

Chapter -I

Introduction

Dictatorship and literature really cannot be depicted as anything else but two wild animals that wrestle continuously. But it being the case that their claws are different, so too are the wounds they cause. The wounds sustained by the writer are fearsome, in as much as they are immediate. Whereas the wounds that he causes the dictator are slow to develop, but of the kind that never heal. (Kadare, “Aspects of Dictatorship”)

The Man Booker Prize for fiction, one of the literary world’s most prestigious honors, is awarded each year for the best novel written in English by a writer from the erstwhile Commonwealth of Nations. The prize seeks to recognize a living author who has made significant contributions to world literature. On 26 June 2005, the first Man Booker International Prize was awarded to the Albanian poet and novelist Ismail Kadare. While awarding the prize, the panel judge, Professor John Carey hailed Kadare as a guardian of Albanian identity, “a writer who maps a whole culture [...] a universal writer in a tradition of

storytelling that goes back to Homer” (www.guardian.com.uk). Kadare certainly brings a powerful sense of ethnic identity to his writing, introducing for the first time on the international stage the customs of his native land. However, he does not dwell on local colour for its own sake and the bardic quality of his work must be read in its contemporary context. Kadare may be considered as the last great chronicler of life under Stalinism. His novels while determined by the history of the dictatorship transcend the immediate history of their genesis to communicate to a wider audience.

Context is all important to an understanding of Kadare’s work. The Albanian experience differed in important ways from that of the other Eastern European socialist dictatorships. Official Albanian scribes and artists presented the history of communist Albania as the saga of a backward, besieged people marching towards a statistics utopia. The actual story of communist Albania is however quintessentially dystopian, a bleak inventory of blood purges and repression, a case study in betrayal and obsessive xenophobia, a cacophony of bitter polemics with real and fantasized enemies that the outside world barely took time to notice.

Twenty years of party infighting and extermination campaigns against the country’s antique communist opposition, the communist

leaders Enver Hoxha and Mehmet Shehu emerged as the dominant figures in Albania. They concentrated primarily on securing and maintaining their power base and secondarily on preserving Albania's independence and reshaping the country according to the procrustean precepts of orthodox Stalinism. In pursuit of these goals, the communist elite adopted or terrorized the entire Albanian population into blind obedience, herding them into obligatory front organizations, bombarding them with propaganda and disciplining them with a police leviathan untrammelled by anything resembling legal, ethical, religious or political norms. Hoxha and Shehu dominated Albania and denied the Albanian people the most basic human and civil rights by presenting themselves, as well as the communist party and state security apparatus they controlled, as the vigilant defenders of the country's independence. After Albania's break with Yugoslavia in late 1948, Albania was a client of the Soviet Union. Later they made rapprochement with Josip Broz Tito, President of Yugoslavia after Stalin's death. In 1961, Albania turned away from Moscow and found a new benefactor in China. When China's isolation ended in the 1970s, Albania turned away from its giant Asian patron and adopted a strict policy of autarky that brought the country economic ruin. In 1967 all religious bodies were banned,

Christian and Muslim church property was confiscated and the country was declared the world's first atheist state.

In 1981, Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu died under mysterious circumstances; he was suspected of leading a plot to unseat Hoxha. In 1983 the Sigurimi, the secret police executed a number of former party officials. When Hoxha died in April 1985, he was replaced as the first secretary of the party by Ramiz Alia, who tried to preserve the communist system while introducing tentative reforms to revive the declining economy, replaced him as the first secretary of the Party.

In Albania and internationally Kadare has been both acclaimed as a writer and denounced as a lackey of the Albanian dictatorship. He has experienced a life of controversy in his own country nevertheless, it would be a mistake to represent Kadare as a silenced figure under the dictatorship. In a land where writers were routinely harassed, imprisoned, tortured and killed, Kadare produced some of the most brilliant and subversive works to emerge from Socialist Eastern Europe. His work was published selectively and he was a well-known member of the Albanian Union of Writers and the Party. He was made a Deputy of the People's Assembly, and he was able to travel abroad. He managed to avoid prison, the labour camps, and other forms of punishment. There were indeed privileges. But it is also important to

understand that Kadare was not at liberty to reject travel opportunities or refuse to join government bodies. Like every other aspect of his life in Albania his works were subjected to control from above. Kadare also suffered tremendously from the strain, the threats and the terror arising from the dictator Hoxha's unpredictable moves. Hoxha retained a level of respect for France and he was wily enough to support Kadare as a valuable figure to display in the international arena. However, Kadare did not give his approval to the regime in his role as ambassador. On the contrary, he used whatever opportunities arose to disseminate the literary works which spoke so eloquently of his country's plight. His literary record remains impeccable.

Enver Hoxha and Mehmet Shehu as well as Ramiz Alia and Manush Myftiu, the top four of the Politburo, were prodigious readers of contemporary literature and had built up substantial personal libraries ordered from French bookshops. Hoxha in particular, was impressed by the ideas of French culture and civilization, and longed to be read in France. Hoxha came from the urbanized middle class of Gjirokastra and unlike his political comrades throughout Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, appears to have harboured intellectual ambitions during his period as a student in France and Belgium. Literature was important to the dictatorship and the Albanian leaders, Hoxha in particular, unlike

their Eastern European colleagues, could recognize good writing.

Dritero Agolli, also a gifted writer, became something of a protege of Enver Hoxha as well. He was made President of the Union of Writers in 1972 in the wake of the purges of the intelligentsia and retained this position until the end of the regime.

By the early 1960s Kadare was already well-known for his poetry collections, *Youthful Inspiration* (1953), *Dreams* (1957), and particularly *My Age* (1961) (Elsie, *Evolution* 23). Young people, in particular, loved his work. For the post-war youth of Albania, Kadare was a poet with something new to say. He came to the attention of literary circles early and was on close terms with editors and literary figures such as Llazer Siliqi, Todi Lubonja, and others after publishing his first poems in the early 1950s. Kadare's political profile recognized in 1961 when Enver Hoxha intervened in a literary dispute between the wartime writers and the post-war generation, who were now coming of age. Kadare had just returned from Moscow. Along with Dritero Agolli, Fatos Arapi, and others, he was accused of anti-national attitudes, cosmopolitanism, and decadence. Enver Hoxha unexpectedly took the side of the younger generation against the old guard who were critical of liberal attitudes and writing styles. His intention appears to have been not merely to disabuse his old companions of any notions they might

have regarding their ongoing authority as ex-partisans. In driving a wedge between the generations, empowering the younger, liberal post-war writers against the older conservative Stalinists, he purchased their allegiance at a time of change and potential ideological isolation.

Working as a journalist and writer and as the editor of the foreign literature section of the long-standing Albanian literary review, *Drita*, after his return, Kadare continued to have access to contemporary work from the wider world as well as to newspapers such as *Le Monde*. Hemingway was popular, recent American and Western European literature was available, and Western culture was accessible via radio and television from Italy and Yugoslavia. Kadare experimented with voice-recording and other forms of composition and was interested in film. A film industry had been founded with strong Soviet support in Albania in the late 1950s and even small towns such as Fieri in the Myzeqe (where Kadare would be later sent as a punishment for his over-intellectualized writings) had a cinema.

However, the cinema was more closely guarded by the regime than writing and his natural talent for writing and poetry reasserted itself:

I took up literature again, but the crisis had at least one lasting effect: it inscribed in my head the decision never to resemble in any way the Soviet writers of the time,

beginning (of course!) with their outward appearance.

(Kadare, *Albanian Spring* 30)

Of his early works, “A Tour of the Cafes” (excerpted from *The City without Signs*(1961)) and various short stories (subsequently collected in *Stories Across Time* (1963) and *Eleven Short Stories*(1965)) were published in periodicals such *Drita*, *Zeri i Rinise*, and *Nentori*. At this stage Todi Lubonja was responsible for youth affairs in the regime and was instrumental in having Kadare’s work published in the youth journal, although it was banned immediately on appearance. Themes, motifs, and episodes from Kadare’s early works and unpublished stories and poems re-emerge later as the author makes connections and explores the permutations of life under communism. Early sketches of the Italian occupation, the story of his home town’s first brothel and other material would appear in “The Great Aeroplane” and “The City of the South” before finding its final form in *The General of the Dead Army* (1962) and *Chronicle in Stone*(1971). The poems “Laocoon” and “The Trojan Horse” rehearse themes which re-emerge in *The Monster* in 1965 and in his late essay “Aeschylus or the Great Loser” in 1985. The novel, *Winter of Great Solitude* (1973) takes up themes from the poem “The Sixties”. And the 1988 political allegory *The Pyramid* has its origins not in the newly planned and built mausoleum for Enver Hoxha in central

Tirana, but in the poem “The Pyramid of Kheops” from 1967. *The City without Signs* would wait a further forty years, hidden in Kadare’s flat, before being published in its complete form. *The General of the Dead Army* appeared in instalments in *Zeri i Rinise* in 1962, before its publication in book form the following year and in a revised version in 1967 (Pipa, *Contemporary* 51).

After the successes of his youth, with his popularity among young people and his Gorki Institute qualifications, and in the wake of the unexpected victory over the old guard, Kadare sensed that he was being offered the role of national writer-in-the-making during the honeymoon years of the early 1960s: “I felt something new and dangerous coming towards me. The mantle of the national writer brushed my shoulders. The heavy mantle of the national writer under a dictatorship” (Kadare, *Dialogue me* 70).

Kadare had secretly discussed exile with his friend Dhori Qiriazhi. In Prague, on the way home from Finland in 1962, he briefly took a hotel room off Wenceslas Square, intending to seek exile because of the intolerable situation in Albania. Faced with the grim reality of life in an unknown Eastern European country, he thought better of relinquishing his language and his homeland for a situation which was hardly better. Looking back during the 1990s, he reflects on the perversity of seeking

exile in the East rather than the West. However, it is a measure of the extent to which he was a product of socialism that the West did not yet appear on his political radar. He had been brought up in communism and the East remained his natural point of orientation. His decision to return to Albania, rather than remain in the steppes of the East, was made in response to a deeper need. He recognized that his creativity, dependent on his native language, would wither and die in exile:

To that silent death in the steppes I preferred the arena
filled with howling and the mantle which would force my
shoulders into a stoop. And like the sinner who does not
resist temptation, I returned on board the machine from
Prague to Tirana to accept the cursed crown.

(Kadare, *Dialogue me* 75)

Kadare's return to Albania was fuelled by a strong sense of ethnicity and of his role as an Albanian writer. In Moscow Kadare's intense nostalgia for his native land expressed itself in his poem, "Longing for Albania" (1960),

I was filled with longing for Albania
Tonight as I returned home on the trolley,
The smoke of a *Partizani* cigarette in the hand of a
Russian

Curled bluish, twirled upwards

As if whispering to me, its compatriot,

In the language of the Albanians (79).

The works of the first half of the 1960s are dominated by the young writer's commitment to his homeland after the break with the Soviet Union and increasing awareness of the problems of the dictatorship: generational conflict and friction between traditional and modern lifestyles, problems of corruption and nepotism in the regime, sterility in cultural and social matters, young people dropping out through frustration and boredom. Albania figures in these works as a backdrop to questions of socialist modernization, but by 1964 a change is perceptible in the representation of Albania. Ethnic identity had become a powerful sustaining force for the writer. At the same time, in the context of the regime's move towards an openly nationalistic socialism, Kadare began to experience the conflict between the regime's politicized nationalism and his own now deeply felt patriotism. Over the years this conflict would become a more or less open battle for the voice of Albania.

Kadare is perhaps the only Albanian writer known widely outside his country. As the voice of an alternative, better Albania, he offered his countrymen one of their few sources of hope for change. He was

committed to Albanian language, culture and national identity, he believed in European humanist ideals and was attracted, to begin with, by the communist model of modernization in his socially and economically backward land. At the same time he built an influential base in France, his chosen intellectual home in the west. Deeply aware of the need for Albanians to participate in European modernity, he nevertheless came to object profoundly to the ideal of the Albanian new man propagated by the regime, and his works represent powerfully the positive force of ethnic identification.

Kadare voiced his opposition through literature, not doctrine or ideology. He expressed defiance through his representation of the grimness of everyday life under socialism and through his powerful evocations of an Albania more ancient and more durable than the new Albania of Enver Hoxha. He steadfastly refused to surrender his language and identity or to be forced into exile.

Kadare's works were published in the communist environment in various forms and formats: different works were drafted as short stories, censored, revised, confiscated, reworked and passed through the filters of comment, feedback and revision and were both translated and published inside and outside Albania. Moreover, Kadare retained the

artistic right to revise and change his texts, refusing to allow them to be determined by the category of the political alone.

Kadare's work is known outside Albania primarily through its French, and more recently, its German and English translations. Even great figures such as Sophocles, Dante and Dostoevsky are read primarily in translation throughout the world. Less well – known writers, or those from minor languages, are more or less dependent on translation for access to a global audience. In an era of increasing dominance of English as the language of global communication and in Anglo-American environments in which the study of a foreign language is decreasing, translations have become crucial in making the voices of small cultural and linguistic groups audible to the world.

The aim of this thesis is to bring Kadare's works to a wider audience by explaining how he lived and wrote in the Albanian Stalinist environment, and by charting his development as the voice of an Albanian suppressed in the course of Socialist modernization. The following chapters present Kadare's work in the context of Albanian socialism. One of the criticisms against Kadare is that he wrote to accommodate the mercurial policy changes of the regime. The present study aims to show that this was not the case. Kadare's writing over the forty-five years of the dictatorship was extraordinarily coherent in terms

of its themes and its focus on aspects of Albanian life. Emphasis is laid on tracing the thematic development of Kadare's works over the period of the dictatorship, with the intention of justifying his claim to have told the truth to power consistently over the decades of his writing life. The focus is on the period from 1959 until 1985, the years of power of Kadare's nemesis, the dictator Enver Hoxha. This focus on the writer and the dictatorship has determined the choice of works for study. *The General of the Dead Army*(1963), and the semi-autobiographical novels, *Chronicle in Stone*(1971) and *Twilight of the Steppe-Gods*(1976) represents important stages in the writer's understanding of self, culture and society leading through the historical allegory of the late 1970's, that is *The Three - Arched Bridge*(1978). *The Shadow* (1985) represents one of Kadare's most soul-searching and private analyses of the writer himself.

This thesis has presented Kadare's journey from a young man enjoying the first fruits of communist modernization to the wily, defiant and self-doubting writer of the end of the dictatorship. The historical and literary analyses reveal Kadare's works to represent a single - minded and coherent defiance of the dictatorship from *The City without Signs* in 1959 to *The Shadow* at the end of the 1980s. He is the voice of Albania's modernity and the singer of its ancient identity.

Albanians have become a presence in European consciousness since 1990, yet little is known about Albania, its people and its past. Kadare continues to write, to speak as a witness of socialist dictatorships, and to represent his country at home, in Europe and the world. Kadare's novels bring the battle between the writer and the dictator, freedom and oppression, to readers beyond the borders of Albania and Eastern Europe and across the era of Eastern European socialism.