

Zejnullah Rrahmani  
The Albanian national journey  
[*Udhëtimi arbdhetar*].  
Prishtinë. Rilindja. 1992. 271 pages

The novel *Udhëtimi arbdhetar*, which can be roughly translated as 'The Albanian national journey', is a metaphoric exploration into the essence of Albanian being. The title is of significance to Kosovo Albanians in particular. With all the routes of escape along their perilous journey as a nation now being blocked - no forward, no return, not even a staying put - Zejnullah Rrahmani takes flight into the fantastic and the mythical, leading us to a time/place where illusion and reality become one.

The literature of Zejnullah Rrahmani, who was born in the village of Ballovc in northern Kosovo in 1952, is a Proustian fusion of prose and poetry, and some of his texts are indeed sublime art. Rrahmani's basic theme has always been Albanian resistance, not only to current Serbian domination and aggression, but, in a more general sense, as the will of the Albanians as a people to survive and to transport their ethos into a more secure future. Typical of Rrahmani's poetic treatment of Albanian identity have been the early novel *Zanoret e humbura* (The lost vowels), Prishtinë 1974; *E Bukura e Dheut* (The Earthly Beauty), Prishtinë 1977, inspired by the Albanian folk tale of the same name; and the 510-page novel *Sheshi i Unazës* (Ring Square), Prishtinë 1978. Professor Rrahmani teaches literary theory and is currently dean of the University of Prishtinë, now in the underground after its forced closure by the Serbian military in 1992. Together with the equally experimental Anton Pashku, Zejnullah Rrahmani is considered one of the leading stylists of contemporary Albanian prose in Kosovo.

Whether the down-to-earth reader in Albania itself will have any inclination for Rrahmani's nationalist fantasies is questionable, but Albanian readers in former Yugoslavia, now like everyone else in the Balkan quagmire more obsessed than ever with their national identity, will certainly be willing to take the plunge.

*Udhëtimi arbdhetar* is a novel with an historic dimension, but for an entirely different reason. It is very likely that it will enter history as the last novel published by Rilindja Press in Prishtinë, the company which has printed over 90% of Albanian-language books and periodicals in what was once Yugoslavia. Now, Albanians are no longer allowed to set foot in the Rilindja Press building in the city centre. Like the university as well as Albanian secondary schools, radio and television, this venerable institution of Albanian-language culture has been wilfully snuffed out by the Belgrade authorities. Ethnic cleansing can be mute and bloodless, too.

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