intoxicated
For help Sahara promptly it calls.
When evil curse its rage exhausts,
Away in time memory fades...
When rising sun thaws piercing frost
Forlorn wasteland feels desolate.*

— *Vilson Blloshmi*

“It is a hermetic poem; it explicitly has a depressing substance and gloomy figuration. It is a symbolic poem, and here and there turns into allegory, which speaks of one thing or action to be understood as representing another thing or action and symbolically expressing a deeper political meaning. Within the allegory, a different idea is hidden. This hermetic poem is a result of the influence of decadent literary movements, such as symbolism. Symptoms of dark figurations were criticized by the IV Plenum of Central Committee of the Communist Party. Comrade Enver Hoxha in this Plenum, said, among other things, ‘In recent poetry is manifested a tendency to use gloomy figuration which is in conflict with the Albanian tradition of unambiguous poetry. A few young poets have started to adapt in their poems the hermetic style. This is utterly alien to our literature...’ (Report of IV Plenum, p. 20)

What is the real meaning of this hermetic and symbolic poem?

In order to understand the poem as a whole we need to shed light on the symbols 'Sahara and night.'

This poem is not a natural scene, i.e., a mere description of the African desert. If so, it would contain details of a desert, whereas here only the sand and the name of the desert are revealed.

Second, the main meaning of desert, a vast area of land, is shrunk by the line, 'Sahara is a piece of land.'

Third and most significantly, it makes no sense for someone to write a poem about an unknown land which is out of his sphere of observation. This fascination in geography, if supposed to be so or alleged to, is absurd and discreet.

Fourth, if it is a mere panorama of the desert then there is no motive to indicate that the desert rises like a curse, created by mankind, to serve mankind. The poem unfolds the idea that mankind calls the memory of the desert when mankind needs to curse or hate, in the same way someone puts a curse on someone else, another country or the world by saying: May God make you desolate! Or turn you into a desert!

So, if the poem is a real panorama of Sahara, it would come as a creation of nature and not as a creation of mankind, human society.

We understand the symbolism of the poem up to a certain point if we bear in mind the rationale of the author. What is his viewpoint for our socialist reality? Through what eyes does he picture our life? The discontent toward this reality makes him express regressive and nihilistic sentiments and ideas. The symbol 'Sahara' is addressed to a specific country other than the real desert of Sahara. If so, what remains for this country which has no friends or acquaintances, sons or daughters?

The symbol 'Sahara' is made clear up to a certain point in the line 'Sahara is a piece of land,' as well as with the details 'rock...and stone' and 'Night can't stand its stony mat,' along with the lines 'Sahara eavesdrops and snorts,' 'When of her he awfully speaks.' It is possible that the word 'he' stands for mankind, or for those 'friends and acquaintances' that Sahara does not have.

The closest hint is for a small country, a piece of land in conflict with 'friends and acquaintances' that it does not have, and 'with the night' that it does not even get along well with. From the overall spirit of the poem intended by the author 'this piece of land' without friends and acquaintances, is a forlorn country encircled by hostility and damnation, and like an injury on the back of the earth, it serves mankind as a curse that comes out in moments of hatred.

What is 'night' in the poem? What does it symbolize? That 'night' is a symbol can be figured out from the details: 'The news has spread that night quarrels with the desert,' 'Night in Sahara hates to fall,' 'It can't stand its stony mat,' 'Her black veil has nothing to wrap,' because in the desert that 'Is a piece of land,' 'There is no love, or chat, or soul'; 'No tears to weep for all her dead', 'Sahara can't even a song find,' 'Sahara has no dreams in mind', this piece of land etc..."

Therefore, 'curse' is the only thing left for this piece of land, which from hiding 'intoxicated memory' calls for.

The idea of the loneliness of the desert resurfaces throughout the poem and in its conclusion: 'Forlorn wasteland feels desolate.'

Let's go back to the symbol 'night' which is in conflict with the symbol of the desert. The desert, as the poem reveals, has two types of powers it does not get along with: its friends and acquaintances it does not have, and the night. Here 'night' is outside the sphere of friends and acquaintances that 'desert' does not have, which means night is a force within Sahara's sphere and actually inside it like a black veil, which does not have anything to cover.

The symbol 'night' is to some extent confusing. If 'night' was a force that the author sympathizes with, it should have been within the range of 'friends and acquaintances' that 'this piece of land' does not have. So it remains a symbol of a power the author does not like, which for him is night. What might 'night' look like in our reality to the author? If the symbols stand to this interpretation, the poem is in an allusion (it is allegorically spoken, indirectly) to this 'piece of land,' 'devastated,' deserted, desolate, then, according to the author, life is a desert. Nothing is created there. 'This piece of land' feels delighted even when they use it as a curse. The poem has a pessimistic, nihilistic feeling. It denies everything related with human activity. Symbolism makes it allegorical, and gives its content a reactionary meaning.

The poem has several dark, contradictory and meaningless lines which, in fact, convey confusion, dissatisfaction for our reality and the author's fear to express the ideas directly.

I do not believe the poem has an interpretation different from the symbol and allegory used, despite the fact that, here and there, the symbol is incomprehensible and erratic."

January 20, 1977

Literary Expert

Koçi Petriti

The Parliament

In November 2006, in one of the sessions of the Albanian Parliament, the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports of the democratic government of Albania, Bujar Leskaj, denounced the member of the Albanian Parliament, Diana Çuli, "A very successful book is recently published," he said, "written by Sadik Bejko about Vilson Blloshmi and Genc Leka; two poets that Diana Çuli sent to the firing squad with her expertise."

Diana Çuli

"At that time, when I was only 25 years old, that was my judgement about literature."

Execution and Tribute

At midnight of July 17, 1977, two anti-Communist poets, Genc Leka and Vilson Blloshmi, were executed by firing squad. Tied in shackles, a few kilometers away from Librazhdi in the area called Absconder's Creek on the side of a shallow hole dug in haste, Communist terrorists fired bullets through the poets' hearts, and covered the warm bodies with mud. They killed them because they wrote poems the Communist Party found objectionable. Their poems were classified by literature experts as reactionary, and the poets were considered enemies of the Party.

In April 1994, with the decree of the President of the Republic, Sali Berisha, each poet was honored with the title, "Martyr of Democracy." After the ceremony, the coffins were transported to the Librazhdi Cemetery. While the caskets were lowered into the ground, hundreds of mourners burst into applause, and some in the crowd shouted, "You were true heroes, heroes!"

Washington

On October 24, 2004, the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., one of the most well-known cultural centers in the world, organized the educational seminar "Through Current Albania." The expert, Diana Çuli, daughter of a well-known hard-liner Communist family in Albania, also herself a member of the Communist Party since she was a university student, at present a member of the Albanian Parliament representing the Social Democratic Party, a new variation of the former Communist Party, was invited and lectured about "The phases that Albanian literature has gone through and the changes it has undergone with accordance to the time." At the end of the seminar the American coordinator complimented her on behalf of the Smithsonian Institute.

Translated from The Albanian by Hilda M. Xhep

A Heinous Crime

by Teuta Mema

Lamtumirë, atdhe I dashtun,

Po të la, po zemërplasun...

Farewell, fatherland dear,

Yet I leave you in despair...

In the criminal courtroom in the city of Kukësi in Albania, on June 24, 1988, the Communist judge, Agim Hoxha, read aloud the verdict: "Dictated by the interest of the Party in Kukësi district, and the spread of hostile activity in the region, the enemy of the Party and people, Havzi Nela, is sentenced to death. Therefore to serve to a better prevention of the enemy activity within the district, he will be executed by hanging."

The poet Havzi Nela stood up proudly, and, addressing his final words to the Communist judge, Agim Hoxha and to the Communist prosecutor, Nikollaq Helmi, he

said, "You only hastened the time of my departure. I ask for justice and not mercy from you."

Better from this world I depart

Better by worms I eaten be

Better become stone and mud

When the villain abuses me!

Better clod, field or meadow

Better grass, of grazing land,

Better I by not a soul be known

When the ruffian is on my head

Havzi Nela

On August 10, 1988, the anti-Communist poet was hung by a rope in the city he loved most.

At the stroke of midnight on August 10, 1988, Communist terrorists put a rope around the neck of the dissident poet and hung him in the main square of Kukësi. At dawn, in front of the bus travel agency, the lifeless body was seen swaying in the air. Many people saw him, and read the inscription on the piece of cardboard hanging around his neck. "Havzi Nela, enemy of the Party and people." The words Party and people were written in red. The fifty-five-year-old Havzi Nela, wearing a thin, discolored, fully unbuttoned shirt, a pair of worn out cotton pants and a pair of rubber sandals (opinga), stared the terrified onlookers in the eye. There were dark and red scars on his face and hands. When a pregnant woman saw the corpse swinging from the rope, her unborn baby was aborted. Only the members of his family, living in the countryside of Kollovoz, were prohibited from seeing the poet exposed as an enemy of the people.

Havzi Nela's lifeless body dangled from the rope for a long time. Then the uncovered body was shoved onto the trailer of a truck "Soviet Zis". The truck then rolled throughout the city as a means to terrorize the residents.

When you'll find out, I have departed

"May he rest in peace?" whilst say

Do you realize what I've suffered

I, the poet passion hearted?

Havzi Nela

Havzi Nela was hung because he dreamed, thought, and wrote differently than the preaching and the orders of the Communist Party, then the state party of Albania. His poems were classified as political crimes.

Who was the dissident poet?

Havzi Nela was born on February 24, 1934, in the village Kollovoz of the Kukësi district in Albania. He finished elementary and high school while living in extreme poverty. He took his schooling farther and began attending college in the city of Shkodra, where he was expelled as a destructive element because of his beliefs. After much difficulty, he found a job as a school teacher in the elementary school of Plan i Bardhë, a small village in the Mati district. He was also banished from this village because of suspicious activity

- reading some of his poems to his students. The poems were considered “repulsive” at the time. Later, he finished college in Shkodra through correspondence courses. He worked as a teacher in various villages such as Kruma, Lojma, and Shishtavec until 1967, the year he was transferred to Topojan. Topojan was where the most dramatic events for the poet and his family began.

Havzi Nela considered what he was being put through: the endless verifications, being taken into custody many times, and limitations on the kind of work he could do and on where he could live. After reciting to his students the poem “Shko dallëndyshe!... Fly (Go) swallow!...” written by Filip Shiroka, Havzi Nela, with his wife, Lavdie, risked their lives by taking the road to cross the border to Kosova on April 26, 1967. While crossing the borderline, he wrote on a piece of paper, “Lamtumirë, atdhe i dashtun, po të la, po zemërplasun... Farewell, fatherland dear, yet I leave you in despair...” and placed it on a branch of a hazelnut tree for the murderous border guards to find.

A more tragic fate would follow him in occupied Kosova. The Yugoslav soldiers handcuffed Havzi Nela and put him, together with his wife, in Prizreni prison.

On May 6, 1967, the Yugoslav occupiers turned Havzi and Lavdie in at Morina army checkpoint, in exchange for Albanian patriots from Kosova that the Albanian Communist government had to hand over to the Yugoslav Secret Police, “UDB.”

On May 22, 1976, the poet received a fifteen-year sentence for crossing to Kosova. All of his property was confiscated. His wife was sentenced to ten years in prison. The poet never compromised with the dictatorship and its marionettes in prisons and camps.

On August 8, 1975, he was sentenced to eight more years in prison as he was considered an ardent enemy of the Party and people. On December 19, 1986, he was allowed out of jail, but only for a short time. Less than one year later, on October 12, 1987, he was placed under arrest and sent into internal exile at the village of Arrën. On June 24, 1988, Albania’s high court consisting of Communist judges Fehmi Abdiu, Vili Robo and Fatmira Laskaj rejected Lavdie’s appeal against her husband’s conviction and death sentence; the court ordered Havzi Nela should be hanged. The final approval of the death sentence by the Head of the Presidium of the People’s Assembly, Ramiz Alia, led to the proceeding of his execution.

The poet was not buried; Communist terrorists thrust him into the hole of a removed wooden pole.

After he was exposed all day long on August 10, 1988, at midnight Communist terrorists took his body down and thrust him vertically into the hole of a removed wooden pole. He was deprived of the chance to lie down like all dead. He stood on his feet for five years and ten days, until August 20, 1993. After many attempts by the democratic government of Albania, that was the day it became possible to find the hole, covered with stones and thorn-bushes near the village of Kolsh, two miles away from Kukësi. With the presidential decree of the President of the Republic of Albania, Sali Berisha, Havzi Nela was granted the title "Martyr of Democracy."

When you'll ask: "Where is he lying?"

When you'll search to find my grave.

Say: "He deeply hated the tyrant."

Say: "The dirt won't him decay."

Havzi Nela

Now and forever, the poet rests in peace in a modest grave beside his parents in Kollovoz.

When spring will come in fullest bloom,

When nightingale will start to sing.

On stones, thorn-bushes veiled tomb,

A bunch of flowers for me you bring.

Havzi Nela