



The Three-Arched Bridge

Ismail Kadare , John Hodgson (Translator)

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The year: 1377. The place: the Balkan peninsula. Here in Ismail Kadare's novel, *The Three-Arched Bridge*, an Albanian monk chronicles the events surrounding the construction of a bridge across a great river known as Ujana e Keqe, or "Wicked Waters." If successful in their endeavor, the bridge-builders will challenge a monopoly on water transportation known simply as "Boats and Rafts." The story itself parallels developments in modern-day Eastern Europe, with the bridge emblematic of a disintegrating economic and political order: just as mysterious cracks in the span's masonry endanger the structure and cast the local community into a morass of uncertainty, superstition, and murder, so the fast-changing conditions in the 14th-century Balkan peninsula threaten to overwhelm the stability of life there. Dark as the story itself is, Mr. Kadare's prose, skillfully translated from the Albanian by John Hodgson, is elegant, witty, and deft. And with so many twists and turns in its carefully constructed plot, this political parable keeps the reader's interest to the very end.

The Three-Arched Bridge Details

Date : Published October 5th 2005 by Arcade Publishing (first published 1978)

ISBN : 9781559707923

Author : Ismail Kadare , John Hodgson (Translator)

Format : Paperback 192 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, European Literature, Albanian Literature, Literature

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Yazeed AlMogren says

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Rashed Aleisa says

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Calzean says

An short book based around various legends of interning a body into a structure (in this case a bridge) as a type of sacrifice. But the story is more about the various Albanian clans whose petty in-fighting are carried out instead of focusing themselves on the real threat of the burgeoning Ottoman Empire. The bridge is a metaphor for the Turkish invaders - it is strongly built, replaces the old and will last for centuries.

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[illegible]

A babble of languages. Their music 'this stupor, this hashish dissolved in the air in the form of song'. Their dervishes with ragged clothes that look like hair, and with hair that looks like rags. The differences between

Europe and Ottoman Asia, suddenly at Albania's borders.

But more differences between 'us' and 'them' come before that--among people of the Balkans themselves. Obscured competition for the profits of commerce come to this small principality from outside, places where no one has been. Someone we never see maneuvers to build a bridge and take the business of someone else we never see--the magnate of water transport. The peasants fear effects on the water spirits. A mogul of water, a mogul of earth. Ferry or bridge? Reason or naiads? Science or religion?

This book is more than a parable, but it has the feeling of a very complex parable that invites contemplation of any number of ancient and current contentions. On the surface it is about the advance of the Ottoman Empire into Europe. The Orthodox priest who tells the story foresees his culture being obliterated under this juggernaut, except for what might be salvaged later if it gets hidden in crevices of the mountains. It is about the basis of the endless wars of the Balkans. (In one of Kadare's linguistic digressions he tells of the Turks' recent nomination of the peninsula as 'the Balkans', to do with mountains.)

But, it could as easily be about the Cold War, the confrontation across the iron curtain, as it was written in 1976-78. It could be about today's religious wars. About ecological disputes among those who believe the water and the earth are more than elements to be shifted and exploited. About the sacrifices of human beings that occur during the upheaval of modernization, to placate the Gods, whether they be real or legendary.

As I finished the book I realized the priest had never mentioned crossing the bridge himself. He only watches.

It's a classic so I hardly need to recommend it, but I do.

Jane says

In 1377 a monk, Gjon [John] Ukcama, begins his chronicle of the events of that time in his corner of Albania. What follows is a mesmerizing, frightening tale. It can be read on several levels; the straightforward narrative of a bridge being built over a raging river, the Ujana e Keqe ["Wild waters"], its construction undermined by sabotage and bitter rivalry between two entities: Boats & Rafts and Roads & Bridges. Byzantium is crumbling; the Ottoman Empire encroaches on Albania; Gjon writes on the last page of his chronicle, *"times are black; soon night may fall..."*

"I, the monk Gjon, sonne of Gjorg Ukcama, who hath finished this knowynge that ther is no thyng wrytene in owre tonge about the Brigge of the Ujana e Keqe and the euil whyche is upon us, and for the love of owre worlde."

Or the novella can be read on an allegorical level. Kadare lived during the brutal dictatorship of Enver Hoxha, so most of what he wrote is purposely veiled in hidden meaning. This tale could be the bloody history of his people, possibly present-day [well, when Kadare wrote it in 1976-78] events. The author used the conflict of the 14th century as a metaphor. The man walled up in the bridge, a sacrifice to propitiate the bridge, seemed like a symbol that Albania would not progress without violence and shedding of blood. The

short chapters ranging from one to five pp. brought to my mind old Hollywood movies where tearing off calendar pages would indicate passage of time. I have read other Kadare and he can be difficult to understand, but this parable seemed unambiguous. It reminds me of the surreal, grotesque stories of Kafka in how this story and those of Kafka's can have layered meanings. The atmosphere of desolation and foreboding is conveyed marvelously throughout.

Gurldoggie says

The story is set in 1377, and our narrator is an Albanian monk, who watches as the Turkish armies gather over the Balkan Peninsula. With a few deft strokes Kadare conveys the great extent of political and economic shifts occurring in Europe in the late Middle Ages: the collapse of Byzantium, the spread of an international currency and the formation of large financial conglomerates, some of them complicit with the emerging Turkish imperial expansion.

A picture is created of a community in the grip of forces it cannot control and can barely comprehend. A medieval community tries to make sense of rapid historical change, against a bleak landscape of fogs, freezing rains, a great river and a stone bridge. This is a profoundly atmospheric book.

Mérta Selimi says

My rating may not be totally objective (I was about to give it four stars actually) but this novel's core is a legend my father told me when I was a little girl (the legend of Rozafa) so I guess it really resonates in me, on a personal level.

Anyway, in this novel Kadare analyses the relationship between legends and reality. He tends to demonstrate how legends can be (have been?) used for treacherous purposes (conceal a crime for example...).

But as a master of allegories and metaphors, Kadare develops the whole story in order to describe a larger reality where the catastrophic events happening to the bridge only prefigure a more terrible curse : the invasion of Albania by the Ottoman empire.

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Alta says

The Three-Arched Bridge, written in Albania between 1976 and 1978, is based on a myth of sacrifice and creation, which also appears in other works by Kadare, and is present in different versions throughout the Balkans.

The legend is about three brothers, all masons, whose efforts to build a castle were in vain because everything built during daytime was destroyed by an unknown force at night. After having unsuccessfully worked for a long time, the masons are told by a wise man that the construction will endure only if a human life is sacrificed, so the brothers decide to immure one of their brides in the foundations. The sacrifice should strike the first wife to come in the morning with the midday meal for her husband, and the youngest wife is consequently walled up alive, one breast left out so she can feed her infant even after her death.

According to the narrator of *The Three-Arched Bridge*, the monk Gjon, the kernel of the legend was the idea that all labor requires some kind of sacrifice, and the spilled blood is in fact sweat. But the legend becomes reality when the construction of a bridge demands a human life, and a mason is found immured in the bridge piers. Thus, the notion of sacrifice, which is at the core of the story, can be read in several ways: as a legend, as a crime done in the name of the bridge, as the idea that all human orders are founded on blood, and at the end of the novel, when the monk, author of “this chronicle, [which:] like the bridge itself, may demand a sacrifice,” announces his own sacrifice, as a commentary on the essence of great art, always built on the sacrifice of the artist.

Muhammed Hebala says

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Escotilha says

Kadaré, como muitos autores daquela “outra Europa”, tem uma “vida dupla”. Vive até 1990 na Albânia e, então, pede asilo na França, onde vive até hoje. As relações do escritor com o regime de Enver Hoxha são complexas e não é minha intenção analisar este tópico.

Talvez Kadaré seja mais conhecido, no Brasil, pela obra *Abril Despedaçado*, adaptada para cinema sob a direção de Walter Salles. *A Ponte dos Três Arcos* parece não ter despertado grande atenção – o que é uma pena. Neste espaço, então, dedico-me a esta obra.

O leitor deste livro lerá um romance histórico com traços de terror. Palavras como “sombrio”, “sinistro” e “maldição” permeiam o livro, estão lá o tempo inteiro, até mesmo no nome do próprio rio sobre o qual se construirá a ponte: o Ouyane maldito.

Por Luiz Budant

Íntegra da resenha em: <http://www.aescotilha.com.br/literatu...>

Jose Carlos says

Leyenda y pavor, crimen y encrucijadas, se entremezclan en *El puente de los tres arcos*, novela de Ismaíl

Kadaré que parece sostener cierto origen común, o trasfondo o subtexto que recuerda a veces a Un puente sobre el Drina, del premio Nobel serbio Ivo Andric (esta última mucho más célebre, con su propia entrada en la Wikipedia y todo). En Kadaré, la leyenda del puente, reivindicada como originalmente albanesa, no oculta sino un fin en sí misma, el asesinato, el emparedamiento de un hombre en los pilares del puente sobre el río, en este caso el Ujana e Keqe, es decir, el río Aguas malas, toda una advertencia de los castigos, del futuro que recibirán quienes se atrevan a desafiar a la naturaleza construyendo un artefacto para salvar la corriente y sepultando a un hombre en sus cimientos para fraguar el futuro.

En principio, y desde tiempos inmemoriales, un barquero (sí, un barquero, tan simbólico como sencillo) se encargaba de que las cosas fueran como debían: cruzaba a la gente de una a otra orilla. Así debía ser, pero un caminante sufrió un ataque epiléptico junto al embarcadero, lo que fue interpretado como una señal de que ese era el lugar en donde se debería levantar un puente. El lugar es Arbería, la Albania medieval, la Albania de 1377, repleta de miedos y oscuridad, de temor y supersticiones, tal y como demuestra en esta crónica que narra -ubicado desde el pavor- el monje Gjón. Arbería: un terreno abonado para la superchería, sobre el que bastaba con que se desplomara un epiléptico, para desencadenarse todo tipo de tragedias. Con la tolerancia indolente de un conde que no es capaz de interpretar los sucesos ni puede defenderse ante el peligro inminente, el puente se levantará sobre las aguas y, finalmente, por él, a través de él, llegaran los invasores (que tal vez estaban tras el epiléptico y tras otra suerte de sucesos que contribuyen a la construcción) para sumir a la Arbería en una noche otomana de siglos.

Sin embargo, y aquí radica lo espantoso, el puente necesitará consolidarse en el terreno de Arbería. Superará algunos sabotajes; algunas veces, aparece medio derruido lo que se ha construido el día anterior, por lo que se decide recurrir a una vieja leyenda: la necesidad de emparedar a alguien en los cimientos con el fin de que aquella obra marche adelante y se termine con bien. Por supuesto, para legitimar el disparate, esa persona emparedada acudiría por su propia voluntad, bajo el acuerdo de un contrato que garantizará el bienestar futuro de su familia. Y así, no falta quien se presente voluntario. Quedará fundido a la leyenda y su rostro, su silueta, blanqueada por la cal, para siempre en los pilares del puente y del mito.

Kadaré reflexiona aquí con el terrible futuro de Albania como estado, que necesitará de mucha sangre y sufrimiento, bien arraigado a su tierra, para estabilizarse como país. Pero también se nos presenta una enorme carga de simbolismo en su advertencia sobre los estados y los estadistas: dispuestos a cualquier crimen para perpetuarse. Así le ocurriría a Albania, deberá cimentar con el sufrimiento de los suyos la intención de ser un estado independiente en ese futuro nebuloso. Y después, en ese futuro, sus ciudadanos, como figuras de yeso emparedadas en los cimientos del comunismo, soportarán la celda interior del régimen de Hoxha.

Todo ello, narrado por el monje bajo el marco de esta leyenda del puente, una leyenda lo suficientemente extendida, puesto que, tal y como asegura Gjón, se trata de una leyenda que se conoce en las once lenguas balcánicas. El emparedamiento en los pilares del puente arranca, de esa forma, desde la leyenda y el mito, sembrado en el imaginario balcánico, y se desarrolla en los miedos del inconsciente colectivo de todo ese ámbito. Sobre la leyenda se desarrolla el pavor, y con ella, de su mano, arrecian los más oscuros temores y se cometen las mayores iniquidades.

El puente, ya convertido en un puente de sangre, será la bisagra que emparente a la Arbería medieval con el año 755 de la hégira. Y desde allí, se extenderá el tiempo inamovible bajo el alfanje.

Robert says

3.5 stars

Tara says

Sometimes the best stories are those that are told simply, without flash or Hollywood-style suspense. The Three-Arched Bridge is that kind of story. It's told in the form of a chronicle, narrated by a medieval Christian monk named Gjon.

On one level the novel is about the competition between, what are essentially, two companies. Boats & Rafts transport the people across the river. Roads & Bridges arrives to build a bridge to take the people over it. The two opposing sides attempt to influence their potential customers with propaganda and espionage – utilizing legend and local superstition. It sounds dry and boring, yet is anything but. After the bridge is repeatedly sabotaged, Roads & Bridges employs bards to re-work an old ballad and twist it to their purposes: about an oath made by three brothers and of the bride of the youngest who is walled up alive within the foundations of a castle. She is a sacrifice to prevent its walls from crumbling.

But like much of Kadare's work, this is a story that functions on multiple levels. The monk, Gjon, is a more complex character than he originally seems. He comes across as deliberately naive, unwilling to grasp the implications of the information to which he is privy. For example, it is he who discusses the old ballad with a representative of Roads & Bridges during a series of seemingly casual walks along the banks of river. Not until it is too late does he understand the reason behind the man's curiosity, or discover the macabre purpose to which a folk story will be twisted.

Interspersed within the tale is news of the last gasps of the Byzantine Empire – the defensive line of Christian Europe against the Islamic Turks. What is so brilliant is that Kadare makes this the secondary storyline, always in the background of Gjon's narrative. Gjon's attention, and ours, remain focused on events which take place closer to home. It's an example of man's tunnel vision; how history often happens without our truly understanding the significance of events as they occur. Because, in the end, what we know as history is only a series of incidents that have been put into perspective.

Ismail Kadare divided The Three-Arched Bridge into short chapters – most are 5 pages or less. These bursts of information convey a sense of real time passing. The breaks in the narrative are the storyteller editing out what he feels is irrelevant to his tale. But, of course, everything is relevant. The reader realizes this early on and, in my mind, that realization makes for a better book. It's fun to know more than the narrator; to understand that the bridge is a mere footnote in a bigger story. One that cannot be escaped or avoided, regardless of whether we want to pay attention to it or not.

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Sorin Hadârc? says

Ismail Kadare poate fi genial dac? vrea, nu ?i în "Podul cu trei arce". Romanul de fa?? face parte din seria de exerci?ii mitologice, prin care autorul ia câte o legend? veche ?i o întoarce pe fa?? ?i pe dos g?sindu-i noi dedesupturi. Un fel de a coase dosar penal Me?terului Manole.

Brent says

I thought this book was fantastic. Kadare's story is short, almost a novella, and yet it is layered with issues of every shape and size, from mythology and religion to war and architecture. There are hints of fable and satire in this story, and while it is set in the medieval period its questions about authority and deceit feel targeted toward the modern day. I am fully impressed by Kadare's ability to write such a multi-faceted tale.
