

Ismail Kadare.
Dialog me Alain Bosquet.
Elbasan. Onufri. 1996. 189 pp.

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Dialogue avec Alain Bosquet. Jusuf Vrioni, tr.
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Who is responsible for the political crimes of the Communist period in Eastern Europe: the dictator alone, the class of officials who served him and themselves at the time, or the people as a whole? This is a question which has been gnawing at the soul of post-Communist Albania ever since the collapse of one of the most inhumane systems Europe has ever experienced. The recent ‘anti-genocide’ law passed by the Albanian government and the repercussions it has had on current political life have only helped to fuel the debate and to encourage a pointing of fingers.

Despite the fact that Ismail Kadare was never actively involved in political life during the forty-six years of Stalinist dictatorship and has lived in Paris since its collapse, he has been unwittingly caught up in the polemics and accusations. It is within this context that ‘Dialogue avec Alain Bosquet’ may be read and interpreted. As with other recent publications such as *Ftesë në studio*, Tirana 1990, *Printemps albanais*, Paris 1991, *Nga një dhjetor në tjetrin*, Paris 1991 (see WLT 66.1, p. 180), *Pesha e kryqit*, Paris 1991, and *Invitation à l’atelier de l’écrivain suivi de la poids de la croix*, Paris 1991 (see WLT 66:2, p. 384-385), the present book traces the evolution of Kadare’s literary works and publications within the framework of Albania’s grim political development.

Beginning with the ‘General of the Dead Army’ (see WLT 65:4, p. 746-747), published in Tirana in 1963 and in a French translation in Paris in 1970, we learn what moved and motivated Kadare to go new ways in Albanian literature and what pressures were brought to bear upon him to hold to the lethargic and much-trodden path of socialist realism. ‘Dialogue avec Alain Bosquet’ is the story of this talented Albanian’s struggle to achieve and survive in a totalitarian state. Against all odds, individual creativity managed to win out over sterile conformity. Partner in the literary and political meeting of minds which the book offers its readers is Alain Bosquet (b. 1919), Odessa-born French writer and critic, known for his interest in the currents of Eastern European culture under communist rule.

The dialogue serves, among other things, to set forth Kadare’s position on the above-mentioned controversy, in particular with regard to his activities as a prominent figure of public (though not, one must repeat, of direct political) life during the long years of terror. Kadare goes to great pains to elucidate his role as a literary dissident and as a thorn in the flesh of the party. He also casts light on the sombre and ubiquitous forces which endeavoured with a variety of methods to rein him in over the years. While there is no reason here to cast doubt on Kadare’s doings at the time, one senses throughout the book, as in other recent works, an unequivocally defensive attitude. It must also be noted in this connection that some of Kadare’s more controversial pronouncements have met with a hostile reception in Albania in recent years.

Ismail Kadare was no doubt a victim of the communist dictatorship, as was ‘virtually’ everyone else in the country. Whether he survived and managed to achieve success in spite of the dictatorship or because of it, is a moot point, despite untiring discussion of the subject in

intellectual circles in Albania. Much is brought to light in 'Dialogue avec Alain Bosquet' and much remains to be said. As Bosquet himself notes at the beginning of the book: "Tout dialogue est incomplet."

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