

Sabri Hamiti.

*A B C, Albetare për fëmijë të rritur.*

Prishtina (Kosovo). Rilindja. 1994. 118 pages.

Spelling books and alphabets for schools have been of a particular significance to Albanian culture. In view of the numerous and competing writing systems devised for the Albanian language by a flurry of literary clubs in the late nineteenth century, of persistent and widespread illiteracy among the Albanians well into the second half of the twentieth century, and of the late and sluggish development of written culture, alphabets still have a direct fascination. Even today, it is not rare for an Albanian peasant, with evident pride in his voice, to tell you that *his* alphabet has thirty-six letters, making the English-speaking visitor pale in shame at the mere twenty-six of his own language.

Sabri Hamiti has chosen the Albanian alphabet as the *leitmotif* for this, his twentieth book. 'A B C, alphabet for grown-up children' is a volume of supple lyrics which introduce us to the current preoccupations of its author and his people from A to Z, or rather from A to ZH.

This collection of eighty-eight poems is divided into three cycles: thirty-six alphabetical lyrics in the cycle *Koha zero* (Zero hour), a further thirty-six poems in the second cycle entitled *Lulet e egra* (The wild flowers), and sixteen somewhat longer lyrics in the final cycle *Iliria* (Illyria).

A is for *atdheu* (the fatherland), B is for *besa* (the sworn oath which an Albanian would rather die for than break). The heavy symbolism is more than apparent in the context of the Kosovo Albanian struggle for national survival. The awesome spectre of Serbian colonization and of ethnic cleansing looms dark over writers in Kosovo. Like so many other perplexed and intimidated writers on the 'Plain of the Blackbirds,' Sabri Hamiti has taken refuge and found solace in his ethnic roots and his national identity.

The ubiquitous national element which Kosovo Albanian readers search for and need, and which, by the way, most readers in Albania itself react allergically to, is complemented in this volume by the consistently high level of literary sophistication now expected of Sabri Hamiti. It is indeed for these two reasons that *A B C* won the Pjetër Bogdani literature prize as the best literary work of the year 1994.

Sabri Hamiti is a prolific writer of diverse talents. He has made a name for himself not only as a literary critic (cf WLT 64.3, p. 508-509), but also as an original poet, a dramatist, essayist and scholar. As secretary of the Albanian PEN club, he is helping to focus world attention of the dramatic plight of an oppressed nation and its intellectual elite, which is now becoming an endangered species.

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