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Adnan Mehmeti - The poet of the Albanian diaspora in the United States of America

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Abstract. Most of the Albanian literary creators who live and work in the United States of America have experienced their affirmation in their homeland, however, in the case of their exile in the United States of America, they have continued their passion for literary art here. creating important works for the Albanian community, but also for the American one. Adnan Mehmeti is one of those Albanian poets, who will reach his affirmation in the field of letters in the United States of America. He has published several books of poetry, but also non-fiction books. His poetry has been translated into several languages, including English, Spanish, Romanian, and Swedish, and has been featured in several poetry anthologies. He is also the winner of several prestigious literary awards. Adnan Mehmeti works and lives in the United States and is the president of the Association of Albanian-American Writers.

Keywords. Adnan Mehmeti, United States of America, Albanian-American writer, poet, poetic anthology

Introduction

The majority of Albanian authors living and working in the United States made their mark in Albania. Affairs migrants to the United States, they continued to produce important works for the Albanian community and for Albanian literature in general. But others, for various reasons, did not have the opportunity to develop their talent in their home country. Some left before they could achieve success in this field. For others, such an achievement was not possible.

Adnan Mehmeti is one of those poets who made a name for himself when he moved to the US. He was born in East Kosovo in Letovice in the district of Bujanoc in 1964. He graduated from the University of Prishtina with a degree in Albanian Language and Literature.

With a manuscript of aforisms and a collection of poetry, he set out for Western Europe. In Switzerland, he taught Albanian to children of immigrants. Meeting and marrying Vilma, a dentist from Tirana, began a new chapter in his life.

After wrestling with whether or not to live in Albania or Switzerland, he chose the latter, the land of the Alps. He was not allowed to publish his books in Kosovo because he was being persecuted by the Serbo-slavic regime. Thus, he published his first book in Tirana, The World of Thoughts, with a foreword by the well known author Ramiz Kelmendi and a review by professor Shefik Osmani. His daughter Tea was born in 1994 in Walenstad in the canton of St.
Galeni. One year later, he left Switzerland and moved to the United States. In 1996, his son Andi was born in Texas. That same year, he published his first collection of poetry with a foreword by the late critic and professor Adriatik Kallulli.

His arrival in America and meeting outstanding people of letters and culture had a positive impact on Adnan's literary career. Without a doubt, meeting the distinguished author, intellectual, and professor Gjekë Marinaj, who works in Dallas, left a great impression on him. On one occasion, he stated that, "If I had not emigrated to the US, I would have remained an average student in the perception of the democracy of the individual. After so many years as a legal American citizen, I have learned and am convinced that this is the most powerful weapon that I have gained. In other words, I have learned to respect the freedom and the opinions of others." This helped him to succeed in America. But Adnan, as an intelligent and cultured person who values others, also found support from the Albanian community in America. Needless to say, the well-respected author and teacher Gjekë Marinaj supported him in his endeavors. In 2001, Gjekë Marinaj founded the first Albanian-American Writers Association which has been active for more than a decade. Adnan Mehmeti has led this organization since 2009.

Besides the collection of aforisms "The World of Thoughts," he has published the following collections of poetry: "I Have Put The Sun In My Pocket" (Tirana 2001), Leaving Loneliness" (Tirana 2004), "Leave The Door Open", (Dallas, 2005), "The Sea In The Middle" (Dallas 2005.) He also published the book "Gjekë Marinaj: More Than A Poet" (New York 2007.) In 2011, the Ada Publishing House in Tirana published the poetry collection "Adverbs Of The Country" which consists of previously published works. During this time, his poetry was translated into several languages including English, Spanish, Romanian, and Swedish. He has also appeared in some anthologies of poetry. Additionally, he has won several prestigious literary awards including The Golden Pen presented by the Albanian-American Writers Association, Pulse from the Literary Magazine of Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas, and the Sezai Surroi Award in Kosovo, etc.

This is but a short summary of the creativity and the humanity of the talented poet Adnan Mehmeti. For more than two decades, he has lived and worked in the United States. He lives with his wife Vilma and their two children Tea and Andi in the beautiful quiet city of Stamford, Connecticut, located on the New York border.

Artistic and Soulful Poetry

"Tea and Andi,
you who keep me awake,
Vilme,
you who give me love!"(Mehmeti, 2011)

It is not a coincidence that I quote these verses by poet Adnan Mehmeti which are dedicated to his family (his two children and his wife.) This poem opens the all inclusive collection "Adverbs Of The Country." The verses cited above emphasize his dedication to his family and his art. Man is born to live and living requires dedication, love of life, love of work, love of family, love of friends, love of surroundings, and love of country. These traits make up the human and creative character of Adnan Mehmeti. He is dedicated to his work and his family. His children are the ones who keep him awake while his wife gives him love. Because of his love for her, he has the two creations that he loves more than anything else. But why do they
keep him awake? Sleeplessness is the condition of a truly dedicated parent concerned about the future of his children who are growing up far from the old country. Under the circumstances, the poet must be dedicated and involved in their lives. Furthermore, he must always be concerned about their professional development. The verses quoted above outline the poet's human and creative profile and they show him as a good husband and parent. Through them, you become acquainted with the spirit of the man who loves his wife and children. After that, he expresses his love for his homeland and his fellow countrymen.

Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that three themes run through his poetry and serve as his creative axis: love, his birthplace, and his dream of going home. This thematic trifecta is natural for a poet who has left his home. He wanders the streets of the world. He searches for and creates a new identity, not a human or national identity, but a societal one in a big free world. But this world is also filled with anachronisms of all kinds. They conceal an unknown world into which you may plunge any moment and from which you will never escape. The poet's longing and love for his birthplace and his beloved people torment him every day. The ever present dream of returning to his home country besieges his thoughts and causes him spiritual suffering. But also, the love for his family, wife, children, and other relatives, keeps him alive and contribute to his optimism.

"It is my turn to leave.
After me it is my wife's turn to leave.
After us it is our children's turn to leave.
But none of us leaves. (Mehmeti, 2011)

This poem was written in Chicago on July 29, 2002. That was many years ago. The poet emphasizes the word "leave" and this shows a decision that he did not act upon. It is the beginning of an ending. The poet alludes to returning to his home country. Although this thought lives in everyone's mind, it does not happen. It does not happen because you must not only decide whether or not you will return but also where you will go. This poem concludes the cycle "With The Horses Of The Wind Beyond The Sea."

On the other hand, the poem "Cameria My Land" brings to mind the people in this area who were violently removed from their land by the Greek government. The poet uses the most loving and painful epithets such as "My land," "My Murdered Conscience," and "Spirit without Sky and Grave." These metaphors and poetic figures of speech depict a painful reality which the poet Adnan Mehmeti knows how to transmit to his readers.

The Birthplace And The Dream of Returning

The birthplace is a constant theme in Albanian literature. It also symbolizes the home country which awakens a sense of nostalgia in a number of poets. They remember their childhood and their first love. They long for their mother, their friends, and the bygone years when they lived without worry. Poets have approached this subject in different ways. Some have elaborated on this theme from the beginning of their creative work. Others come to it later when they begin to burn with longing. Many poets write about their homeland after they are forced to live far away from it.

Adnan Mehmeti is such a poet. Living far away from his home and birthplace, he began to feel nostalgia for it. Anyone would exhibit such feelings for their mother, their friends, and anything that breathed the air of the old country. Adnan Mehmeti's poems on this topic are filled with a mixture of emotions: love and longing for the streets, the village, the school where he
learned the first letters of the alphabet, and all that his home country means to him. We find this in the poems written far from his home country and also in those written in connection with visiting his homeland. Examples of such poems include: "Meditation On Morava", "With The Horses Of The Wind Beyond The Sea", "The Choice Of Homeland", etc. Although he does not directly dedicate them to his homeland, they are still related to his birthplace, his home country, and its history. On the other hand, those directly connected to the home country are found in the cycle "Land Of The Gods" published in the book "Adverbs Of The country." This cycle includes the poems "Scenderbeg In Bujanoc", "Let Us Return To History", "At The Crossroads Of History", "The Houses In Letovice", "The Broken Fences", "He Walked With Quick Stepst." Other poems not included in this cycle but related to this topic include: "My First Class", "Movement", etc.

**Poetry as a search for ancient roots**
In the poet's subconscious, the homeland and birthplace are inseparable. His birthplace constitutes his homeland and his homeland his birthplace. Even when he writes about his mother, his grandfather, his father, and other loved ones, he thinks about his birthplace because all of these people are part of it. They are part of the memories, experiences, and the love that everyone shares for the land, fields, meadows, streets, the houses of the village. They are part of the poet's dreams and of his country's proud history. The poet sings the praises of the Morava, the river that forever flows through his homeland. He does not hesitate to call it the last living witness that relates the history of his country's past. It tells of the legend of the marriage of King Agron, of Scenderbeg’s passing through it after the Battle of Nish and his arrival in Albania in November of 1443, the wars of the brave Idriz Seferit etc. For the poet, the homeland preserves national and familial identity. When he speaks of the Arbaresh, exiled from their homeland six hundred years ago, he reminds them to send their love and thoughts to the old country that it might remain pure:

"Take yr love,
Send it over the sea.
Put it in the walls of the homeland,
My body will come soon." (Mehmeti, 2008)

In "Scenderbeg In Bujanoc", where the recollection of history begins and where the swords of the shield of Arberi were united, the poet turns to the well known story in the form of a legend. It reminds him of the pride and glorious days of old. The city, with its generous inhabitants, remains in the historical and national memory. Its residents do not speak the language of departure. Adnan Mehmeti's poems on this topic are a search for the ancient roots and the preservation of national identity. These poems recall an inspired poet filled with nostalgia for his homeland. Adnan Mehmeti writes the poems related to this topic, as well as the majority of his other poems, at a distance. Under such conditions, Feelings of nostalgia and uneasiness overwhelm him. He writes other poems, however, closer to his homeland, as evidenced by the date and place of their creation which he includes at the end of each poem. These poems reflect show the emotional state of the poet. The dream of returning to the homeland is connected with the dream of the Arberesh. For the dream of returning home is not new, but many hundreds of years old. It is an eternal dream, expressed in writing even before Adnan Mehmeti. People will continue to write about and explore it as long as they live away from the place where they were born and raised. The poet is plagued by leaving the homeland.
and living far away from his people, his childhood memories, and the memories of his youth. These feelings awaken his desire to write poetry about this topic. This also explains his allusions to the Arberesh who left their homeland hundreds of years ago but still dream of going home. The poem "The Star Aphrodite And The Arberesh" shows this most strikingly. The poet wrote this piece in Durres in July of 2004. Visiting to the beautiful beach of Durres and looking out over the endless Adriatic Sea reminded him of the Arberesh and their dream of returning to their home. In this spiritual condition, knowing the dream of the Arberesh, he wrote this poem which is one of the best of its kind. The poet imagines the star of Aphrodite reminding the Arberesh that now as six hundred years ago, the sea passes through the palms of their hands. It promises the Arberesh that it will come again. This symbolizes the Arberesh's unrealized dream of returning to their homeland. This also symbolizes the dream that kept their patriotic feelings alive and helped them to preserve their identity. In the same way, the poet, far from his homeland, together with his family and friends, dreams of going home.

Other poems of this nature include "The Sea And The Poet" dedicated to the poet Zef Serembe, "Cameria, My Land" and "Leaving The Pristina Airport." In "The Sea And The Poet", the author sees similarities between himself and the Albanian Renaissance poet. Both are searching for their beloved: their homeland.

**Poetry As Enlightenment of Spiritual Enigmas**

Adnan Mehmeti's poetry is well thought out and has a clear message. With just a few lines, he says a lot. His poetry is inspiring and meditative. While living far away from his home country, he continues to develop his talent. He takes care to give his readers poems rich in metaphors, comparisons, epithets, etc. He is conscious of his mission as a poet and the history of his people influences his creative work. He views the past from a contemporary perspective. He mentions distinguished historical figures from the Ancient Illyrians to the recent war fought by the UCPMB. Poems of this type include: "The Queen Before Death", "Illyrian Ships", The Pledge Of The Illyrian Soldiers", "Loyalty Or The Throne", Scenderbeg's "Promise", "Prayer", "The Two Brave Ones", "The National Lantern", "Bon voyage, Kostandin", "With Noli In Boston", "The Longing That Burns" (dedicated to the fallen martyr in the war fought by the Presheva Liberation Army), "Medvegje And Bujanoc", To Ridvan Qazim (one of the poet's classmates.) Both readers and critics affirm that his poetry has reached an acceptable level of artistry.

As we have observed, from his first publication, Adnan Mehmeti's poetry has received good reviews. The first to write about his poetry was the well known critic and poetry expert Adriatik Kallulli. Kallulli recognizes Adnan Mehmeti's talent and his gradual but sure development as a poet. Critics recognize other elements that make him a respectable poet. "Metonymy of numbers and their symbolism are not only perceived graphically but also metaphysically. The philosophy of this figures is a construction not perceived outside of the conversion but within the safety of the words", states the scholar and critic Fatmir Terziu (Terziu, 2011).

Furthermore, the author and translator from Romania Baki Ymeri declared that “Adnan Mehmeti possesses an intelligent imagination and chooses clear categories in the domain of the spirit. He further states that his ideas have force and wisdom and are fragile yet powerful at the same time” (Ymeri, 2012).

Fellow poets who live and work in the US, including Pal Ndrecaj, Gjeto Turmalaj, Iliriana Sulkuqi, Ramiz Gjini etc. also appreciate the work of Adnan Mehmeti. Pal Ndrecaj writes that “what impresses you and remains in your mind after reading Adnan Mehmeti's
poetry is the emotional reaction of the readers. They become aware of the values that make life more human and resistance to these values” (Ndrecaj, 2016).

The poet Gjeto Turmalaj considers Adnan Mehmeti’s poetry “a living metaphor written by a man of great talent. He also speaks of the charm and finesse of Adnan Mehmeti’s verses” (Turmalaj, 2008). The poet Iliriana Sulkuqi calls "Adverbs Of The Country" (Ndajfoljet e vendit) a monolog that moves within the spiritual instinct of the author. At the same time, she considers it a dialog with an animate character to whom he dedicates his poetry. With "Adverbs Of The Country", the author has sought to document his movements in time and space with his location as the numerator and love as the denominator. This poetic metaphor is not only historical and geographical but at the same time it is also the limitless space to which he has dedicated himself like a marathon runner (Sulkuqi, 2008). The author Ramiz Gjini, a friend of Adnan Mehmeti, considers him a keen observer of reality who constantly strives to excavate the human spirit in order to enlighten the corners of this world where mysteries are hidden. Such is Adnan: a poet who digs into the human spirit, always seeking to shine a light on spiritual enigmas that lie deep in the labyrinths of life and history.

References