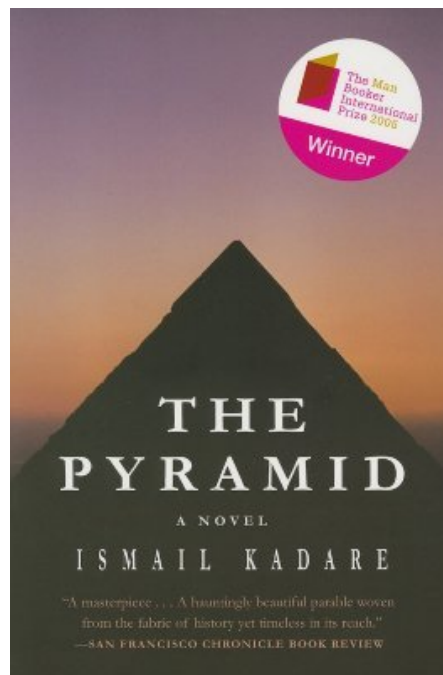




The Pyramid

Ismail Kadare , David Bellos (Translator)

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From the Albanian writer who has been short-listed for the Nobel Prize comes a hypnotic narrative of ancient Egypt, a work that is at once a historical novel and an exploration of the horror of untrammelled state power. It is 2600 BC. The Pharaoh Cheops is inclined to forgo the construction of a pyramid in his honor, but his court sages hasten to persuade him otherwise. The pyramid, they tell him, is not a tomb but a paradox: it keeps the Egyptian people content by oppressing them utterly. The pyramid is the pillar that holds power aloft. If it wavers, everything collapses. And so the greatest pyramid ever begins to rise. It is a monument that crushes dozens of men with the placing of each of its tens of thousands of stones. It is the subject of real and imaginary conspiracies that necessitate ruthless purges and fantastic tortures. It is a monster that will consume all Egypt before it swallows the body of Cheops himself. As told by Ismail Kadare, The Pyramid is a tour de force of Kafkaesque paranoia and Orwellian political prophecy. "A haunting meditation on the matter-of-fact brutality of political despotism." - The New York Times Book Review "Kadare's prose glimmers with the magic realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez." - Los Angeles Times Book Review "One of the most compelling novelists now writing in any language." - Wall Street Journal

The Pyramid Details

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From Reader Review The Pyramid for online ebook

Sarah says

To be honest, this is rather a dessicated account of the bloody process of building of Cheops's pyramid - with obvious significance in Albania, as Hoxha's intended mausoleum is a squat and particularly ugly pyramid (designed by his architect daughter) on prime land in the centre of Tirana (with a pretty nice parklet around it, granted). At least, from the ground it's ugly; from the air it's a representation of the the Albanian eagle and rather more impressive. Hoxha has long lain elsewhere, the pyramid still seems solid but the various doors are a patchwork of broken bits and pieces, it's covered in graffiti and it's mainly used by young people who run up the slopes and hang out on the flat top. There's also an occasional nightclub operating in a back entrance, called Mumja.

So anyway this is a short and serviceable but uninspiring account of dictatorial behaviour, of using economy-collapsing projects specifically to keep the people occupied and unhappy, and of labyrinthine bureaucracies where the system is everything and no one seems to be actually in charge. There are probably a lot of Albanian references here, but I only got a few of them. It's rather difficult to see what exactly Kadare is doing with this, other than the broad comments about vanity projects, dictatorships and a put-upon population, but the mention of Albania's pyramid and all its little pyramids (the bunkers) was resonant, and probably more so to those who were on the spot when Hoxha's pyramid was happening.

This was written in the years just after the pyramid itself was completed, in 1988. There's probably a more interesting book in the inconsequential dithering over what should become of it now - here's a taste. The latest was a contest during the Architecture Week last September which invited proposals for it; none were particularly memorable. Also.... this book predated the growth and collapse of the pyramid schemes in Albanian (with such a violent outcome) but not by much. I wonder what I should be finding anything in the book that prefigures the rest of that messy decade in Albania.

Mira says

I'm a fan of Ancient Egyptian stories - but this was a drudge. Sample text goes like "*..stone number ten thousand and twenty six arrived from the quarry and was placed, stone number ten thousand and twenty seven arrived but was cursed and forty slaves died, stone number ten thousand and twenty eight had a crack in it..*". No joke.

It put me in mind of this comedy sketch. It's only 2'29 mins long, but infinitely more entertaining than this book. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ob1rYL...>

Having said that - if anyone knows of any great fantasy or detective novels set in Ancient Egypt please recommend in the comments.

Jim says

I wasn't sure why I was reading this book when I started it. I've never been much of a history buff and had I realised when I'd started it it was going to be about ancient Egypt I'm not sure I would've picked it up. If it wasn't by Kadare. That was the only reason. This is my fifth. I've heard it called "one of the greatest works produced by this writer" but then I've also seen it called "[a] below-par performance by a world-class writer." It certainly has its moments but even though it's a short book it does drag on a little. Once you've got the joke—and it took me a few pages—that's it. Kadare reimagines Egypt under the rule of Cheops as a totalitarian state and it works; it works well. The reason for building the pyramid is analogous to the reasons given to Winston Smith in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* for the need for constant war: "prosperity, by making people more independent and freer in their minds, also made them more resistant to authority in general and to the power of the Pharaoh in particular". The solution? A distraction. And what could be more distracting than a project that would take somewhere between ten and twenty years to complete? And then start all over again!

The Pharaoh's ministers came up with many different ideas at that time: a bottomless pit to be dug in the earth, toward the gates of hell; a rampart around the whole of Egypt; an artificial waterfall... But though they were all inspired by elevated, patriotic, or mystical ideas, they were all rejected by the Pharaoh. The wall would come to an end one day or another, and the hole in the ground, because it was bottomless, would exasperate the people. What had to be found was something else, something that would keep folk busy night and day so that they became oblivious. But it had to be a project that could in principle be completed, without ever reaching completion. In a nutshell, a permanently self-renewing project. And one that would be really visible.

Cheops at first doesn't want a pyramid but once he realises the benefits he decides he wants the biggest ever built.

No sooner has construction begun than the rumours start:

Every day something new happened, and a good half of what happened had some connection with the pyramid. Its shape was embroidered on young people's clothes, old men clipped their beards to pyramid points, and who knows how far things would have gone—had the whores of Luxor not taken them just too far by decorating their underwear with a triangle that suggested, even more than a pyramid, the delta of their pubic hair.

They were arrested one evening and taken to the police station, shouting: "Long live the pyramid! Long live whores!" Meanwhile their pimps, together with hoodlums from the rough quarters, put the commotion to use by ransacking the town centre stalls.

Such facts were talked about in bars; in private homes, after dinner, they were fearfully deplored. There was talk of numerous functionaries being sent to the remoter regions. According to some rumours, it was not just people being sent to work in the quarries and basalt mines: undesirables were being removed from the city. Pure and simple deportation, people muttered, but, obviously, no one dared to call a spade a spade.

Was there a police force in Egypt circa 2550 BC? Not as such. And there probably wasn't a Security Service either. This book is not meant to be historically accurate. When I read about the "bottomless pit" the first thing I thought about was *The Foundation Pit* by Andrei Platonov. It's the same thing. It doesn't really matter. It could be any totalitarian state, any seemingly pointless project.

Eventually the thing gets finished, Cheops dies and the grave robbers come. That should've been it. But Kadare feels the need to hammer the nail home by talking about the skullstacks built by the Turco-Mongol conqueror Timur showing the legacy of the pyramids. Kadare notes, "Pyramidal phenomena occurred in cycles, without it ever being possible to determine precisely the timing of their appearance," and imagines a man photographing the pyramid; as he does he makes a wish: "that the monument should become quite transparent, so that everything inside—the sarcophagi, the mummies, the indecipherable puzzle—would be visible, as through a wall of glass." Does he see in his mind's eye the Pyramid of Tirana, built in memory of Enver Hoxha? Perhaps. Perhaps.

Not a masterpiece but worth reading if only for the descriptions of the Sumerian ambassador's continual efforts to get coded messages home on stone tablets:

While the two overloaded wagons of the diplomatic courier were conveying his message (it weighed about the same as the side of a house—despite the diplomat's efforts to have thinner tablets made, he had been unable to reduce their weight any further), the Egyptian secret service had had a hidden trench dug across the highway, and so easily got the carts to tip over. In the ensuing confusion and while the injured couriers were receiving first aid, purloining a few of the tablets scattered over the road was hardly a problem.

Paul A. says

There is no doubt that Kadare deserves to be a perennial nominee for the Nobel Prize for literature. The Pyramid is ostensibly about Young Pharaoh Cheops and his decree to build the greatest pyramid in the world (which is known to us as the The Great Pyramid of Giza), but it's really about brutal regime of Enver Hoxha in Albania. The novel is really a parable about totalitarianism, an allegory of tyranny.

The construction of Cheops' pyramid terrorizes Egypt. As the novel's dust jacket says, the pyramid "is a useless and infinite project intended to waste the country's wealth and keep security and prosperity, ever the fonts of sedition, constantly at bay. ... A secret police is formed; the most drastic purges are carried out in the interest of the Pharaoh's great obsession." Like Cheops, Hoxha had his own pyramid, co-designed by Hoxha's daughter Panvera, said to be the most expensive individual structure ever constructed in Albania up until then. Hoxha's pyramid, which opened in 1988 — the same year Kadare began writing his novel — "celebrates" a regime that "which included the establishment and use of forced labor camps, wrongful incarcerations, extrajudicial killings and executions that targeted and eliminated anti-communists and other dissidents, and evictions of families from their homes to remote villages strictly controlled by his secret police, the Sigurimi, which, like Nicolae Ceaușescu's Securitate, was strongly oppressive and ubiquitous," according to Wikipedia. The parallels are obvious.

However, it's not for the faint of heart. It's a haunting, hypnotic book. I read this book with a sense that it was good for me. (But so is medicine.) I have to confess that it was tough going at times. It's a solid novella, but the amount of detail about pyramid-building, for instance, is a tad intimidating. The chapter called "Daily Chronicle," goes for nine pages without paragraph breaks.

I read this book with a sense of wonder. Only a writer of the caliber of Kadare could write this mille-feuille of a book that horrifies at the same time grips you despite the fact that the novel lacks a conventional plot or conflict. Kadare is a master of the psychology of oppression and the despotic mind. Think Kafka or Orwell.

It's surprisingly relevant to our times.

sh'dynasty says

This is my least favourite Kadare novel in the group of five or six that I have read. As the others are mostly simply amazing, that doesn't make this book a bad read at all. The language in it is beautiful, but I could have done without some of the more vulgar parts of it, as they were not pertinent to the story but just mentioned from time to time. Doesn't seem very Kadar-esque to me. But I suppose it's a matter of taste. Also a matter of taste would be where it takes place, in Ancient Egypt, which is not all that interesting to me, but definitely read-able because of his style of story-telling. My favourite part of the book besides its message is how Kadare takes that message and updates it for us, reminding us that history repeats itself and modern states are just as capable of applying terror to their populations as those that first used the method.

Bbrown says

Kadare's novella *The Pyramid* rehashes the subject of life under an inscrutable bureaucracy that was also the focus of Kadare's *The Palace of Dreams*, though this is a darker take on the topic. Kadare paints a portrait of the state as existing solely to oppress the populace, whether that be through busywork on an unimaginable scale or directly through killing and torture. The titular pyramid here seems to represent all the actions taken by a tyrannical and authoritarian state- it is justified to the populace through lies, masking the true purpose of working the people so hard that they will not have the strength to rebel. The pyramid might represent other things to other people, as the construction is met with optimism by the population when first announced, but these more positive perspectives of what a pyramid may represent are not dwelled on in this work. The book emphasizes most strongly that such works are tools of oppression and deception more so than they are a symbol with any positive connotations, and the final pages make explicit that Kadare is drawing the same connections between the actions of more recent oppressive governments and the cruelty of old. Every stone that is used to build the pyramid is a gravestone, and the blood spilled in such endeavors will never be erased no matter how many years have passed. Kadare clearly means to suggest that modern authoritarian governments will likewise never have their past sins erased- they are fundamentally tainted.

This was a solid novella, but it was weaker than the similar Kadare book *The Palace of Dreams*. That work focused on an individual and his family and their experiences within an inscrutable totalitarian state, and was also a longer work, giving you more time to walk in the main character's shoes and come to sympathize with the precarious and absurd position he had to occupy under the bureaucracy. Here, by comparison, the story felt impersonal, as the story shifted focus and provided no anchor point for the plot. Such a difficulty was magnified by the fact that Kadare had obviously done research into the construction of the pyramids but chose to set the story in an ahistorical version of Egypt, so the setting always felt a bit wobbly. *The Palace of Dreams* is well worth your time, but I'd only recommend *The Pyramid* if you've run through a significant portion of Kadare's work and are looking for similar subject matter.

Jose Carlos says

Es simple: toda la novela de *La pirámide* es una metáfora.

Es complejo: ¿cuál o cuáles son los objetos que refleja la imagen metafórica?

La pirámide es un ejemplo del Estado totalitario, de las dictaduras, de los elementos represivos del poder, de las ideologías ultras, pero también es una recreación del culto a la personalidad, de los líderes políticos mesiánicos al estilo de Stalin, de la evolución del comunismo en el siglo XX, en la misma Albania.

Egipto, el faraón Keops y la construcción, se pueden trasvasar sin dudarlo a la situación de la Albania desde donde se ubica Ismaíl Kadaré. Y sin embargo, en La pirámide, Kadaré no escribe una sola frase, ni una sola palabra hace referencia, ni menciona nada expresamente, sobre el estalinismo ni sobre la Albania de Hoxha y, sin embargo, toda la novela, al completo, trata sobre ellos.

Estamos ante una novela de varias capas, de distintos niveles de profundidad, se puede leer e interpretar hasta las honduras que se desee. Un análisis profundo de esta novela piramidal podría arrancar de la premisa de que el faraón Keops es Stalin, Egipto una suerte de URSS y la pirámide el sistema comunista. Desde esa lectura, puedo analizar diferentes sucesos de la narración que, así, cobran sentido. El primero, es la necesidad por parte del Estado de abotargar a la población consumiendo sus fuerzas, evitando que piensen en ellos mismos y que tomen conciencia de lo que les ocurre. De esa manera, el Estado se evita problemas, mantiene a la gente aterrorizada y distraída de sus propias realidades, prestando atención a un suceso de impacto mayor en sus vidas como será la construcción de la pirámide, cristalizando esta artimaña en el asunto sobre el que Kadaré teoriza en buena parte de su obra y al que califica como “la gran estratagema”.

A esta “gran maniobra” del Estado con el objeto de que los súbditos no sean conscientes de su propia realidad y no puedan así rebelarse en su contra -o que gracias a la estratagema vivan permanente bajo los hierros del pavor, en un régimen de terror- pertenece, además de la pirámide, el Caballo de Troya, así como otras numerosas artimañas que el autor desgana en sus obras, todas ellas maniobras de distracción infames que se van sumando al repertorio de “grandes estratagemas” políticas, mentiras manifiestas con poder represor: purgas, conspiraciones, intentos de golpes de estado, traiciones, tribunales, causas escandalosas y casos nefandos, falsos héroes, desastres magnificados, situaciones de alarma o alerta forzadas, fiestas nacionales, celebraciones...

Así que la pirámide, y todo lo que la rodea, consume el poder del pueblo, sus fuerzas, no sólo físicas, sino también mentales. Y con ella, vienen de la mano los grandes procesos por conjuras inventadas, acusando a la gente por tratar de atentar contra la construcción que, no en vano, significa el poder completo del Estado, lo que vendría a ser un ataque contra el Estado mismo. La pirámide, todo el poder que la rodea, se defiende montando un proceso, y luego otro, en paralelismo a los grandes procesos y purgas estalinistas llevadas a cabo en Moscú, señalando masivamente a enemigos del Estado y a conjurados.

En la novela, el faraón Keops construye su pirámide a sangre y fuego, tal y como Stalin modeló el país a su imagen e intentó identificar el Partido con su propia persona. Es en este sentido, en donde pirámide y faraón se confunden, donde poder y Estado se mezclan con su dirigente, otra similitud con el estalinismo. Toda la política de Stalin fue un intento de servir a su persona, de engrandecerla, elevarla hasta lo más alto, como se erige la pirámide del relato, y no sólo personalmente, sino intentando construir edificios en Moscú que rivalizaran con los rascacielos de Nueva York, por ejemplo, por lo que este Keops arquitectónico tiene muchas similitudes con Stalin.

Aparte del evidente paralelismo comentado, la novela se puede leer en otra dirección: el avatar personal del albanés durante el comunismo, o la forma de subsistencia individual del ciudadano durante la vida cotidiana del régimen. Progresivamente, y bajo el aplastamiento del sistema, la animación en las calles decae, los bares cierran, las plazas se vacían, incluso los hombres experimentan una alteración en el lenguaje: las palabras

van desapareciendo, variando sus significados, quedando vacías, carentes ya de contenido. Los sueños son pesadillas, el descanso se torna imposible, y la gente se mueve, avanza como sumida en un duermevela alucinado y automatizado: el régimen, el Estado se ha salido con la suya, ha convertido a los súbditos en inofensivos y aterrados autómatas, incapaces, así, de revolverse contra Él.

Y por encima de todo, presente desde todos los puntos de vista y paisajes posibles, la pirámide, que proyecta su sombra infecciosa sobre todo tipo de vida. Al estilo de la omnipresencia del Palac Kultury de Varsovia, que no he podido apartar de la cabeza durante la lectura. El monolito en forma de rascacielos, que Stalin legó a los polacos tras la reconstrucción de la ciudad después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, es una masa de cemento que se arroja sobre la ciudad, con su presencia demoledora en cada vez que alguien levanta la vista al cielo. De igual manera, siempre permanente en la vida de los egipcios, está la pirámide en la novela, metáfora de otro elemento característico del sistema comunista y de los regímenes totalitarios: los expedientes.

Me he llegado a preguntar si esta pirámide no es, también, o no tiene algo, aunque sea un poco, del terror que inoculan los expedientes policiales y secretos de organismos como la Sigurimi albanesa, la Securitate rumana, la Stasi alemana o la propia KGB... Si no será la historia de la erección de la pirámide la historia, tantas veces repetida en la Albania de Hoxha, de la puesta en pie de un expediente, con todos y cada uno de sus aterradores pasos, incluso con su sangriento desenlace para con el inocente o inocentes expedientados.

La pirámide, junto con El palacio de los Sueños y El firmán de la ceguera, tal vez sea el libro de Kadaré que aborde de una manera más directa el asunto del poder aplastante y totalitario, así como su tesis de “la gran estratagema”. Los Estados totalitarios, pero no nos engañemos, todos los estados en general, necesitan mantener distraídos a sus súbditos. Si el Estado es dictatorial y genocida, represivo y criminal, no tendrá reparos en que sus “estratagemas” sean de terror y que sus gentes desvíen la mirada atendiendo a tareas absorbentes como la edificación de la pirámide o el cumplimiento del plan quinquenal, o fijando la atención en una macro conjura con un juicio monumental y un carrusel de delaciones y delatores.

Si el Estado es de pleno derecho, entonces quizás deberemos acordarnos del director norteamericano Michael Moore, que en su película documental Fahrenheit 9/11 sostiene la teoría de que al Gobierno le conviene mantener al ciudadano sumido en una situación de perenne terror, asediándolo con breaking news en los canales de noticias y con permanentes llamadas a la prudencia y al miedo ante cualquier situación que, bien pronto, se convertirán alienantes emergencias de primer grado. Que la población agote las reservas de los supermercados ante una inminente situación de crisis a causa del miedo infundido por el sistema es infinitamente mejor a que, esa misma masa, enardecida y consciente de su propia desesperación, genere disturbios y manifestaciones violentas o que, al final, termine por asaltar la sede del Gobierno y fusile al Conducator de turno.

Así las cosas, y vistas las alertas desesperadas y alarmistas ante las más que naturales oleadas de frío en invierno y de calor en verano, las plagas de mosquitos o las sequías masivas, las campañas paternalistas que advierten de posibles desastres, o las noticias apocalípticas de epidemias o gripes que de repente son referente mundial porque así lo han decidido los lobbies de los gobiernos internacionales, me hacen concluir que en el Estado llamado “de derecho” también rige la norma de “la gran estratagema” y, por supuesto, no son más que otro tipo de burdas pirámides aquellas que las gentes se afanan por elevar, pirámides que se están construyendo todos los días, hasta rascar el cielo.

Se trata de mirar hacia otro lado, como sea. Eso es lo que más desean los Estados, que el hombre de a pie desvíe la mirada. En su novela El gran invierno, por ejemplo, en el instante mismo de la ruptura política de Albania con la URSS, una ruptura terrible y traumática para todo el país, una quiebra de significados

mayúsculos, a la par que ocurre ese asunto político de importancia capital, se produce el reventón del dique de una presa, una inundación que requiere la ayuda de todo el país en tareas de supervivencia. La atención se ha desviado, así. En El concierto, la ruptura política con China sigue los mismos derroteros: lejos de la política y de la situación delicada, la atención la centrarán los trabajos de emergencia en unos grandes hornos del Estado, que terminarían en una tragedia distractora.

Sea como sea, incluso en Troya, donde el caballo de madera es una estrategia para desviar la atención de los tejemanejes políticos entre griegos y troyanos, Kadaré abunda en este asunto: el ciudadano debe desviar su atención de la realidad, suplantado el terrible día a día por el sucedáneo que le sirve el Estado, bien sea envuelto en el terror y la inseguridad, en la opresión y el dolor, en el castigo y las mentiras, atenazados por el sistema represor, o bien sea alejados de la miserable actualidad por sucesos distantes sobre los que se pueda concentrar toda la atención para, así, poder seguir, día tras día, con la pesada digestión de la vida cotidiana en los comunismos.

La vida cotidiana al pie del calaveral.

Neal Adolph says

A book that sounds so much more interesting than it becomes.

Despite moments of brilliance, nothing in this novel quite takes flight. The ideas in it have the potential to be disturbing, but the reader never finds themselves caring for what is happening in the author's world. Certainly there are some really impressive observations about government and terror here - and it is interesting to read a dystopian novel set in Egypt - but all of his observations and ideas come off as more important than how he hopes to communicate them. Structurally, there aren't any characters that matter. The ending is bizarre, and threadbare - as though something far grander was hoped for, but in the interests of concision there was no means of taking it to the degree that was necessary...

Ultimately, this is a novel with some great ideas and poor execution. Perhaps it was an experiment for the author - I'm not sure. But I'm also not sure if I will be picking up any of his other novels. He is clearly quite an intelligent man, but this book was far too disappointing. If I do try again, it will be as a result of all of the praise the man continues to receive for his other work (it should be noted that The Pyramid is never named as one of his best works).

Carla says

“A Pirâmide” de Ismaïl Kadaré relata as circunstâncias e motivações que impulsionaram a construção da maior e mais antiga das três pirâmides de Gizé, a Pirâmide de Quéops.

Bem sei que o intuito do autor não era propriamente explorar a questão histórica (que para mim teria sido tão mais interessante...), mas sim revelar a construção da pirâmide como o fruto de um regime totalitário que dominava em absoluto as vidas dos egípcios, condenando-os a uma inescapável forma de escravidão (gerações atrás de gerações atrás de gerações...).

O período de 20 anos que demorou a edificação da Pirâmide de Quéops representou um espaço de tempo

avassalado por um histerismo colectivo sem precedentes com constantes denúncias sobre hipotéticas conjuras contra o Faraó e consequentes punições caracterizadas por uma crueldade sem limites...

Apesar do potencial inerente à ideia base, o autor não consegue harmonizar o texto de forma a tocar o leitor. A narrativa é estanque, muitas vezes desinteressante (o que para mim é inédito no que toca a um tema que me é caro...) e Kadaré parece escrever para si próprio. Não há uma verdadeira partilha com o leitor ou pelo menos eu não a senti.

Joni Baboci says

Gjeniu i Kadarese rishfaqet perseri tek romani "Piramida". Dy histori te treguara paralelisht implementohen tek ky roman. Kadareja me gjuhen e tij te paster shqipe, ku nuk gjen as edhe nje huazim arrin perseri te ilustroje historine e komunizmit tek Piramida. Historia perqendrohet ne ngritjen e nje Piramide (ate me te madhen, te Keopsit). Kadareja perqendrohet fare pak tek Egjipti, historia apo dicka tjeter qe nuk ka lidhje me piramiden. E gjithë historia ka per baze ngritjen e struktures madheshtore. Ngritja e Piramides ne kete rast simbolizon ne menyre te perkryer ngritjen e sistemit komunist ne Shqiperi. Hierarkia e piramides (Guri i Majes dhe Gurat e Bazes) mundohet te maskohet plotesisht nga ideja se cdo gur perberes i saj eshte i njejte. Pra edhe pse cdo gur simbolizon nje individ, eshte teresisht e qarte qe edhe pse individi perbehet nga i njejti mish e shpirt, pozicioni qe ai ze ne piramiden komuniste ndryshon nga nje baze e thjeshte proletare e deri ne majen komanduese. Ne nje pjese te romanit (kapitulli "Perbetimi"), autori permend dy "kryengritje" te ndihmesve me te medhenj te ndertimit te piramides. Autori gjithashtu tregon se si keto "tradhetare" ne piramiden komuniste zbulohen dhe eliminohen nga kryetari - Keopsi. Ne te njejtin kapitull Kadareja permend viktimat apo fatkeqesite qe sjell cdo gur i piramides. Per cdo gur ka nje numer normal te vdekurish (Pra cdo tulle e sistemit shton viktimat). Ama edhe keto gure nuk jane te njejte ne fatkeqesine qe sjellin.

Sarah says

It's sad when the initial interest dies fast.

The beginning was so good and intriguing that I forced myself to keep on reading when it started getting dull; thinking that it will get better. But NOPE ... it just got more boring by the page.

The idea was amazing but the execution wasn't great.

I did love reading about the background of this novella and learning bout Enver Hoxha. That's why I'm giving it 2 stars.

I think I should try the author's other novels ~

htanzil says

Piramid adalah sebuah konstruksi bangunan tertua dalam sejarah umat manusia yang sudah digunakan sejak berabad-abad lampau oleh bangsa Mesir dan Maya kuno. Piramid biasanya digunakan sebagai makam raja-raja atau tempat pemujaan. Salah satu piramid yang paling terkenal dan masuk dalam daftar 7 keajaiban dunia adalah kompleks Piramida Giza yang terletak di dekat kota Kairo (Mesir).

Piramid Giza hingga kini adalah piramida terbesar dibandingkan dengan piramida-piramida lain yang ada di

muka bumi. Luas area kompleks Piramid Giza yang terdiri dari 3 piramid besar dan sebuah patung Spinx bisa disamakan antara jarak dari St Peter (Roma), sampai ke St. Paul (London).

Ketiga piramid itu adalah piramid Khufu (Cheops), Khafre (Rakhaef/Chephren) dan Menkaure (Mycerinus) dan yang paling besar adalah Piramid Cheops setinggi 145 meter yang dibangun 4000 thn yg lampau (2550 SM), karena faktor alam tinggi piramid Cheops kini telah menurun sekitar 9 meter. Para arkeolog memperkirakan piramid Cheops yang dibangun selama 20 tahun ini mempekerjakan 10 rb orang.

Selama ini mungkin kita hanya mengetahui kalau Piramid adalah sebuah monumen kuburan raja atau tempat pemujaan, ternyata tidak, ada maksud tertentu dibalik pembuatan piramid yang erat kaitannya dengan kelanggengan kekuasaan raja-raja Mesir. Hal itulah yang coba diungkapkan oleh Ismail Kadare, sastrawan Albania, peraih Man Booker Prize 2005 di salah satu novelnya yang berjudul Piramid

Di lembar-lembar pertama novel ini Kadare langsung memikat pembacanya dengan celetukan Firaun baru Cheops (2589-2566 SM) pada para pejabat istana bahwa ia tak ingin ada Piramid didirikan untuknya. Celotehan ini tentu saja membuat semua yang mendengarnya terkaget-kaget bagaikan mendengar sebuah 'berita malapetaka'. Hal ini juga membuat para pendeta istana buru-buru menyelidik lembar-lembar papyrus tua untuk meresponi keinginan Firaun muda yang nyeleneh ini.

Berdasarkan penelidikan para pendeta istana, akhirnya Pendeta Tingga Hemiunu memberanikan diri menghadap Firaun Cheops dan mencoba meyakinkan Firaun untuk membatalkan niatnya itu. Di bagian ini, Kadare menarasikan argumen Hemiunu pada Firaun dengan gamblang sehingga terungkaplah tujuan utama dari dibangunnya sebuah Piramid. Setelah mendengar penjelasan dari Hemiunu akhirnya Cheops membatalkan niatnya dan memerintahkan rakyat Mesir untuk membuat piramid untuk dirinya seperti yang telah dilakukan oleh para pendahulunya.

Menurut Hemiunu gagasan membangun Piramid lahir dari pada suatu masa krisis dimana kekuasaan Firaun melemah. Namun krisis ini tidak dipicu oleh kemiskinan, luapan sungai Nil, atau penyakit sampar seperti yang umumnya terjadi di Mesir, melainkan karena keberlimpahan. Kemakmuran ini tentunya membuat masyarakat lebih mandiri dan bebas dalam berpikir sehingga membuat rakyat lebih kritis bahkan membangkang terhadap kekuasaan Firaun.

Untuk mengatasinya Firaun mengutus dukun-peramal Sobekhotep ke gurun Sahara untuk merenungkan persoalan ini dalam kesunyian total. 40 hari kemudian Sobekhotep mendapat wangsit dan menyampaikannya pada Firaun bahwa yang harus dilakukan adalah meniadakan kemakmuran!

Wangsit yang diterima dukun peramal ini lalu diterjemahkan dengan menyelenggarakan kerja raksaksa yang melampaui imajinasi, yang akan memperlemah rakyat Mesir, menghisap energi rakyat yang menghancurkan jiwa raga. Sebuah proyek yang pada dasarnya bisa diselesaikan namun takkan pernah terselesaikan, proyek yang memperbaharui dirinya sendiri terus menerus, tak bermanfaat bagi rakyat namun berguna bagi negara. Tujuannya adalah membuat rakyat Mesir terus menerus sibuk siang-malam sehingga mereka menjadi linglung dan tidak memiliki semangat untuk melawan kekuasaan Firaun

Membangun Piramid adalah jawabannya! Sebuah makam yang diperuntukkan untuk istirahat abadi sang Firaun yang kelak akan menjadi identitas Mesir hingga kini. Setiap Firaun nantinya akan memiliki piramidnya sendiri, sehingga meski sebuah generasi belum lagi pulih dari letih akibat pembangunan, seorang Firaun baru kembali akan menundukkan rakyatnya melalui pembangunan piramid untuknya

Demikianlah Ismail Kadare menuturkan maksud dan tujuan didirikannya Piramid dalam novelnya ini. Di

novelnya ini kita akan disadarkan bagaimana pada akhirnya Piramid memiskinkan kehidupan rakyat Mesir. Novel yang minim dialog ini mengupas secara apik bagaimana sebuah Piramid dibangun mulai dari masa persiapan pembangunan yang dimulai dari pelipatganaan produksi cambuk, penambangan batu-batu besar untuk piramid hingga ketika piramidion (batu puncak piramid) dipasang lengkap dengan isu² persekongkolan dibalik pembuatan piramid, kutukan, hingga tekanan yang dihadapi oleh para pembuat Piramid mulai dari pekerja, mandor hingga Firaun sendiri.

Tekanan akibat pembangunan Piramid ternyata tak hanya mempengaruhi rakyat Mesir, bahkan Firaun sendiri mengalaminya terlebih saat Piramid selesai dikerjakan. Setelah Piramid berdiri dengan kokohnya Firaun Cheops merasa ada sebuah kekuatan yang ingin menyeret dirinya untuk masuk ke dalam Piramidnya. Jiwanya terganggu karena seolah Piramid itu terus memanggil-manggil dirinya untuk menjemput kematiannya sehingga muncul ide darinya untuk membunuh seseorang dan meletakkan muminya untuk disemayamkan dalam Piramid untuk menggantikan dirinya. Pada akhirnya mental Firaun semakin memburuk hingga akhirnya ia meninggal tiga tahun setelah kerja Piramid usai.

Novel ini tak berhenti sampai ketika Piramid rampung dan mumi Firaun Cheops akhirnya disemayamkan di dalamnya. Kadare melanjutkan ketika di suatu masa para penjarah mulai berani memasuki piramid. Mereka ternyata tak hanya menemukan harta karun yang dibawa mati sang Firaun, ketika para penjarah mencongkel sakrofagus (peti mati) Firaun dan kerabatnya, melalui mumi yang dilihatnya mereka menemukan fakta-fakta baru tentang isu-isu pribadi sang firaun dan keluarganya, intrik politik, persekongkolan, dan dendam di masa lalu yang selama ini ikut terkubur rapat setelah kematian Firaun.

Hal inilah yang nantinya akan mendorong para sejarawan muda untuk mempertanyakan dan meninjau kembali konsepsi mereka mengenai sejarah resmi kerajaan. Dari bukti-bukti yang ditemukan oleh para penjarah kubur inilah sejarah kerajaan Mesir memungkinkan untuk ditulis ulang sebagai sesuatu yang sama sekali berbeda dengan sejarah resmi yang selama ini ditulis dan diingat rakyat Mesir.

Di akhir novel Kadare juga membawa pembacanya pada Piramid di pedalaman Asia, di padang rumput luas Ishafan, dimana seorang raja bernama Timurlenk mendirikan sebuah piramid yang serupa dengan yang dibangun Firaun Cheops. Namun yang membedakannya, piramid itu bukan dibuat dari batu melainkan dari tengkorak kepala-kepala musuh kerajaan yang mereka penggal. Hal ini membuat Raja Timurlenk terus melakukan pembantaian demi pembantaian untuk memenuhi ambisinya membuat sebuah piramid tengkorak!

Pada akhirnya membaca novel karya sastrawan Albania yang diterjemahkan dengan apik ini akan menyadarkan kita bahwa Piramid bukanlah sekedar monumen budaya adiluhung bangsa Mesir. Piramid adalah lambang kekuasaan, ia adalah penindasan, kekuatan, penakluk pemberontakan, penyempit pikiran, pelemah kehendak, kebosanan, dan kesia-siaan. Piramid adalah pilar penyangga kekuasaan. Jika ia terguncang, segalanya rubuh berantakan.

Melalui novel ini kita juga dapat merenungkan betapa dahsyatnya sebuah usaha untuk melanggengkan kekuasaan hingga ia bisa menentukan arah dan nasib manusia di dalamnya. Walau tak berwujud segitiga tinggi yang merobek langit, setiap negara memiliki piramidnya sendiri, jika di epilog novelnya ini Kadare juga menemukan 'Piramid' dalam bentuk bunker bawah tanah di tanah kelahirannya, Albania, lalu bagaimana dengan kita? Setelah kita membaca novel ini mampukah kita menemukan 'piramid' yang saat ini sedang dibangun oleh penguasa negeri kita sebagai pilar penyangga kekuasaannya?

Tentang Penulis

Ismail Kadare (76 thn) adalah sastrawan asal Albania, di negaranya ia dianggap pembaharu sastra Albania

karena menulis murni dalam bahasa Albania tanpa dibumbui bahasa asing.

Penindasan rezim totaliter Enver Hoxha memaksanya untuk menyelundupkan naskah-naskah novelnya keluar negeri. Pada tahun 1990 Kadare akhirnya melarikan diri ke Perancis dan disanalah ia merampungkan naskah *La pyramide*. Selanjutnya karya-karya Kadare menjadi inspirasi penumbangan rezim totaliter Albania.

Dengan puluhan karya-karyanya yang mendapat respon positif dari kalangan kritikus sastra Kadare beberapa kali dicalonkan sebagai penerima Nobel Sastra dan beberapa kali mendapat anugerah sastra internasional salah satunya adalah Man Booker International Prize (2005). Kadare juga dianggap sebagai filsuf di Perancis, pada tahun 1996 ia diangkat sebagai anggota kehormatan Academie des Sciences Morales et Politiques menggantikan kedudukan filsuf Karl Popper.

Karya-karya Kadare telah diterjemahkan kedalam 30 bahasa dunia, termasuk Indonesia. Novel *Piramid* adalah karya kedua Kadare yang diterjemahkan ke dalam bahasa Indonesia setelah pada tahun 2003 yang lalu salah satu karyanya *Elegi Kosovo* diterjemahkan oleh Penerbit Jalasutra

@htanzil

Lukasz Pruski says

Ismail Kadare's "The Pyramid" is a parable about totalitarian system of government and about the dynamics of relationships between tyrants and their subjects.

In the 26th century BC, Cheops, the pharaoh of Egypt, influenced by his advisors, decrees that a huge pyramid be built for his tomb. The unfathomably difficult task (over two million blocks of stone are used, with some blocks weighing over 20 tons) is completed in 20 years. The construction process is accompanied by cyclical fabrications of anti-government conspiracies, which lead to mass quarterings, stonings, and crucifixions of people. Tens of thousands die, while working on the pyramid or executed for fictitious crimes.

Mr. Kadare obviously models the pharaoh's totalitarian rule on Enver Hoxha's ways of wielding power in his native Albania before the fall of "Communism". Moreover, he rightly implies that people have not changed very much in 4600 years. We had Timur the Lame, Stalin, Idi Amin, and now we have North Korea's Kim Yong-un, starving his nation.

My mixed feelings about the novel most likely indicate that I am too obtuse to grasp its greatness. True, the writing and translation are of high quality (the English version is based on the French translation), but I find the book highly unfocused. I do not quite understand the author's fascination with the cyclical nature of Egyptian people's emotions toward the pyramid ("Admiration turned to indifference, hatred, destructive fury, then reverted to indifference, followed by veneration, and so on, ad infinitum"), and the chapter about the pharaoh reading the scrolls is, in my view, abstruse.

I agree, however, with what I think the main message of the novel is: a tyrant's greatness is measured by how many thousands or millions of people horribly suffer or die.

Three and a quarter stars.

Tamara Agha-Jaffar says

The counselors and High Priest gasped. The Pharaoh Cheop's had just announced his intention to deviate from tradition by refusing to have a pyramid erected in his honor. His announcement sent his counselors in a panicked frenzy to research the issue. They finally found their answer. The pyramid, they told Cheops, serves multiple purposes. It is not just the future burial site of the Pharaoh. It also serves to keep the multitudes under control through oppression and forced labor. Give them busy work, they argued. The higher the pyramid, the more arduous the task of building it, the less time the rabble will have to make trouble. It would be an obsession for decades, keeping the masses distracted from their other concerns. Once completed, it would stand as a symbol of the Pharaoh's power and majesty, dwarfing everything and everyone in its surroundings.

Cheops was convinced.

So begins Ismail Kadare's *The Pyramid*, a tour de force depicting the brutal tactics a totalitarian regime will employ to sustain its powers. The pyramid snuffs out people by the hundreds. Kadare chronicles in elaborate detail the hauling of thousands upon thousands of giant stones from far away quarries, their positioning in the pyramid, and the numbers of people who lost their limbs or were crushed to death in the process.

The construction of the pyramid precipitates periodic purges in which people are disfigured, tortured, and executed. It chronicles theories of internal and external conspiracies; the ubiquitous spread of superstition, rumors, and lies; the tedium and mind-numbing boredom of the work; the silencing of speech; paranoia; the fear and trembling with which the Pharaoh's closest advisors approach him; and the rush to fulfill the Pharaoh's every whim even at the cost of the maiming and killing of innocents.

The pyramid comes to represent different things to different people throughout the decades of its construction, its completion, and beyond. It symbolizes a tool of oppression wielded by authoritarian governments whose goal is to magnify the power of the regime and diminish all else in their wake. At the end of the novel, Kadare explicitly draws a parallel between the construction of the pyramid and modern tools of oppression:

Pyramidal phenomena occurred in cycles, without it ever being possible to determine precisely the timing of their appearance; for no one has ever been able to establish with certainty whether what happens is the future, or just the past moving backward, like a crab. People ended up accepting that maybe neither the past nor the future were what they were thought to be, since both could reverse their direction of travel, like trams at a terminus.

The Pyramid is an allegory of life under any authoritarian regime at any time and in any place. The atmosphere is haunting, eerie, and terrifying. This may not be a novel for everyone, but it is a remarkable achievement, prescient and relevant to our time.

Highly recommended.

Zoe says

Initially, I was super excited to read The Pyramid, however, once I got to page 8 or so, I lost interest.

The writing style of The Pyramid was unbelievably dull. Trying to read this book was like trying to take care of my grandmother, eventually I just end up falling asleep.

The starting ideas of The Pyramid were good and well, but honestly, ok, we get it, social control is bad, could you have made this book a little more intriguing?

How did this book win a prize? That's what I want to know...

To say this book was lame, or boring, or dull is an understatement. It makes me want to gouge my eyes out to be perfectly honest.

I don't care about the Pharaoh, the Priests or any of the terrible characters, none of them are good people. I'm so done with this book..
