

Din Mehmeti
Neither on earth nor in heaven
[*As në tokë as në qiell*].
Prishtinë. Rilindja. 1988. 95 pages

Albanian literature can no longer be considered a marginal phenomenon in Yugoslavia, the product of an obscure national minority down in the corner somewhere. Albanian now indeed constitutes the second most widely-spoken language in the Yugoslav federation (after Serbo-Croatian), and the Albanian minority, despite all the political problems inherent in adjustment and recognition, is slowly beginning to make its impact felt on Yugoslav culture and European letters. Though literary prose in Albanian is recent and drama has long been weak, poetry has always enjoyed a solid tradition both in Albania and Kosovo. Publishing statistics also reflect this penchant for verse: in Tiranë about 40% of literary publications over the past few years have been poetry, in Prishtinë up to 80%, something quite unimaginable in the rational West.

Din Mehmeti is among the best-known classical representatives of contemporary verse in Kosovo. He was born in 1932 in the village of Gjocaj i Junikut near Gjakovë (Djakovica) and studied Albanian language and literature at the University of Belgrade. He now lectures at the teacher training college in Gjakovë. Although he has published some prose, literary criticism and a play, he is known primarily for his figurative poetry which has appeared since 1961 in twelve volumes. His most recent book, a collection of seventy-eight lyric poems, is entitled: *As në tokë as në qiell* (Neither on earth nor in heaven).

Mehmeti's verse is one of indigenous sensitivity. He relies, as does Ali Podrimja, also from Gjakovë, on many of the figures, metaphors and symbols of northern Albanian popular verse to imbue and stabilize his restless lyrics with the stoic vision of the mountain tribes. Despite the light breeze of romanticism which transuses his verse, as critic Rexhep Qosja once put it, this creative assimilation of folklore remains strongly fused with a realist current, at times ironic, which takes its roots in part from the ethics of revolt in the tradition of Migjeni (1911-1938) and Esad Mekuli (b. 1916). Mehmeti's poetic restlessness is, nonetheless, not focused on messianic protest or social criticism, but on artistic creativity and individual perfection.

As në tokë as në qiell is divided into five cycles: *Trimat e këngës simë* (The heroes of my song), *Bishat e bardha* (The white beasts), *Kujtesa e letrave* (The memory of letters), *Barka ime mbahu* (May my bark hold), and *Këngë për vete* (Songs for myself).

The title of the fourth cycle *Barka ime mbahu* is perhaps symbolic of the presence of Albanian letters or of the Albanian people in Yugoslavia today. It derives from the poem 'Dialogue with the Lake' composed in Struga on Lake Ohrid, the Yugoslav-Albanian border, during the Struga International Poetry Festival in August 1987:

*The lake has grown dark
The lake has gone mad*

May my bark hold

*On this side are your cliffs
Of bones
On the other side immortal dreams
May my bark hold*

*You once searched for a way out
In your heart*

The cape of hope is afar

*The blood-red flowers
Will arrive*

May my barrack hold...

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