

Our time and

by **ISMAIL KADARE**

- *The Albanian literature is a great national treasury and, as such, it deserves and dignity and freedom of the Albanian people.*
- *The Albanian writers have made their choice long ago: total commitment or who strive for progress. They have no doubt at all about and are not in a commitment, and so did Dante, Cervantes, Hugo, Brecht and scores of great writers feel honoured in this company and do not seek to enter any other club.*
- *The modern Albanian literature is one of the most emancipated literatures in*

The current Albanian literature, what we ordinarily call the literature of socialist realism, occupies nearly one tenth of the period of Albanian literature, whereas the literature of the period of Renaissance stands for one fifth and that of independence for one twentieth part of it. We needed this comparison to delineate a time scale of the four principal periods of our literature, which is not without a correlation to the dimensions and values they have created. As can be seen, although socialist realism is the last and culminating period of the Albanian letters, it comes third in size, next to the period of the Middle Ages and the National Renaissance. At the present moment, it spans a period of time twice as long as that of Independence and keeps growing. The day will come shortly when it will equal the time-span of the Renaissance.

This time-dimension assists us to form a clearer idea of this period, which is the closest to us, since it is the product of our time and of our socialist social order. It is an asset in making our requirements extremely serious and in weighing our words as strictly and realistically as possible.

The time of socialism in Alba-

nia is one of extraordinary events and the greatest emancipation the Albanian people have seen throughout their whole history. Their literature and culture have also experienced an unordinary growth in this period. We would not be objective if, in the assessment of our contemporary literature, as compared with that of the other periods, we were to automatically attribute all the merits of the time and of the revolution directly to the literature, if we were to place it in a privileged position confronted with the other periods. Were we to proceed in that way, we would be allowing ourselves too much euphoria, self-satisfaction and a complete lack of a sense of self-criticism towards our work.

It is true that the contemporary Albanian literature is the product of its time, but it must be assessed according to its own worth and not be allowed to assume merits from extra-literary circumstances. To put this idea plainly, let us make a hypothetical comparison between our current life and that of a period of a hundred years ago, in 1889, or sixty years ago in 1929. It is impossible to find any common elements which could compare among themselves. The effort it-

self would be ridiculous. However, both in 1889 and in 1929, there were masterpieces of literature, which could stand any comparison.



The socialist literature of our country today has its roots in the dramatic time when the Albanian people, led by the communists, were locked in a life-and-death struggle against the occupiers and the local feudal lords and bourgeoisie for national and social liberation. It grew with each passing year and decade in the time of the construction of socialism. It was extended and enriched against numerous predictable and unpredictable odds which involved problems of ideas and artistic choice of the right or left directions.

Never in the long history of the Albanians had their literature created such broad contacts with the people; and the people and time never acted together with it, serving as a source of support, inspiration and benevolent encouragement. Here we must add that, despite the merits

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of literature, it was the nature of the new social order, the very nature of the socialist culture, which created such an unprecedented communication. All these factors converged to determine its emancipating role and character to such a broad extent which was not and could not be created before in the life of the Albanians.

This was a literature of a new type, like the new atmosphere, time and the whole order which was established in this country. At a first glance, it seems as if there was nothing in common between it and the previous literature, but gradually, when the opinion of the time became more mature and the vision more complete, it was easy to notice that this new literature was part of the Albanian centuries-old literature, was its most advanced section, which, together with the new messages, inherited the lifelong messages of the Albanian letters, just as the new time inherited the best tradition of the past.

Our contemporary literature communicates with the three other periods of Albanian letters and, thanks to its indisputable values, unites their values and qualities, which shows that, apart

from other things, it is a real national art of Albania's.

The contemporary literature has one thing in common with the old Albanian literature of the Middle Ages: international recognition. By a paradox of history, it is precisely these two periods — the earliest and the latest, which are best known outside the borders of the country.

The old Albanian literature, a semi-religious, bloomy and extremely élitist literature, with very few readers in Albania, has, nevertheless, played an important role in the creation of all the mechanisms of expression of one of the oldest and most beautiful languages of Europe and in making Albania, the Albanian nation and language known all over the world. We can mention two facts in support of this: first, with its numerous publications in different countries it succeeded in making the epic wars of Skanderbeg and the drama of the Albanians known everywhere; and second, it encouraged the early investigations into the Albanian language and civilization. It was precisely two books of this literature, by Pjetër Budi and Frang Bardhi, which, three hundred years ago, came to the notice of the greatest scientific mind of

that time, Gotfried Leibniz — the initiator of studies on the origin of the Albanian language and of the Albanians from the Illyrians.

The contemporary Albanian literature comes closer to the period of our Renaissance thanks to their great national emancipating mission, their militancy and unreserved commitment to the vital cause of the country. They stand close together also on account of their broad popular character, humanism, lofty civic spirit, and the nobility of art as a bridge which unites the peoples. Today, when the vulgar black winds of chauvinism are blowing in the Balkan Peninsula, these qualities appear still more wonderful.

All these values and qualities of the different periods of Albanian art, were taken up by the contemporary Albanian letters and further enriched with the new ideas of the epoch, assuming a new vitality and brilliance which they never had before. As they rose in full vigour, they built a wonderful reader, who became the broadest and most intelligent support for the development of our new letters.

The road of growth and perfection of our contemporary so-

cialist literature has not been simple and easy.

Its first phase, that which roughly extends from the forties to the end of the fifties, is one of the most interesting ones, precisely on account of the clash of opposed concepts on art. On the one hand, there was the great enthusiasm and the optimistic inebriation following the liberation of the country, the confidence and the noble feelings stirred at the dawn of a new epoch; on the other hand, there was the petty distrust towards the literature and the intellectuals, which had the effect of a cold shower, especially in the early years of this phase.

The sectarianism of Koçi Xoxe and his minions, their hatred towards the national culture and identity, inflicted a considerable damage to literature. The greater the damage since this culture was still in its beginnings, was still «brittle» and could be wounded easily. These enemies of the Albanian culture and nation in their efforts to paralyze the Albanian literature — in an effort to cause the paralyzation of our whole intelligentsia — resorted to an old mechanism: that of the complex of guilt. By making the intelligentsia, and together with it the writers, feel a sense of guilt, they hoped they could easily bring them to serve their own aims, disarm them and destroy their personality, in brief, change them from militants of their time into jesters of old feudal courts.

The overthrow of Koçi Xoxe and his ilk buried this reactionary mentality of ignoramuses, but it does not mean that this barred all possibilities of its re-

crudescence in the same measure as left sectarianism did.

Other difficulties on the way of the new Albanian literature were various misunderstandings in connection with the mission and role of art. They came from different directions, from the right and the left. But, whereas the political atmosphere, the pronounced anti-imperialist character of the entire life of the country emphasized the need for the struggle against the right viewpoints which defended the perpetual character of art and departure from the social problems, we cannot say the same about schematism.

The cut-and-dry views about the positive hero, the ill-famed theory of the absence of the conflict, or of the conflicting not between evil and good, but between the good and the good, and other similar misapprehensions, which appeared under a revolutionary garb, were nothing but manifestations of a sort of decadent trends, imitations of petty-bourgeois rose-water literature known in the West as fashionable literature. This kind of literature had nothing in common with the revolution, although with its arrogance and intolerance, it pretended to be the only representative of it. Whereas, in essence, it was only an expression of servility to the vulgar bourgeois art, in as much as it imitated its mechanisms.

All this was bound to create a lifelessness and superficiality in the Albanian letters and to make it insipid. Nevertheless, while it could more easily fight back and contain this assault of vulgarity, our literature had a much

more arduous task in giving timely answers to the more complicated problems of the relationship between what is national and what is socialist in literature, between the typical and the non-typical, etc. Some of these problems continue to preoccupy the literary thinking today, and it is the urgent task of our criticism and all literary opinion to deal with them and put them to their place.

We are very familiar with the formulation «socialist contents and national form», but in my opinion, today this formulation does not make much sense. The first question we would be tempted to ask is: Why this division? Why the national part of literature and arts should have the attribute of the form only? I am not going to ask any such questions which are difficult to answer.

The above formulation emerged and appeared to make sense in a multinational socialist state, in which different nationalities formed a people with a specific literature of its own — the Soviet literature. In our country, which has a homogenous national constitution, this division of component parts cannot stand.

But whereas the relationships between contents and form in this case remained only within the context of a formula the question of the typical and non-typical appeared much more complex.

The theory on the typical, elaborated in the Soviet Union in the mid 50s, precisely on the threshold of the revisionist processes, has brought about great confusion and incalculable harm

to the socialist literature of all countries.

The theory of the typical, as it was served to us, was the theoretical breeding-ground for mediocrity, the groundwork on which it supported its edifice from which it launched its attacks for the destruction of really great art. It championed the uniform art, conformity, against militancy, against any novelty and originality in art, which form the principles of the socialist art.

Accepting militancy in words, in fact it denied the concept wholesale, because it disarmed the writer and deprived him of any possibility of treating the real problems of society in his work. Any protagonist that happened to be criticized found protection in the social category which he stood for, and, in this manner, the negative character could not be made a physician, artist, police officer or office employee, and even less a peasant or a worker, since the rule of the typical could not permit them to be ordinary people with vices.

It is useless to dwell any longer on the fatal consequences of this theory, if it were imposed on literature. However, we must add here that, although in theory some efforts have been made by our criticism to reject it, still the roots of this phenomenon have not been eradicated, which shows the weakness of this criticism. In the practice of our literature, this theory has been completely denied long since. It is to the credit of our new literature that it resisted this alien theory. Besides other things, it is proof of its vitality and good con-

dition and the solidity of the ground on which it stands.

In the beginning of the 60s, when a non-typical event occurred and small Albania challenged the Khrushchevites, the latter made a gruesome remark about the Albanian letters. They offered two alternatives: either the Albanian literature would be disfigured and transformed into a typical bourgeois literature, or it would disintegrate and end up as a propaganda babble, as was the case with some dogmatic literatures of that period.

The challenge of the Albanian literature to this ill-wishing prophecy was worded in equally strong terms. Not only it did not disintegrate and become a propaganda slop, not only it did not degenerate into an imitation of decadent literature, but, on the contrary, defying any forecast, it gathered new strength and vigour and experienced an unprecedented rise. By this it showed that it was a true literature, and not a temporary flame which the first gale could blow out.

The vigorous development of all genres was accompanied with an emancipation of writers, with the liberation of their minds from all clichés and dogmas, with a renewal of genres and forms. Powerful innovative works created one of the most beautiful literary atmospheres in the history of Albanian letters. This confirmed again the great truth that art is immortal through the renewal and change.

It was not unexpected that the Chinese pressure of the 70s, which did not pass without leaving its imprint on some countries, should meet with repulsion at the gates

our literature. Having reached a stage of consolidation, our literature could not be shaken by outside pressure, from any quarter it came. But, whereas it failed to put its stamp on the Albanian letters, this pressure, due to extra-literary reasons, had a negative influence in the school-books and programs, with which our younger generation made their contact with our national literature and with that of the world, in general.

The 70s were marked by a stern clash on two fronts: against the influence of bourgeois liberalism, on the one hand, and against conservative schematism, on the other. Here an admission has to be made that, whereas in the front against the right trend just as before, the struggle was really efficient the same cannot be said of the struggle against the left trend. Encouraged by the Chinese pressure, it strove for revival, for regaining its lost positions and paralyzing the Albanian letters, which, by then, had grown strong enough to be overcome by schematism. Seeing that this was its last opportunity, schematism launched a desperate attack.

The last decade of our literature has been just as rich, not to say richer, with problems requiring explanations and solutions, with the joint efforts of the writers to overcome the expected and unexpected difficulties which emerged in the literary process.

The unharmonious development of different genres, especially of poetry and the novel, the backwardness of the theatre and the literary criticism, created preoccupations which sometimes were justifiable and sometimes were

not. A problem which had emerged previously, but which the literary life brought into greater prominence, was that of the so-called major and minor themes. The consensus reached about this problem, that is, the total avoiding of such a metaphysical division and the assessment of literary works, not by merit of themes but by the ideo-artistic level, was a sign of the maturity of the common literary and social opinion.

The extension of themes, the inclusion in literature of the great richness of life and the complicated social, philosophical and psychological problems, have been another preoccupation of the writers. This was especially true about some themes which seemed taboos, although no one had declared them to be so, and managed to steal into the literary world. The cause for this situation, I think, should not be sought outside the ranks of our writers. It is they themselves who lacked the talent or the courage to overcome a surmountable obstacle. In our literature there are still blanks in themes and motives from the ethical-moral motives and spheres — those impulses and passions without which the human existence cannot be imagined — and other complicated experiences which are present in the life of everyone, but which cannot be found in the pages of books. Other acute and dramatic themes which are connected with the relationship between man and society, questions of democracy, the struggle against the bureaucratization of legislation, and so on, are scarcely treated or avoided altogether. All these pro-

blems which exist together with literature since ancient time create a marked vacuum if they remain absent. The history of our socialist state, the published records of the Party, Enver Hoxha's works, are replete with facts, events and protagonists connected with the above-mentioned themes, whereas in literature they seldom occur or do not figure at all.

Some of our critics justify this blank by resorting to the mechanism of the typical. Others, always proceeding from the same category, have dared further afield. To the question why the facts of the history of the country should not appear in literature, they respond with the argument that literature has a generalizing effect and is concerned with what is typical, which makes the problem delicate. One must really be a barbarian in logic to accept that the fact treated in the novel or story of a writer, I repeat it, in the novel or story which bears the name of one of the numerous writers of the country, has a stronger generalizing effect, that is, has a more delicate approach, than the fact mentioned in the book of the founder of modern Albania.

The overcoming of the above-mentioned misunderstandings and the establishment of closer contacts with life are an imperative. They will bring a breath of fresh air into the «lungs» of our literature.

Some time has passed since the moment when a basic demand was made for our literature and arts: the struggle for better quality and against mediocrity. The problem which Comrade Ramiz

Alia raised has to do with major things connected with the future of a literature.

Mediocrity, just as schematism and rose-water literature, the trite imagination of the positive hero, the cut-and-dry moralizing and happy endings, is by no means the quality of socialist literature. It is a universal disease of literature, which emerged together with it and will be its lifelong companion. A total life and death struggle has continued between real great art and mediocre art from the time when Homer sang the first line of the *Illiad* until our time, right to the moment in which we are speaking about literature.

The outcome of this prolonged wearing clash has determined the fate of entire literatures, of their blooming into effervescence or withering, of their raise and fall.

As a rule, the states and administration, beginning from ancient Rome, have not supported great art against mediocrity, on the contrary, they have put their support behind the latter against great art. An this is in the logic of things, because it is known that great art is a headache to the administration, whereas mediocrity is comfortable.

The fact that our socialist state has raised this problem in the opposite sense, that is, against mediocrity, is significant in itself, and the writers and artists ought to appreciate it for what it is.

In socialism, mediocrity continues to work against real art with unabated fury, although the character of this struggle has its specifics. Like an ailment which is stimulated by other concomitant

diseases and which, in turn, stimulates them, mediocrity draws heavily on schematism and nourishes it and all its sub-products. So, they operate together on a broad front to gain dominating positions in literature and they can easily win if literature and society slacken their vigilance towards them.

In socialism, mediocrity tries to flatter the bureaucrats in office with the aim of fulfilling one of its main dreams: to gain recognition, even without being proclaimed official literature.

The concept of «official literature is unacceptable in socialism, just as its opposite, the «non-official» literature, is also unacceptable. A similar division would certainly cause a diversion of fatal consequences which could have a disfiguring effect on literature.

Speaking about mediocrity as a negative phenomenon, we have correctly stressed previously that the writers and artists of mediocre qualities are not to blame for being what they are. But this innocence ends at the moment when they strive to raise mediocrity into a standard, in short, when mediocrity becomes aggressive.

This kind of mediocrity strives to make the law in art. To this end, it resorts to various methods. One of them is the effort to secure for its representatives the leading positions in places where the fates of literature and art are discussed and decided. When the mediocre writers and artists, especially those with great pretensions who become over-confident, occupy such positions, they become dangerous because they want to impose their tastes and

preferences on literature and art.

This set of officials-writers can by no means help in establishing confidential relationships between the writers and artists, on the one hand, and the state administration, on the other. Sometimes they do the opposite. And this occurs at the moment when they want to show that it is they who have the monopoly of the loyalty to the state, a loyalty which, according to them, is lacking or is insufficient among the writers and artists. According to this sinister logic, the latter, that is the writers and artists, must be kept under surveillance and tutelage. Similar practices and concepts disrupt the unity of the creative forces and lead to painful divisions between the writers and the state.

All this is opposed to the line of the Party on literature and arts. And this is confirmed fully in the fact that in post-Liberation Albania, the institution of censorship has never existed and does not exist, which is to the credit of our socialist state. If there are people who do not like this situation, they are out of touch with our time and are against the advance of the nation, against socialist democracy and the prospects which the 8th Plenum of the Party has opened.

Literature has its own laws of development. Various internal mechanisms protect it from destruction and ensure its rejuvenation and existence. One of these mechanisms is the process of the selection of values.

Selection is one of the basic and most vital processes for the existence of literature. It is similar to the process of metabolism of living beings. Interruption

of it means the interruption of life.

Violation of the process of selection is the gravest act that can be perpetrated against literature. Unfortunately, sometimes it happens that this violation really takes place for different motives: it is due mostly to the pressure of mediocrity, which seeks by all means to occupy a place in the literary treasury of a people. Other motives are connected with sentimentality, literary cabaalism, lack of principles and misunderstanding of democracy.

The struggle against mediocrity cannot be waged without respecting the laws of selection. Mediocrity strives hard to disregard this principle, whereas real art does the opposite.

The principle of selection has been and continues to be flagrantly violated in our country in our school text-books. They are full of passages and evaluations of many literary works that still have not passed through the sieve of selection. To include unselected works into text-books means to put together the good with the bad.

Imagine the colossal amount of work that will be required to root out the bad from them. Whereas, in the case when the principle of selection operates, the bad is thrown out of literature in a natural way, every day and every minute.

That is the reason why in the practice of studies in the world, contemporary literature is cautiously introduced, and that is done without haste. It is true that there are bourgeois conservative schools which have been severely

criticized for ignoring the contemporary literature. But, the extreme opposite, the stuffing of the latter into studies is unwholesome to culture.

In Albania, the contemporary writers occupy a much larger place as compared with the literature of the past. Sometimes the disproportions are scandalous. Things have reached the point that an ordinary writer of our time receives as much space as a whole period of literature. This question has to do not only with ethics, the lack of modesty and a complete absence of a sense of self-criticism, but also with a disrespect for the culture of your own people.

This phenomenon has had and continues to have its advocates. There is a strange symbiosis between the schematic critical opinion and the mediocre literature. Both sides are very comfortable in each other's presence; they nourish one another and, thus, create a closed circle to the detriment of art.

Apart from other things the struggle for raising the quality of our letters and arts is also directed against this dangerous symbiosis.

The Albanian literature is a great national treasury and, as such, it deserves all our energies, passion and devotion.

It is part of the consciousness and dignity and freedom of the Albanian people.

Wherever it is created, in the first place here, in the motherland, and outside the state borders of Albania, wherever the Albanians live in their own territories, the Albanian literature

bears the dramatic stamp of one of the most ancient and civilized peoples of Europe, of the noble race of Albanians.

There is much talk today about the freedom of writing, about its violation, and from time to time, the writers themselves accuse others of this act. The freedom of writing, the sublime gift of the writer, cannot be snatched from him in any way. No establishment can give it to him or take it away from him. Only the writer himself can dispose of it, defend it or give it away, and in so doing, he should not seek an alibi, or accuse anyone, but must be answerable for his actions to his own conscience and that of the nation to which he belongs.

There is a great ado in the world today about how literature should be: with or without a mission, committed to the great problems of the time or disinterested in them.

The Albanian writers have made their choice long ago: total commitment on the side of their own people and of all the peoples of the world who strive for progress. They have no doubt at all about this and are not impressed by any philosophy. The Greek tragedians wrote with a commitment, and so did Dante, Cervantes, Hugo, Brecht and scores of great men of world art. The present generation of Albanian writers feel honoured in this company and do not seek to enter any other club.

The modern Albanian literature is one of the most emancipated literatures in this part of Europe. It follows the great tradition of the emancipation of the old Alba-

nian literature of Naim Frashëri and De Rada, who were among the most illuminated minds in this zone of the Mediterranean, of Migjeni, Noli and Poradeci who were among the leading figures of Balkan emancipation in their time.

The literatures of the Balkan countries have passed through many tests in the last two centuries. Some of these tests have been so bitter that they have left marked distortions in them. One such consequence has been chauvinism, this mortal disease of literature. We have been witnesses to innumerable cases when the Balkan chauvinistic writers and academicians hid their barbarous nature, their sinister hatred, their misdeeds and jealousies against other peoples and cultures behind good manners and fine words, behind titles and degrees.

It is the exceptional merit of Albanian letters, which has its source in the culture and noble spirit of the Albanian people, that they never fell to such lowliness. This literature can be proud of many things, but one of its greatest assets is, without doubt, its love of its own people and, undivided from this, the love of the other peoples and all progressive mankind.

For nearly half a century, the Albanian people live and are nourished with the Albanian socialist literature. Their need for it is great, their love of it is touching. This need and love makes our responsibility before this people, to whom we belong, before the time in which we live, before socialism for which we have been working and fighting for forty-five years on end without interruption, all the more important.