

Kadare's heresies within "Socialist Realism"

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Abstract

The paper makes an interpretation of narrative characteristics that permeate in some of the most well-known novels of the internationally recognized Albanian writer, Ismail Kadare. By studying some specific, original findings, the author tries to comprehend the way how they were created and were allowed to be published as a series of novels, internationally successful, in one of the cruelest Stalinist dictatorships. Through the study of the narrative techniques it results that often in Kadare's novels, the main narrator is who interprets the Albanian world, its myths and ideological history, is a stranger, and, according to the mentality of the time, he is an enemy of the totalitarian Albania. The artistic reconstruction of Albanian world seen with the eye of the enemy apparently saved the author from the personal responsibilities for wrong political points of view and ideology in relation to state institutions of publication and censorship.

Keywords: Kadare, general, castle, censorship, the socialist realism

Introduction

Ismail Kadare entered into literature as a poet. Despite the achievements as a poet he did not go further than his contemporaries: D. Agolli, F. Arapi, Rr. Dedja, A. Podrimja, A. Shkreli. Meanwhile, as a prose writer, he is among the most well-known European and world writers. In prose, Kadare has enriched Albanian literature with a series of masterpieces, in the namely sterile climate of the Socialist Realism doctrine. By "Socialist Realism" we mean its most liberal version, defined by the American scholar Irina Gutkin

"The foremost principle of the socialist realism is to present the positive main characters, politically obedient and performing heroic deeds. The political mission of such artistic creations is that conflict resolution must be optimistic, it must glorify the Communist Party teachings and reach a positive conclusion"^[1].

Since the Zhdanov doctrine in our country was defended by a totalitarian state, ruthless with those who deviated from his principles, Kadare's artistic courage, featuring the best in prose can be considered "an artistic heresy." Confrontation with the dogma and other ideological taboos of the time is obvious in his first three novels

"General of the Dead Army (1970), The Castle (1972), Chronicle in Stone (1973).

General, Castle, Chronicle left a defining mark to the rest of all his future works. They provided him an indisputable authority in the context of Albanian literature, and ensured as well international recognition, starting with *The General*. Meanwhile the author with these novels inaugurates his entry into the literary scene of the time standing *de facto* outside the official dogma. It seems paradoxical, but it is a fait accompli: the three above-mentioned novels, regarding the creative methods, attributes of the texts and semantic stratifications are not classifiable within the corpus of the literary works of socialist realism.

We believe that the fundamentals of the success of these two novels are:

1-*affiliation of the narrator and*
2-*specific viewpoints* that the author chose for narrators. Referring to the crucial role of points of view in a narrative work it is worth mentioning F.de Saussure when he writes: *it is the point of view that creates the object.*

In the aforementioned novels, narrators help the author to avoid standards of the Marxist creative aesthetic standards, the party line, folk patriotism, political militancy and other non-cultural passions, typical and compulsory for that area. By faithfully observing the psychic and mental structure of the narrators, while maintaining their natural viewpoints, Kadare in reality respected his creative gift but not respecting the artistic creative requirements of the party propaganda. Kadare's narrators are strangers for the Albanian world; while in *General* and *Castle* they come from enemy camps. Their view point excludes any chance to see the Albanian reality with any positive, pathetic idolatry.

General and *Chronicle* has as its time and setting, events related to the period known as Anti-Fascist National Liberation War (AFNLW) glorified as the brightest in the history of Albania, when, under the leadership of Albanian Communist Party (ACP) the country was freed, leaving behind the darkness and oppression era of many centuries, and became part of the Socialist paradise. This constant demagogic standard of the communist historiography is indisputable today and in the 21st century, Kadare avoided completely this stance. Normally, he admits the Albanians' war against fascism, but with normal tones, without hyperbolic exaggeration and mystification as it is treated in all literary genres in the period of Socialist Realism. Kadare does not give, either directly or implicitly *the unsubstituted savior role* of the Communist Party. In *General*, communists are rarely mentioned, for some bizarre actions such as intervention in Tirana's urban planning to avoid similarities with fascist ax emblem. In *Chronicle* their leader Hoxha, is only referred to as "an eccentric person holding dark

glasses who hangs around saying "I will fight, I will fight." War is drawn with dark color, as a great evil, an enormous nonsense, an escape from normality, as awful sacrifice of human lives:

"Young boys and young girls gather together. They sing in cellars banned songs. We will destroy the old world they say, we will make a new world.

-A new world? And how is this new world?

-They know Xhiko, they know-for to make this new world blood will be shed. Great sacrifice – I can't believe it. Really." (p.242)

In the novel *General*, it is narrated in the third person through the optics of the general and the priest, representatives of the occupying army and an opposite social and political system. They are not inclined to speak positively about the Albanian reality; they are free to express themselves openly with one - another for what they see. This unlimited freedom of expression strengthens the realistic spirit of the literary work, distancing itself from samples of Socialist Realism, aids to articulate critical views and perspective about Albanians, actuality, and history. At the same time, the interpretation of the Albanian world through their perspective frees the author from responsibility since those who speak for us are our enemies:

"Albanians are fierce and backward people. Since the very time when they are babies in the in the cradle, they put guns next to them, so the gun becomes an inseparable part of their lives."(p.36)

Unadorned and without idyllic panoramas of cooperative existence is portrayed life of people in socialist regime. People traveling in truck trailers, villagers dressed in dark wool clothes, bunkers everywhere, fortifications, weird kind of people ... etc.

"The general and the priest looked the woman, but she had turned and was fleeing; its hub wavered for some time until disappeared in an alley in the village." (p.51).

Their backward highlanders that until yesterday lived the same as in the Middle Ages." (p.135).

In the *General* one can't find even the official thesis of the time for the anti-fascist resistance. The time of the resistance during the first days of the occupation is given by the author through the character named Nik Martini. His portrait is drawn according to the mythical imagination for the unknown eternal soldier of his homeland, somewhere on seashore, waiting for the enemy.

General and priest in their conversations characterize the locals, namely Albanians. They discuss their external appearance and consciousness, racial qualities, ethno-psychological trends, music, clothes, behavior. Their characterizations of views sound as repeated denigrating articulations of different propaganda centers have produced against us. On the other hand, such assertions, instrumental, were not necessary in their dialogues, if the plot of the novel is reduced in the peace mission of two representatives of a defeated army in the land of winners. Interpretations converge on one point: The general and the priest represent major powers in relation to the numerically small people.

The Liberation army is not opposed morally to the Dead Army; it has a challenging counterweight challenging within itself, diaries and testimonies of former fascist soldiers. They deny and make a parody of military morale and the combat spirit of a conquering mission. They are proof of a reality that infringes and denaturalizes them without mercy. In *General* is never talked positively about the war, even if it means the survival or the country's liberation. Neutralization of enemies and of the evil they represent, even schematically, as it is common in the works of socialist realism, would be indispensable. In the *General*, the foreign worldview, set again in a hostile position, is betrayed by its representatives themselves: foreign soldiers are given as ordinary human beings, without the heavy shadow of the invaders, sexually hunger and with the natural desire to be normally buried and not separate from each other.

Travel around the country is not used by the author to reflect great transformations, and the beautiful socialist life. On the contrary, a gloomy environment, here and there strange, non-emancipated villagers, exotic in appearance and with an uncivilized behavior. The Albanian representative in the expedition, the specialist is a silent man, being not at all a representative of the prototype of the time, which means, not a revolutionary militant. It is masterfully drawn as a positive figure, but he hasn't the features of the representative hero, a missionary and spokesman of the time, even though he is close to the world of people who represent opposing worlds. The Albanian specialist is non-typical in his role facing enemies. Silent, he expresses loudly his opinion only once, by breaking peace between them:

"Twenty years ago you were writing fascist slogans in the chests of our hanged fellows" (p.54)."

A culminating moment in the novel is the wedding and the actions of the old woman Nicë. Murder of the assassinator of her husband and rapist of her daughter is natural and justified in the context of a world war. But the burial of the colonel at her home doorstep where she must pass a thousand times is a horror episode. Nica as a catalyst figure, not only transcends the boundaries of Socialist Realism but also the standards of the realist novel in general. She illustrates the viewpoints of the general and the priest on ethno-psychosis of the locals, on fatality and the century mourning of the Albanian spirit displayed in their songs, as they say. History and the monologue of the old woman Nicë was involved regularly in school literary anthology, however, it remains outside the functions of the acclaimed positive character, not only in the framework of Socialist Realism literature. She is enigmatic in the beginning and terrifying in the end. Incomprehensible even by her fellow villagers.

"-Do not be afraid, intervened another, even they knew Albanian; they wouldn't understand at all her grief." (p.210)

In *The castle* the narration is about the Ottoman army camp. If it wouldn't be mentioned several times Scanderbeg, or our Gjergj, this novel could be the story of any Ottoman siege, wherever there were castles. Only the symbol of resistance relates the novel to the Albanian world while the reader's knowledge about that era, the social strata, key figures, well-known events of that time not only are not enriched historically, but are rather simplified. There is a minimalist data on Gjergj Kastriot (Scanderbeg) that, *once he caught a*

cold, and had wrapped his neck with a scarf ... If we seek to find historical elements for the Albanian side, without interfering with our earlier knowledge, we would get only Ottoman information about the structure of the Ottoman army, about the organization, hierarchies, the ideological spirit, the way of functioning etc. At school and university interpretations Castle is taken as the primary symbol of strength, the resistance of our people and the title of the novel in Albanian imposes this kind of idea-emotional attitude. Meanwhile, the novel text discloses in versatility only the opponent camp and the figure of the Turkish pasha. Pasha is the central figure. The same as in the novels *General*, and *Castle* by focusing on the entirety of the means of expression, and self-understanding and worldview of the enemy camp, it is shaped the content of the giving us a novel that goes beyond the socialist-realistic standard.

The result of viewing outwardly the Albanian space is the cold objective description of nature, mountains, poverty, and sadness.

“He had never seen such mountains. They resembled a serious nightmare which constantly appeared not letting you become awake. Land and rocks were hurled from towards the sky with such a frenzy that seemed to have broken all the laws of nature. Allah must have been angry when he created this place.” (p.8)

In the *Castle*, what contradicted the literary norms of the time is the conflict solution. The conflict ended the same as in a classicist drama, with an artificial solution, *deus ex machina*. It is a masterful solution that goes alongside the symbolist and allegorical spirit of the novel. There is no victory of one army against another army; there is no final decisive battle or event where each side gets what it deserves. The dramatic knot is solved by nature. Unlike all the expected solutions, the fate of war was determined by the rain. Victory does not belong to the one who makes the right war, the side that has a great leader like Scanderbeg (Gjergj Kastrioti), who has in his army selfless and sacrificing Albanians, victory or loss depends on the rain clouds. Pasha is afraid of nature and the whims of fate, not of the defenders of the castle:

“For a long time he had a peaceful sleep without dreams. The dream came later. He dreamed of rain drums. Lined up one after another, they began be heard without anyone hitting them. He ordered them to be silent, but they did not obey to him. They continued to sound with a muted roar. Tursun Pasha awoke. This was not anymore a continuation of the dream. Away, somewhere in the depths of the camp, real drums of rain were sounding. He felt a soft noise on the steep tent sites and everything suddenly became clear and irreparable. The rain.” (p.233)

With no rain, the castle would surrender due to thirst, by nullifying the ultimate sacrifice and endurance of the castle defenders. With the onset of rain Pasha gave up any other effort, accepted even placidly no comforting illusions for his future.

Life and war are given as bloody insidious games of chance. In this case, the fate (rain) was in favor of the castle and Turkish Pasha accept in advance the outcome of the game, with respect for himself and with dignity and unwavering equanimity he departs from life, through the rain, as the character of Ernest Hemingway. Before committing the suicide, he calls Exher, the woman who was pregnant.

The main battles occur in the consciousness of the Pasha. All the time of the siege, he mused about his subordinates, the declared opponents, for his friends and enemies in the capital. He is constantly observing his side. His people, war headquarters, his superiors in the capital and nature decide his fate as a man and as a soldier. Picture of Pasha is a great achievement for the author, because through his complexity, the novel conflict fully exhausts the patriotic motive, eliminates the ethical plan of comparisons and reveals a greater drama, a more complex and more universal one- the absurd and fatality of the human existence. With *Castle* Kadare not only fully escaped Socialist Realism but also enriched in the international level the typology of the historical novel.

In the *Chronicle* there are three storytellers. Firstly, the author as a little boy tells the most of the story. Secondly, the author-writer who interferes several times between chapters, in the introduction and memories sections. Thirdly: chronicler Xivo Gavo. The narration of Xivo Gavo is complemented with the story of the old woman Sose (in the absence of the chronicle) and the sayings of strangers.

With three narrative voices, in the *Chronicle* is aimed at the morphology of the life of an archaic city between war and other strange phenomena of the twentieth century civilization. The author withdraws from building a fictitious world and portrayed the real world of his unique memories. The artistic literary piece based on this historic period becomes more difficult when part of the history of the city is the communist movement and Enver Hoxha. He was perceived at his hometown as a man who seemed fond of education in France, but he was a different man now....

The first narrator, the child-author is realized at the zero degree of writing, the “writing degree zero” if we use an expression of R. Barthes when he analyses “The Outsider” of A. Camus. The child-author is attentive but neutral. He never shows emotions except when he sees blood in a slaughterhouse of livestock. This rare case of the emotional reaction of the hero is identical with the emotional remembrance that Camus himself keeps from his father, a memory he conveys to his character Merso; Camus’ father one day went to a public execution, in the guillotine and returned from there shocked, pale, and vomiting. It remains to be analyzed if we are dealing with random or genuine impact. Kadare, associates the image of livestock slaughtering with the game of postage stamps to create a metaphorical slaughterhouse of states and people. Either the burning of his house does not impress him, or the imaginary burning of his grandmother. He displays an unusual attention to the world around him, to the ordinary things, but is not included in the show of emotions and judgments, even those of childish world.

Among “old women of life”, young communists, town gossips, the author does not show any kind of stance. This child of a city-village, as it was Gjirokastra of that time, has no idea what peasants are and where they go when they leave the city. His ignorance and naivety is artificial, quite unacceptable for the age of the narrator, since he is a normal child. He is portrayed insensitive even to the possible flooding and burning of his house, unaware of the serious events happening around, displacement of people from their homes, bombings, assassinations, etc. The author-narrator continues to pretend he is a child, while he tells a story only for adults. The neutrality of the main narrator brings an unknown lyric-philosophical dimension of the Albanian prose. We have to do with a new mode of narration, an apocryphal story, hidden behind the age

of the child-narrator. The “child-narrator” recounts neutrally the same as Roland Barthes wrote about the novel “The Outsider” by A. Camus:

“White....neutral ... demonstrative ...flat...colorless.... transparent ... innocent ... timeless ...narration.”

The child’s love for the enemy bomber aircraft is also unnatural. Even this action is unlikely to match in any case with the child psyche. There is another correspondence (or influence) by philosophy of Merse, in “The Outsider” who conspires against himself. By paraphrasing the author of Merse, Camus, *we have a moral cooperation between the victim and the perpetrator, to make easier the sentence when that is inevitable.*

“Zero degree of writing” was an unknown method for the Albanian literature, even a punishable one for the time. The age of the narrator seems to have saved it from censorship and official criticism by allowing the magic of narration to be conveyed to the reader.

The second narrator-the author-writer makes an introduction, some interference with memories and among chapters. In the introduction he recounts about the phantasmagoric aspect of the city;

“It was hard to be a child in this city”

In the interventions among chapters adds a poetic dimension to the complex world that is unfolded. He makes generalizations based on daily events, combinations of feelings and thoughts with poetry and cruelty of life. Even this narrator (author-writer) remains unaffected by the ideological spirit of the time when he wrote. No other nostalgia and gratitude to the city of childhood, except the nostalgia for old women of life, for the beams of his house and the stones of the street pavements.

The third narrator; chronicler Xivo Gavo serves to introduce in the novel world a series of events and facts that no discourse of other narrators can accept: Who is the most serious man of the city, who is the best at drinking large amounts of coffee, the list of those killed by bombing, schedules and addresses of midwives, changing of currencies by invaders, linguistic rubrics. Chronicle of Xivo Gavo, among the chief actors of the novel skips the most important factors of age, skips continental sensational events of the world and meticulously sculpts the gothic prosaicism, the original physiognomy and dramatic life of a real city. War was given as an injustice falling from the sky that severely violates the city life, but in quiet pauses, all driven by memory, even the chronicler scrupulous Xivo Gavo. For the entry into the city of the Greek army he writes:

On November 18 in the city entered g ... No one could explain such a saving of words for an event so desperate, much more usage of just one letter (g) for all the misery of the Greeks. (p.172)

Old woman Sose and sayings of unknown people replace many times the chronicle by offering a more surreal optics; predictions, intuitions, comments, interpretations, startling result of experiences, common myths and destruction of myths, protagonists of historical factors. In the *Chronicle*, one can find in its initial stage a model of the future ruling Communist state; the relentless destruction of the opposing classes, destroying each other, the destruction of private property, expropriation,

nationalization, socialization of extreme life including common mess halls.

Conclusion

General, Castle, Chronicle not only in the content aspect, as it was discussed above, but also at the level of artistic expression, are nevertheless unclassifiable among the works of Socialist Realism. The unmerciful destruction of the opposite classes, the annihilation of each other, destruction of the private property, expropriates, nationalization, extreme socialization of life up to the common mess halls, are narrated openly, illustrated by concrete episodes, and are conveyed without any sympathy from the narrator to the reader. When talking about the class war, for sacrifices of the new world, when partisans kill their friend, when the illegal communist kills his uncle, his idea-emotional stance is condemning: disaster, I can’t believe it, I can’t believe it, why I didn’t die last winter etc.

There have been earlier attempts to investigate traces of anti-conformism in Kadare’s literary work. A noticeable one is the study of Arshi Pipa *Subversion to conformism* (first edition, 1987, the US quarterly journal “Telos”). Despite the professional skills of the author this work was not based on a philological methodology.

Kadare was able to create literary masterpieces within the framework of Socialist Realism without obeying to the intolerable rules of the official dogma, therefore curiosity of readers and researchers continues. Of course, in the future, additional studies are expected to be more thorough. Up to now, Kadare’s works convinces you that in addition to the extraordinary talent, his courage was one of the reasons of his success. Artist’s creative courage, although it is never enough for the true art, it is, however, always necessary and irreplaceable.

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