

THE LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN - A GREAT ACHIEVEMENT OF OUR ART OF SOCIALIST REALISM

by **BEDRI DEDJA**

The Albanian literature for children has always striven to combine literary art with the demands and ideals of communist education, while at the same time contributing to a profound knowledge of the social psychology of the children of our days

OUR YOUNG READERS UP TO FOURTEEN-FIFTEEN YEARS OF AGE MAKE UP TODAY NEARLY HALF OF THE POPULATION OF ALBANIA. SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN SET UP FOR THEM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY. SOCIALIST ALBANIA IS THE COUNTRY IN WHICH ONE IN THREE INHABITANTS GOES TO SCHOOL. CRECHES AND KINDERGARTENS FOR PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION, THE 8-YEAR SCHOOL OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION, THE FAMILY, THE RADIO AND TELEVISION, BOOKS AND LIBRARIES, FILMS AND PUPPET THEATRES PROMPT THE YOUNG AT THE TENDEREST AGE TO SEEK THE BOOK, THE TALE, THE POETRY. THIS OBJECTIVE REQUIREMENT OF THE YOUNG GENERATION AND THE CONDITIONS CREATED FOR THEM HAVE CONDITIONED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LITERATURE OF SOCIALIST REALISM FOR CHILDREN JUST AS EVERYTHING ELSE IN THE ALMOST FORTY YEARS OF BIG STRIDES OUR COUNTRY HAS TAKEN AHEAD ON THE SOCIALIST ROAD. QUITE RIGHTLY CONSIDERS OUR SOCIAL OPINION THIS LITERATURE AS ONE OF THE POWERFUL MEANS OF COMMUNIST EDUCATION.

The literature for children, which Comrade Enver Hoxha has called «very important» and «very necessary», is **BEDRI DEDJA** — Professor at the University of Tirana and writer

one of the achievements on the front of our socialist culture. It has become an inseparable component part of the spiritual world of the child. This emerges clearly from the hundreds and hun-

dreds of enquiries in which children speak in most enthusiastic terms about the works of this literature. In these works there is nothing in the way of anxiety and insecurity, the old ethics of the exploiters or religious ethics, Christian pity or submissive prayer. On the contrary, the children's books reflect our happy life, the happy life of children in socialist Albania, a life of work and learning, of love for the people and the Homeland and the Party of the communists, of optimism about our secure communist future. From the works of this literature children learn to follow in the footsteps of outstanding people of our society and to put their lofty ideals into practice. The rich and varied life of children in today's Albania cannot be imagined without a literature for children.

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The Albanian literature for children inherited few valuable things from the past, by way of cultivated literature. It must be admitted that the ground on which it flourished, however, was a sound one. This is primarily due to the sources of oral creativeness of our people, their tales, riddles, lullabies and lyrical songs, the numerous games which have been through the centuries a powerful means of education in the framework of the closed system of family education, at a time when there were no Albanian schools because of the many-centuries of Ottoman rule. Old folk tales are still read by our children to this day, because they sing to the heroism and work of simple people, to their aspirations to and efforts for a life of freedom, without exploiters. Apart from its very nature, which is so attractive to children, the tale as a genre enabled the cultivation of many other genres of literature for children, especially in prose. The folk song also gave an impulse to the poetry of socialist realism for children. Its simplicity and musicality, its sense of humour and social character were important features which not only proved very suitable to the children's psychology, but also educated them in a popular spirit. Relying on these traditions and developing them further in accord with the ideals of our socialist order, the Albanian writers for children have produced beautiful works which preserve the popular and national spirit and raise it to a higher level.

Likewise, the literature for children of the period of the Albanian National Renaissance (from the 19th century to 1912) and the progressive literature of the period of Independence (1912-1939), which developed in the wake of the Renaissance, also served as the groundwork for the development of our children's literature today. The struggle of the men of Albanian Renaissance for freedom and independence and, especially their struggle to set up the Albanian school, raised before them quite naturally the need for the literary creativeness for children, convinced them of the urgency of creating a literature for them. The literature of the Renaissance is outstanding not only because it marked the beginning of the literature for children, but also because it enclosed in itself a profoundly patriotic character, as it was linked with the struggle of the Albanian people for

freedom, independence and with their efforts for the dissemination of the writing and teaching in the Albanian language.

A very positive feature of this period was that many outstanding men of the Renaissance — philosophers, linguists, teachers and writers, made it a point to write school books and books for children. The literature of the Albanian Renaissance had a profoundly patriotic content and contributed in a long way to the education of the young generation and the spread of teaching in the Albanian language. Because of the Ottoman occupation, their works were almost all published abroad, but, all the same, they were introduced into the country for young and old to read.

In the period of Independence of the Albanian state the more progressive writers channelled the literature for children into the mainstream of realism and, for the first time made felt notes of protest against the social injustices of the feudal-bourgeois order. However, the obscurantist regime of King Zog took no interest in the literature for children. This is proved by the fact that the only magazine published at that time for the little readers, «The Hearth of the Youth» (1933-1939), received no assistance from the state. Almost every one of its issues called on the readers to make a contribution in money to ensure continuity of its publication.

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The children's literature of socialist realism emerged in the years of the Anti-fascist National Liberation War of the Albanian people. In the time of fascist occupation, when the enemy did their utmost to Italianize the Albanian school and bring the education of the younger generation under their influence, the Communist Party of Albania sounded the battle-call for the liberation of the country. It called on the younger generation to take to arms and throw themselves in this great revolutionary action. The setting up of the Organization of Young Pioneers in February 1942 marked an important turning-point in the field of the revolutionary education of children. Hundreds and thousands of children joined this organization and, as its members, took an active part in the struggle against the occupiers; others, numbering tens

and hundreds, joined the partisan ranks and, through countless sacrifices, fought and some laid down their young lives for the liberation of the Homeland. In these conditions the literature for children was born, which inspired itself from the struggle of the people under the leadership of the Party. In its beginnings this literature circulated by means of the communist leaflets and calls addressed to the younger generation, the partisan songs for children, descriptions and sketches, short stories describing the heroism of the people and the young pioneers. Later, the first magazines published underground for young pioneers came out. They became tribunes for the literature creativeness of the partisans, the communist youth and the young pioneers themselves. So, in 1943 the magazine «the Young Pioneer» came out in Tirana, and in 1944 «The Young Pioneers' Voice» began to be published in Elbasan, both in underground conditions. Many revolutionary materials for children were published in the illegal press of the Communist Party, of the anti-fascist youth and in the pocket newspapers of the partisan formations. After the liberation of the country this activity assumed much broader proportions.

The children's magazines, the new readers that began to be compiled for the schools, as well as for the out-of-school education of the young pioneers, the amateur movements, etc. were a powerful stimulus to the literature for children. Still in those early years after Liberation the literature creativeness for children was insufficient compared with the demands of the little readers. At that time only two-three and, more seldom, eight-ten original books for children were published yearly. Translations accounted for the greater part of the publications. Nevertheless, thanks to efforts and the passionate work of the pioneers of this literature — the communist and patriotic writers, a socialist tradition with a sound militant communist spirit was created in this literature. Up to the beginning of the seventies there were five hundred original publications for children. In 1972 forty-two such books were published, while in 1973 eighty. In the last decade about 730 children's books have been published. These figures speak not only of a quantitative growth but also of a qualitative rise of the literature for children from the standpoint of both themes and genres. This development responded to the task the Party had set in the speech of Comrade Enver Hoxha in the spring of 1973, in which it was said, «the Central Committee of the

Party calls on our gifted writers not to neglect writing for the youth as well as for the young pioneers..., only gifted and dedicated people can turn out attractive and educative work for the most beautiful flowers of our socialist garden.» (Enver Hoxha, «Reports and Speeches 1972-1973», p. 238, Alb. ed.)

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This is the period in which the ideological level of the Albanian literature for children can be said to have gained its proper definite range of themes and variety of genres to have enriched a certain one-sidedness overcome, such as was the cultivation of short genres or tales only. To this period belongs a great number of stories and novels, poems and verses for children of all ages, and for those of the pre-school age, in particular, plays for children's theatres and puppet theatres, films, science fiction and other works for children and youth. In their themes these works broadly reflect the life of present-day children, their life in our socialist society, the epic of the Anti-fascist National Liberation War, the historical past and, through science-fiction, the happy communist future awaiting of our country. A signal success in this time is the specialization and increased productivity of many writers in this field of creativeness. A considerable achievement is also the contribution of other writers who, besides their works intended for the grown-ups, have also written books addressed to the young readers. So, our literature for children today is cultivated by the more qualified creative forces of the country which consider their activity for the moral and ideological-esthetic education of the entire young generation as a very important task.

This explains the many achievements in all genres of literature for children, especially in the novel, which is in great favour among the young readers. This genre with its broad reflection of our socialist life enhances the educative and instructive role of this branch of literature. Novels for children mainly portray the rich spiritual world of children and grown-ups, people who struggle, work and learn for socialism. They acquaint children with life and the major problems of the time. So, for example, the novel «Beni Walks on His Own», which has also been screened,

is interesting both for its descriptions of life in the socialist village of Albania and for the problem it raises about the education of children with qualities of courage and love for the common man working in agriculture, instilling in them the desire to be useful to society as early as possible. Another novel, «The Orphans», describes with moving realism the life of orphan children in the years of the Anti-fascist National Liberation War, the awakening of their consciousness and their eagerness to fight against fascism under the leadership of the communists and to throw themselves unreservedly in the movement for the liberation of the country. This novel, too, has its firm version with the title «Poppies on the Wall». Achievements of our literature for children are also such novels as «Chuffie and the Curly Doggie» which appeals to the phantasy of the little readers and teaches them to love the good and to hate the bad. Under this same category come many other works such as «I Am the Son of My People», «A Joint Victory», «For Today and the Days to Come», «The Black Coat», «The New Foundations», which deal with various themes, such as the heroic resistance of our people in the centuries against the foreign invaders, the valuable contribution of children in the National Liberation War, or such works in which the little readers acquaint themselves with the great projects of socialist construction in the present times.

Another important success of our literature for children is reflected in the dedication of many writers to stories and short stories which have met with the favour of the young public. Among them worth our mention are the collections of short stories such as «One-and-Sixty tales» «Legends and Stories about Skanderbeg», «Stories about Qemal», «The Dardanian Knights», «The Little Woodcarver», «At the Bride's Fountain», «A General Is Taken Prisoner» and many others, which have raised this genre to a higher qualitative level. These works have a broad range of themes: they describe episodes of the lives of our forefathers, of their struggle to defend their Homeland from invaders much superior in numbers. In all these short stories an important place is occupied by the National Liberation War and the construction of major projects of socialist industry and agriculture, problems of ethics, of behaviour, of the revolutionary relationship between children and the grown-ups, etc.

Poetry for children and, in particular, poetry for children of the pre-

school and low-cycle school age, has reached a high degree of maturity. In this genre, too, a number of strong creative individualities have emerged who have won the affection of children with their works. There are poems based on folk motifs and folk verse, such as the poem «The Heroine of Tërbaç» — a description of the strength of character of the Albanian woman in the struggle against the foreign occupiers. The poem «He who Vanquished the Emperor», dedicated to Vasil Laçi, the youth who made an attempt at the life of the Emperor of Italy, Victor Emmanuel the Third, in the middle of Tirana, is not easily forgotten. Many poems stand out for their warm humour, carefully chiselled verse which often assumes the value of an aphorism; many of them are not only agreeable tales in verse, but also successful descriptions of life. Other poems focus on the description of the life of the present-day Albanian village, the dreams and aspirations of children, their games, lessons and labour actions. All this is given in melodious richly figured verse which children read with pleasure, and readily learn by heart. Poetry for children has been enriched with new and original values by such works as «In the Arms' Museum» which acquaints the little readers with the centuries-long history of the Albanian people, with their heroism and their weapons which put all foreign invaders to shame in our land. Other poems like «The Battle of Aspirins» expresses in a humorous manner the desire of children to temper themselves physically against the erroneous concepts of some parents that want to keep their offspring shut up, like flowers in hotbeds, allegedly to defend them against diseases. The poetry for children also expresses the great political and social problems of the times in the form of tales or through the description of real events, thereby the children are educated with the lofty ideals of socialist society. So, for example, the electrification of the country is dealt with very attractively in the tale-poem «We Will Build the Hydro-power Stations»; the struggle against the reactionary concept «what's the use of school?» in the poem «The School in the Woods»; the process of the revolutionization of the whole life of the country in the poem «The Bear Takes Up Photography».

The successes of our literature of socialist realism for children are evident. The capacity of this literature to cope with the repertoire of Twenty-six puppet theatres that have been set in all the districts of the country and which

give regular performance for hundreds of thousands of little spectators, is evidence of this. A number of children's journals, are published today in Albania according to the different categories of children's age like «The Little Stars» for the pre-school age, «The Hero» for the children of the lower school cycle, «The Young Pioneer» and «Horizon» (a journal of science digest), and «The Children's Stage». There are many fine films for children which have been a success among the grown-ups, too, such as «The Communist Youth», «A Torrent of Light», «In our Home», «Our Comrade Tili», and many others. Good work is being done by the professional theatres and variety shows which now and then put up plays and variety shows, operettes, ballets and musical tableaux for children.

However, with all its achievements, our literature for children is still undergoing a process of uninterrupted creative development. Here quality is the main point, and the struggle to raise it is directed against the publication of weak works, full of cut-and-dry moralizations which bore the little readers, works which do not rely on a profound knowledge of the present-day child psychology or show marked poverty of themes and language. It is clear that this creative process cannot develop spontaneously. On the contrary, the further development of our children's literature is increasingly based on scientific literary and pedagogical methods and criteria. For this purpose, particular attention has been paid to working out a theory of this literature through the study of Marxist-Leninist literary thinking, of the materials of the PLA and the Works of Comrade Enver Hoxha, summing up our experience in this field of creativeness, drawing on the legacy of world progressive literature and stimulating serious criticism

— all things which constitute the theoretical basis of this literature.

In February this year the Plenum of the League of Writers and Artists of Albania met to discuss the problems arising in this field today. After a broad analysis of the situation, it set tasks for a new qualitative advance in this field of literary creativeness. All this analysis of theoretical and practical value was based on the orientations of the 8th Congress of the PLA which pointed out that «The extension of the range of themes of literature and art, including in them more and more of the vastness and variety of life, so that the great tableau of the socialist epoch in Albania is gradually completed by our writers and artists, is a demand of the time. The creation of this artistic testimony remains a basic task of our literature and arts.» (Enver Hoxha, Report to the 8th Congress of the PLA, Tirana 1981, p. 149, Eng. ed.)

Fulfilment of this major task demands that the writers link themselves more closely with the life of the country and, especially with the life of the children, and write works which acquaint them with broader tableaux of the socialist construction in our country, which reflect with truthfulness the great spiritual world of the working class, the cooperativist peasantry, and all working people, with the communists in the lead, as well as of the children themselves. Particular attention should be paid to the enrichment of the literature for children with some themes and genres, especially with works on the great projects of the five-year plan, on the great socialist transformations in the countryside, on the problems of the school and its revolutionary principles. The further development of the novel for children which gives great possibilities for a more complete artistic reflection of life, the more extensive cultivation of the

genre of science-fiction short stories and novels, and new literary tales for the younger readers which, despite their phantastic character, should be based firmly on our socialist reality and communist morality, arises as an urgent need.

Likewise, in the literature for children quality is closely linked with the proper understanding of its specific character.

Of course, the specific character of the literature for children calls for interesting adventures, dramatic situations, dynamic events and suspense, which, however, should never become an aim in themselves. Taking account of this demand of the psychology of the child, apart from imagination, the books which are intended for them should also stimulate their thinking and concern about the great problems of the life of the people in our socialist country. Dramatism and suspense should always be based on materialist logic and on efforts to reflect the reality as truthfully as possible. The writers of socialist realism never play on the feelings of the child nor do they limit their works within the narrow interests of the child.

The specific character of the literature for children in our country cannot be imagined without its artistic reflection of the actual demands of the revolutionary pedagogy of our Party which wants the children not only to attend lessons, but also to take part in actual life, to develop their technical intuition, and their scientific imagination, to combine literary art with contemporary knowledge. The Albanian literature for children has always striven to combine literary art with the demands and ideals of communist education, while at the same time contributing to a profound knowledge of the social psychology of the children of our days.