

Visar Zhiti.

*Dyert e gjalla.*

Tirana. Eurorilindja. 1995. 108 pages.

It is perhaps an irony of fate that the modest Visar Zhiti, who shuns the public eye and avoids the ritual denunciations of fellow writers, has now become the poet laureate of his struggling nation. Since his release from prison, Zhiti has returned to life and published four volumes of verse which in many ways reflect the state of being of post-communist Albania.

Zhiti's first verse collection, *Kujtesa e ajrit*, Tirana 1993 (The memory of the air ) [see WLT 67:4, p. 867], which was awarded the Migjeni Prize for the best book of 1993, was followed a year later by *Hedh një kafkë te këmbët tuaja. Poezitë e burgut, 1979-1987*, Tirana 1994 (Throw a skull between your legs. Prison verse, 1979-1987) and by *Mbjellja e vetëtimave*, Skopje 1994 (Sowing lightning).

The present volume, 'The living doors,' subtitled 'poetry in two acts and an intermezzo' is a collection of seventy-seven poems composed between 1980 and 1995. The first half of the volume, 'Act one underground,' are the years of anguish and desperation, reflected in odes on prison cells, skeletons, barbed wire, still life and insanity - human existence reduced to a naked heap of bones. Yet the writer survived and, contrary to common conjecture about poets, did not go mad. "So exhausting is this life / That you'd need eternal sleep to recover."

The second act or 'The self in a reverie,' are the years of freedom and recovery, the return to normality. Again the poet, at last given an opportunity to see something of the outside world, offers proof of his passion and forceful imagination. No detail is too small to escape his attention, from squirrels in a park in Washington to angels in Holland.

Visar Zhiti has remained faithful to the poetic muse although it was she who got him into trouble in the first place. On 24 October 1979, in an expert opinion which has only recently come to light from the files of the *Sigurimi*, two of his fellow writers from the League of Writers and Artists concluded in their evaluation of his poetry: "He is endeavouring to corrupt the readers and to poison their minds and feelings. As demonstrated above, he has expressed erroneous political views in many of his poems, both openly and indirectly, distorting our socialist reality and thus contravening all of our literature and arts which, under the direction of the Party, are struggling fiercely to educate the people. Strongly influenced by bourgeois revisionist ideology, he has fallen victim to a type of poetry which is foreign and hostile to us and which contravenes the course of the Party. With obscure language full of allusions, he has endeavoured to sow the seeds of counter-revolution. On other occasions, he is quite hermetic and utilizes figures of speech which cannot be interpreted at all. Such hermetic and unintelligible poetry is in contradiction to the teachings of the Party for a clear and intelligible literature. This pseudo-poet with his unfavourable imitations of reactionary art has endeavoured to plant poisonous weeds in the pristine garden of our literature and to destroy our literary culture." As a direct result of this report, the poet spent the next seven years of his life in Albanian concentration camps, including a long struggle for survival in the infamous copper mines of Spaç.

Putting the past behind him, Visar Zhiti now works for the Albanian parliament. As chance would have it, he shares an office with the very person who denounced him in 1979.

Robert Elsie

Olzheim / Eifel, Germany