

Mehmet Kraja.

*Vdekja pa emër.*

Peja/Pec. Dukagjini; Tirana. Eurorilindja. 1995. 105 pp.

The reasons for the traditional weakness of Albanian prose are manifold. Although most professional writers who grew up in Stalinist Albania were able to enjoy the benefits of formal literary training, they were unable to explore the universe around them because of the suffocating political climate which reigned there up to 1991. It was not experience in writing they lacked, but experience in living. Writers in Kosovo, however, who grew up in the more liberal climate of Tito's Yugoslavia, were more or less free to explore the universe around them but, on the other hand, often lacked the formal training necessary to record their thoughts and emotions in a coherent manner.

Experimental prose, as we shall call it for want of a better term, arose in Kosovo under the influence of the masterful Anton Pashku (1937-1995), whose recent death has been a blow to Albanian literature there. In his wake, many notable attempts have been made recently to advance and liberate prose from the late effects of socialist realism. Among the younger writers of the nineties who have experimented in this vein, mention must be made in particular of Kim Mehmeti (see WLT 69:2, p. 408) of Skopje and of Migjen Kelmendi of Prishtina. New directions are also being taken, however, by more established writers, as is the case with Mehmet Kraja.

Mehmet Kraja was born in 1952 in the village of Kështenja in Montenegro and went to school in the once Albanian and now Montenegrin town of Ulcinj on the Adriatic coast. After studies in Prishtina, he worked for the daily newspaper *Rilindja* until it was banned during the Serbian takeover. Kraja is the author of short stories, some literary criticism, novels and plays. As a prose writer, he can be said to have reached full maturity with the 649-page novel *Net bizantine*, Prishtina 1990 (Byzantine nights). He has been living in exile in Tirana since the military occupation of Kosovo and the virtual destruction of Albanian cultural life there.

With *Vdekja pa emër* (Death without a name), Kraja has returned from the epic proportions of 'Byzantine Nights' to a much more intimate scale. One hesitates to use the term 'short stories' in this most recent of his publications, since the twenty-four narratives are very 'short' indeed (an average of four pages each). Each nonetheless conveys the essential attributes of what one might call a short story, concentrating as they do on a single incident or character and creating a successful atmosphere. If there is one common denominator among the narratives, it is perhaps the sense of anguish and despair which prevails.

'Death without a name' has been well received by the reading public. Immediately after initial publication in Kosovo by the innovative Dukagjini Press of Peja / Pec, it was taken up by Eurorilindja and republished in Tirana where readers are now finally willing to approach experimental and alternative works in a more courageous manner.

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