

Book Review

by Isabel Roleff

Child of Nature

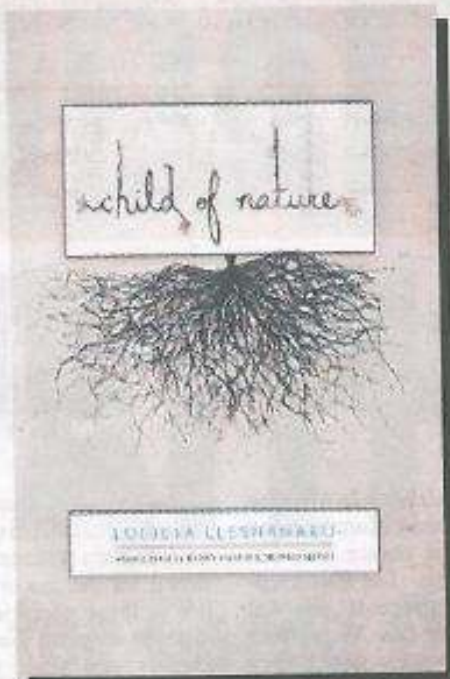
By Luljeta Lleshanaku
(New Directions)

Luljeta Lleshanaku is the confident new voice of Albanian poetry. In *Child of Nature*, her second work to be translated into English, the introspective and personal poems seem to emerge from interior strife – mirroring the political struggle of an entire country freeing itself from totalitarian regime. Yet this collection finds its own distinct style, neither dwelling on Albania's difficult past nor breaking with it and emulating other poetic traditions.

The award-winning poet incorporates into her work her personal experience with the stillness and claustrophobia of the atmosphere under the Stalinist regime. Moreover, a fragile status quo is always present, as if each poem could be destroyed within a second. Each one is a moment saved, a parenthesis in an ever-changing world.

Child of Nature captures the landscape of small villages, mountains and woodlands of Lleshanaku's youth, mapping these to an inner landscape – but without the pain and internal struggle of, say, Sylvia Plath.

Take the following excerpt: 'My body/more abstract than ever, is a country without an anthem, / a country delirious and once near death,



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which I touch / like a mother touching her lips to the forehead of her child / with a high fever.' This slow, introspective merging of a painful past with an unsure future opens a new way of healing difficult experiences not through catharsis, but through acceptance of all aspects of life, good and bad.

The second and third chapter of the collection groups Lleshanaku's autobiographical poems, capturing glimpses of childhood and everyday life in Albania while at the same time becoming more and more introverted, with hardly any external influence. In these works, society as such does not seem to exist – only a circle of close relatives, contact with whom provides the impulse the poems are based on.

Maybe Lleshanaku's greatest achievement is to never judge or deny difficult past times, but to accept and use the strength gained through hardship to create original art without any false sense of over-enthusiasm or hypocrisy. Hers is an individual style free of loud imagery or any noticeable external influences. In this way, *Child of Nature* represents purity.



Isabel Roleff has written articles and reviews for various magazines in her native Germany. More information about her work can be found at irishwritersexchange.com