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The Chronicler in Stone

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Abstract
This article analyses the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare's attitude to Communist regime through his early written novel, Chronicle in Stone. It documents the formation of the writer's consciousness in the era preceding the communist Gleichschaltung. In counterpoint to the encomiums paid to Hoxha's Stalinist purism and Albanian patriotism at the high point of the regime, Kadare reminds his fellow countrymen of the origins of Albanian communism in civil war, terror, revenge, and summary justice. Moreover, it is the subjective authenticity of the narrative voice, not the objective authenticity of socialist realism, which gives meaning to Kadare's struggles against dictatorship.

Keywords: *Socialist realism, Albania, Hoxha, Dictatorship*

Introduction

The suggestion that the writer might be anything other than the amanuensis of history's progress is a heresy against the doctrine of socialist realism. In Kadare's novel *Chronicle in Stone* (1971) the child uses a mirror to reflect light down to the nether world of the water cistern deep in the cellar, reminding the imprisoned rain drops of their provenance among the upper realms of light and air. This image indicates why the writer could wield such influence in the socialist state so dependent on words to shape reality. At one level the communist dictatorships were collective writing enterprises dedicated to the propagation of the idea over reality, of dogma over truth. In as much as a writer constructs an alternative world, he reverses this relationship.

But he nevertheless works with the same tools. No writer in a dictatorship has been more aware of this relationship than Kadare. As he matured, Kadare came to realize that the writer and the dictator share something in their control over the worlds of imagination and reality.

Methodology
Analytical Research

The contextualization of the original idea for the *Chronicle in Stone* in the conversations at the Gorki Institute reinforces the sense of distance and perspective which is powerfully evoked in the epilogue to the novel as the writer experiences flashes of memory in the bright modern boulevards of foreign cities. In 1964 Kadare published approximately thirty pages of descriptive episodes from his childhood under the title, "The Southern City", in the journal Nentori. These were extended and republished in 1967 in a collection of short stories, "The Southern City: Short Stories and Reportage". The completed full-length novel Chronicle in Stone appeared in 1971 Chronicle in Stone is about the meeting of two worlds, as seen through the eyes of the child and retold from his adult perspective. The child does not yet understand the nature of this meetings; the adult writer, looking back, recasts his fragmented childhood memories, together with documents and imported reminiscences and recollections, as a chronicle, a narrative structured by the passage of time. Memory is allowed open and free access to the origins and development of consciousness.

A powerful sense of the past and the present is created through the loose association of events, places, and personages. To the contrast between objective and subjective time frames is added the sense of historically determined subjectivity as the relationship between the child's perception and the adult voice deepens. The overwhelming, often elegiac, sense of time passing gains a further aspects in the chronicle of decline and destruction, as the traditional life of the Albanian Ottoman town fragments and ends in civil violence. The march of history continues as the child plays, interacts with family and friends, encounters the new and the strange, learns to read, begins to think for himself. In the act of remembering the adult voice revisits its origins. By the end of the story the voice of the narrator exists in a history, and an adult identity has formed in organic relationship to its environment. Everything is in flux and the child's consciousness is formed in the process of observation of events and characters. It is this process of formation of the child's consciousness which lies at the core of the work, explaining the adult writer's view of the present as the outcome of a history characterized by breakdown and violence.

Memory re-establishes continuity for the adult who has travelled so far from his origins in the final epigraph.
During a storm the child's parents realize that the water cistern below the house is in danger of overflowing and undermining the foundations. The hinged guttering must be disconnected and the over filled cistern emptied. The child imagines the fall of the raindrops into the cistern below the house as a descent from freedom to unfreedom, from the realm

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of the gods to the gloomy, sunless netherworld which in Kadare's writing is associated with the Albania of the communist regime The imagery of freedom and imprisonment, however, contrasts with that of order and chaos. Nature is a potentially disruptive force and the incarcerated raindrops represent a threat. The presence of unruly forces plotting against domestic and civil order alarms the boy, who remains an onlooker as the adults frantically empty the tank in order to safeguard the house. The captive, displaced entities threaten the balance which has been established between the house and its environment and which depends on the timely intervention of the boy's father to release raindrops back into their natural course:

> As each bucket was emptied out, I said silently to the water, "Go on, get the hell out, if you don't want to stay in our cistern". Each bucket was filled with captive raindrops, and I thought it would be good if we could weed out the nastiest ones first, the ringleaders; that way we could lessen the danger. (*Chronicle* 16)

The image cluster of freedom, imprisonment, and rebellion is indicative of a recurring theme of confinement and control, foreshadowing questions of change with which Kadare concerns himself throughout his creative life. The sense of the hierarchy of forces in the vertical metaphor of above and below, colours the child's early experiences, creating the cognitive structures for his understanding of power. Later in bed that night the boy imagines himself and the house flooded down to the hillside along with the cistern and its overflowing water. The different universe of above and below and of the displaced entities-water, river, mankind-which expend their lives in range and conflict, frightens the child. In the dialectic of anarchy and order which is the subject of this novel, the writer-as-child seeks stability and safety.
Danger comes from chaos, anarchic energy, destructive nature. Threatened by powerful forces from every side, the boy seeks security in the status quo that existed before the waters of the cistern were stirred up. He seeks to mitigate the conflict, to keep the powers of disorder at bay, and to liberate the rebellious element in order to protect the house and to safeguard his existence. Once the dangerous water-level has been reduced and the forces of anarchy expelled, the boy resumes his dialogue with the water. However, the cistern answers, "in a hoarse, strange voice" (Chronicle 19), and the child realizes "that its anger had eased, but not completely, for its voice was duller than usual" (*Chronicle* 19)

The spectacles of the intellectual, the harbingers of change, also affect the author-as-child, bringing clarity and the hard lines of modernity to him, the following generation, as well. He finds a spectacle lens in his grandmother's chest. The spectacles establish a link between the child and the young revolutionary intellectuals, only a decade older than he, who will become the cadres of the new regime in the late 1940s and 1950s. The ruthlessly sharp outlines created by the glasses both appal him and enable him to see more clearly the films which nurture his imagination and to read the books introduced to him by Isa and Javer: Shakespeare's Macbeth and the psychology of Carl Gustav Jung. The Italian brothel, the glasses, later the aeroplanes of the British and the Germans, are signs of a modernity which will hang the world from the traditional one of usage and familiarity to one determined by the rules of economics and efficiency. The "new and bright" world of communist enlightenment contrasts throughout Kadare's work with the misty world of eternal Albania. The image of the present with its sharp lines and piercing light has little of the positive spin of Western modernity: rather it is the harbinger of the type of economic efficiency, rule-bound bureaucracy, and uncompromising scrutiny which would characterize communist social planning and everyday reality. In the symbolic scheme of the work, the writer-as-child is located between the two worlds. He takes the lens he has found in his grandmother's attic to the cinema in order to see clearly. It enables him to escape the nether world of fog and haze. But it also turns his world into a set of precise details, a society of contracts against the old, hazy community of nature, accommodation, and mutual compliance. The lens is the counterpart of the mirror that the boy uses to reflect a piece of the sky, of freedom, to the imprisoned waters of the cistern below. Light, in its reflected and refracted states, is the medium of the writer, it is an attribute of the upper world but like the fire of Prometheus, it is dangerous, shining fiercely into the dark corners where life exists.

As the British bombing raids increase in frequency the citizens abandon their homes for the cellars of the citadel, the heart of the ancient city. Here the boys experience history in the journey downwards and inwards in to the medieval origins of their town. Like Dante in the Inferno they hear the stories of the past, of the Ottoman times which shaped and distorted the nation's identity. The severed head of a disobedient pasha rolls past them and the chained and rotting bodies of officials who had fallen foul of the Porte haunt this place.
This Ottoman motif of beheading would provide Kadare with one of his most important symbols for the failure of Albania to have found a modern leader after the early uprising of Scanderbeg. The Ottoman practice of capturing and beheading any figure of opposition represents for the Albanians a syndrome of the loss of potential leadership and the focus or centre of the nation's spiritual as well as material forces.

Chronicle in Stone ends with the occupation of the town by the Germans.

Conclusion

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.

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