



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## The Disappointments of Uncle Braho in Space and Time

Prof. Asoc. Dr. Teuta Vinca Kafexholli <sup>1</sup>, Prof. Ass. Dr Gjylë Totaj Salihu <sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup> Faculty of Philology, University "Ukshin Hoti", Prizren, Kosovo<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Education, University "Ukshin Hoti", Prizren, Kosovo**ARTICLE INFO**

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gjyle.totaj@uni-prizren.com

**ABSTRACT**

This paper presents an analysis of Mitrush Kuteli's intriguing prose "Father Braho of Shkumbanore," employing a qualitative research approach. The study aims to delve into the depths of Kuteli's work, examining its themes and nuances. The document review method was utilized in this research. The title encapsulates the main character, Father Braho, the reign of Ahmet Zogu in Albania, the setting - the challenging rural life, and the location - Shkumbanore village. The portrayal of the main character is vivid, fostering reader identification with the surrounding characters. Alongside the protagonist, the narrative features other characters, including the neighborhood children, adeptly described by the author, the antagonistic figure named Qamil, Father Braho's grandson, and other episodic characters. The children catalyze the story, initiating the narrative through retrospection, recalling their time as uninvited guests of Father Braho. Subsequently, they describe the village, rural and social challenges, the scars of emigration, the elderly Father Braho, and his familial relationships, particularly the poignant connection with his grandson, which inflicts significant spiritual anguish. The children serve as witnesses to Father Braho's heavy emotional burden throughout the events. Kuteli deliberately omits naming these children, thereby emphasizing their collective identity. Skillfully portrayed, the children are integral to the prose's composition. Mitrush Kuteli distinguishes himself as a modern poet/writer through his presentation of characters' inner worlds, exquisite descriptions, and well-chosen words, showcasing a unique stylistic realism apparent in many of his works, especially the analyzed piece, "Father Braho of Shkumbanore."

**INTRODUCTION**

Mitrush Kuteli (1907-1967) stands as one of the most renowned figures in Albanian literature, recognized as the initiator of modern prose and the creator of the school of storytelling in Albanian literature. Born in 1907 in Pogradec and passing away in 1967 in Tirana, Kuteli spent the majority of his life abroad, initially pursuing studies and later engaging in professional endeavors. Despite holding a doctorate in economics, he left an indelible mark on the field of literature, particularly in prose. Kuteli's creative repertoire spans a multitude of disciplines; he is celebrated as a prose writer of stories and novels, a respected scholar and critic, a skilled translator, journalist, and publicist, as well as the esteemed founder of the Writers' League of Albania. Additionally, Kuteli's contributions extend to folklore, poetry, and economics (11 significant works in the latter field). The focus of this work is Kuteli's story "Father Braho of Shkumbanore." Before delving into the analysis of this story, we take a moment to examine the titles of works in this genre, specifically in the realm of prose. Volume publications in literary prose that have thousands of pages are: "Albanian Nights" ("Netë shqiptare") (1st edition, 1938), "Ago Jakupi and other stories" ("Ago Jakupi dhe të tjera rrëfime") (1943), "Songs and shouts from the burnt city" (1944), "Kapllan Aga of Shaban Shpata" ("Kapllan Aga i Shaban Shpatës") (1944), "Literary Notes" ("Shënime letrare") (1944), "Havadan në havadan" (1944).

In 1946 he submitted for publication some literary works, which got "lost". This loss occurs at the time when the writer Kuteli is arrested. Other works such as, *"The love of Artan the barbarian"* (*"Dashuria e Barbarit Artan"*) (in part), *"The Second Revelation of Pjetër Kulira from Liqerasi"* (*"Zbulesa e dytë e Pjetër Kulirës nga Liqerasi"*) got lost as well. A novel dedicated to the prisoners of the Prishtina camp is lost, as well as the drama *"Bridge"* (*"Ura"*) with the motifs of the burial in the wall legend. There is also no information regarding *"Stories with the living and the dead"* (*"Rrëfime me të gjallë dhe të vdekur"*) and *"Economic notes"* (*"Shënime ekonomike"*) as well as a series of other works that were announced on the cover of *"Albanian Nights"* (*"Netë shqiptare"*) (Pasko, 2015, p.159).

Emphasizing the specific circumstances surrounding Kuteli's literary endeavors is crucial, particularly considering the challenging nature of his creative journey, especially within the confines of the communist system in Albania. Delving deeper into the complexities of Kuteli's creative path, particularly amidst the socio-political backdrop of his time, sheds light on the resilience and determination inherent in his literary pursuits. After being persecuted and imprisoned by the communist regime in Albania in 1947, he was deprived of the right to publish for 15 years. At that time he was engaged in translations, excelling as a rare translator. (Translated over seven thousand pages of literary works from different languages). After returning the publishing license, with a strict censorship due to the political situation in which communist Albania was, he published the works *"The Chestnut Forest"* *"Pylli i gështenjave"* (1958), *"Xinxifilua"* (1962), *"Early Albanian Tales"* *"Tregime të moçme shqiptare"* (1965) and leaves behind many manuscript works which are published posthumously under the care of Kuteli's children. Thus, we can say that Kuteli's literary creativity in the first phase, which includes the time before the communist system, is very rich compared to the second phase, which includes very few publications due to the dictatorial circumstances created in Albania. After his death, in addition to reprints, the works *"In a corner of Lower Illyria"* (*"Në një cep të Ilirisë së Poshtme"*) (1983) were published, with chapters from two unfinished novels, as well as the novel *"Great is the lament of sin"* (*"E madhe është gjëma e mëkatit"*), written in 1946 and published in first in 1993.

## METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative research pattern to analyze the prose "Father Braho of Shkumbanore" by Mitrush Kuteli. Qualitative research methods encompass various approaches, including document analysis, interviews, observations, and more. The qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to explore the nuances and depth of literary texts, enabling a comprehensive understanding of themes and character dynamics (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). The document review method was specifically employed in this research, with data collected and evaluated through content analysis. Content analysis is a technique used to make objective and systematic inferences about specific features of a message (Büyüköztürk et al., 2018). Through this methodology, the study aims to clarify the significance of Kuteli's work within the context of Albanian literature and contribute to a deeper understanding of literary analysis methodologies. This analysis is based on the writer's message and seeks to uncover the underlying themes and narrative techniques employed by Kuteli in "Father Braho of Shkumbanore."

### An interesting narration

In 2001 the book *"Prose and selected verses I"* prepared by Atalanta Pasko, was published in Tirana. There are three of Kuteli's proses as well as some poetries and poems. The first story published in this work is "Father Braho of Shkumbanore" which has 23 pages of text. The main characters are: Father Braho as the protagonist, the children of his neighborhood, his grandson named Qamil and other characters, while the content of this prose is related to emigration and the problems of rural life, presenting the concerns of the main character in relation to other family members:

*"The prose begins as follows: "Ever since the willows of the leat grew green and the vine arbor were reaping and shaking, we, the little ones of the village, were day by day and moment by moment the uninvited guests of Father Braho of Shkumbanore. We had inherited the great longing for the roar of*

*foamy water, the sound of cowbell, the flour dust, from our friends who were occupied by the field and the mountain work, the army and emigration.*

*I do not know how, even today after so many years of emigration, when I remember that part of the village: the old mill of Shkumbanore, with a whitewashed roof bent under the walnut branches, the green moss of the hopper, the hanging viburnum, the white foam that came out swiftly among the thousands of rainbow splashes and the beaten water of the feather, which they drank with their fists and couldn't quench their thirst, I say, when I remember all this, a longing comes to my heart that I cannot describe in words nor in writing. Even if I see today our Father Braho, there, in the shadow of the vine arbor ... ". (Kuteli, p. 7)*

We notice in this sequence, in this introduction of the prose the narration in the first person and the description of the environment where the event takes place with words and style full of color of the environment and the mill of Father Braho with a childhood story of Shkumbanore village. Therefore, we notice the beginning or exposition of the whole composition of the work, where we will hear and see the vicissitudes of Father Braho. The children's story is made in retrospect and this is implied and emphasized only once in this start that we presented above. The reader's concern regarding whether Father Braho lived as a factual character throughout history may be negligible; however, the vivid and immersive descriptions within this prose inevitably lead readers to envision Father Braho as a contemporary figure, intertwining his character with those familiar to us. In this regard, one researcher says: "Literature should always be interesting; it must always have some structure and some aesthetic purpose, it must always be coherent and active ... Literature presents choices from life, even useful ones" (Velek & Voren, 1982).

### **The world of children who initiated the motion of events**

To develop the composition to the climax, we are stopping again at the world of children, in the descriptions and dialogues they make about Albania. They talk with Father Braho about foreign rulers who had invaded this country. This world of children stands out when they mention the Karadak King, the Greek, the Bulgarian, the French, and German one, etc. The children also talk about Albania, that Father Braho had not heard, so he expressed surprise by saying:

- "... *When did this new king come?*

- *It has been forever here Father Braho, - we responded fast as a bullet.*

- *Oh, who was it?*

- *Albaniiiiia! ..*

*Father Braho was left half surprised and half angry by our rants, he would sit and kill his mind and then he would start again:*

- *I've spent a lifetime here in Shkumbanore, and I have not heard the name of this new king!*

- *He is old, Father Braho, very old. As old as mountains, as old as God! "We usually called them because the village teacher had told us about the Pelasgians and the Illyrians, whom we mistook for Pirro, Skënderbeg and Ismail Qemali". (Kuteli, p.11)*

Father Braho had never heard of all these historical figures. One day the children mentioned Skanderbeg's name and the old man there heard about his deeds. He was especially surprised when he heard the song of the children, whom he does not name, but they are present in the whole composition of the prose: "Where do you come from/ oh brave man/ Do you know him/the king of Albania/ the famous Skanderbeg/ (*"Nga na vjen o ti/ Trim o kapedan/ A e njeh o ti/ trim o kapedan/ Mbren` e Shqipërisë/ Skënderben me nam/*). This song and conversation about Skanderbeg (1405-1468) become the cause of shifting from one time to another one. Thus begins the dialogue with the children about where and how this great hero is. Father Braho decides to go and meet this brave man, not knowing that the time span between him and Skanderbeg is five centuries.

Kuteli continues the composition of the story and again the question comes out of the children's mouths: Why and where he went - and the answer is: to meet Skanderbeg and talk the matter of his grandson, Qamil. (Kuteli, p. 15)

Father Braho left the village and arrived in the city to meet Skanderbeg. There someone stopped him in a stern voice shouting: stop! This strange meeting with the soldiers of "Skanderbeg" tenses the situation and Father Braho was ambushed and shouted:

*"Open the way, for I will cause a bloodshed!*

*There was a wise and kind-hearted man, who did not want to shed blood, and started a conversation with Father Braho in a soft voice to find out who he was and where he came from. He got the answer:*

*- "I am Captain Braho of Shkumbanore! What about you?*

*- Albanian.*

*This word warmed his heart a little, but he still did not trust him.*

*- Where did you come from?*

*-From Albania.*

*- Are you with Skanderbeg?*

*- With Skanderbeg.*

*- I want to talk to your elder because I've got some business.*

*They looked each other in the eye, and started laughing ... "* (Kuteli, p. 16)

This Kutelian-style grotesque continues with Father Braho's back in time dialogue with government soldiers. He complains that there is no heir other than his grandson, Qamil, who like many other Albanians had taken the path of the emigration, sometimes in Rumania and sometimes in Egypt. This was the only heir, because death and war had taken away all the other members of the family, leaving Father Braho alone with his mill and his meager wealth. Father Braho therefore demands from Skanderbeg the return of his grandson. The development of the composition of this story by Kuteli turns into anachronism, as is Father Braho himself anachronistic with time. This is the solution of our prose writer. Under different circumstances, if Father Braho were literate, Kuteli might have drawn parallels to the French writer Guy de Maupassant's novel "A Life." In this novel, akin to Father Braho, a solitary mother expresses her longing for her son through a letter, mirroring Father Braho's spoken words as he yearns for his grandson, whom he wishes Skanderbeg would bring back to Shkumbanore (Maupassant, 1962).

### **Father Braho's grandson returns to Shkumbanore village**

Father Braho's confession that he was looking for the head of the government, who he thought was Skanderbeg, would return Qamil to his village in Shkumbanore. Father Braho's time is a time of his closure in the rural setting. Unfamiliar with visual aids, telephones, or any other modern means of communication, Father Braho's longing and affection for Qamil, his sole hope of family reunion, remained profound. Engaging in a peculiar journey, he traverses back to the 15th century, to the era of Skanderbeg. Here, the reader encounters paradoxical and notably anachronistic scenes, immersed in a time neither known nor desired.

To make the anachronism even bigger, we have two pairs of witnesses: the little ones who are the co-characters of the novel and the government soldiers themselves, whom he hoped would solve their problem.

Mitrush Kuteli thus creates interesting scenes that evoke both curiosity and magical realism to the readers. It also induces disgust towards the ingratitude and misunderstanding of the prodigal grandson named Qamil. He disregards Father Braho's such humane feelings, and therefore evokes in

readers a catharsis of Aristotelian poetics or Shakespearean dramas, which are always read with admiration.

Qamil's return brought great disappointment to the old man who even asked "Skanderbeg" to bring his grandson back. Here is a dialogue:

- *"Hey, old father, have you come to your senses? Here's the deal: neither saying good job nor greetings, but: have you come to your senses. Father Braho raised his head, looked at him with some teary eyes, then again continued to carve in vain in vain, as he had done all his life.*

*"Old father," said Qamil in a high-pitched voice, "I'm talking to you. Why don't you respond?"*

*The old man was clanging his hammer, but we could see that his hand was shaking and we were afraid that he would unintentionally hurt it.*

*Then Qamil burst out:*

*- Say something! ...*

*- What do you want? Asked Father Braho.*

*- That's right! So, your mouth started speaking but have you actually come to your senses? If you do not give me the mill, let me mortgage it, I will borrow money, because the tithe is being sold. I will pay off this debt after two or three months ... Either way, the goods are mine. It's mine, I will take it even if you don't want me to. You have one foot in the grave ...*

*Then Father Braho replied:*

*- Listen you son of Smail Braho! I will keep the mill till my last breath! I will not give it!, It's a memory of my father and I want to die as the owner of the mill. What I previously gave to you I gave them because they were mine. I had bought them myself with the sweat of my brow ..."* (Kuteli, p. 24)

In this passage, a gradual and escalating dramatization of the narrative becomes evident. This is achieved through the conflicting dynamics between the two characters: Father Braho and Qamil. Qamil's character embodies rudeness and unparalleled selfishness, starkly contrasting with Father Braho's love and reverence for heritage, his broken spirit evoking a sense of empathy and even disdain towards all Qamils past and present. The old man's soul wept, infusing the unfolding events with a poignant blend of drama and emotion, resonating with every reader.

Gradually the disappointment was increasing and accumulating in the soul of Father Braho. The neighborhood kids understood this disappointment. With these children throughout his life, he has a relationship with a traditional ethnopsychology. This means that he keeps both a traditional and a pedagogical distance. Between Father Braho and the children throughout the story, there is a wall created by Father Braho himself, and the children are careful not to tear it down. This distancing wall over time fluctuates from the very fact that children discover and know the Father Braho's soul, his sufferings, until towards the end of the composition this distance remains only formal: On the side of children narrators, it collapses completely, and from Father Braho's side "exists", remains translucent. At the height of accumulated psychic despair, the old man puts it this way:

*- "Come on, run away. I'll not see you anymore. Be good today, but tomorrow you will become bad, like my grandson!"*

*"The children leave keeping their head down for a crime they did not commit"* (Kuteli, p. 26).

These words that come out of Father Braho's heavy spiritual accumulation, only the children know and understand. They play the role of the modern psychologist, as if they knew the theory of the well-known S. Freud. Children move around, become characters carrying the composition, the axis and the frame of the story with many pages, with language and attractive style, so painful and so proud of our man through the heavy weight of time and lonely life. Father Braho seems to be looking for a superman to heal his spiritual wounds. He seeks the time of Gjergj Kastriot Skanderbeg of the 15th century, the proud and tragic century, when problems were solved with a sword.

### The tragic life of the old man and the experience of the world of children

The little ones are spectators and recorders of Father Braho's difficult life. He had suffered a lot for his grandson who was not at home, "he had had a great thing: hope", which he broke so desperately with those punches of old age life. These were caused by the man from whom Father Braho expected the preservation of the ethnos, genealogy, pride and heritage that keeps alive a traditional family that has the highest ideals: the preservation of wealth as a continuation of life, as a means of existence and as a traditional Albanian pride.

Here are some passages that Kuteli writes and are "recorded" and "applied" by children who experience spiritual distress. They take on the role of those who want to teach a lesson to the prodigal Qamil and the healing herb of the good word for Father Braho of Shkumbanore:

*"... Although little, we had seen and heard about many atrocities in the world, but we had never seen or heard of such a thing. Until then, no one had dared to speak like that to our Father Braho ... We hid and clenched our fists. Just as we were, little ones, we were ready to hold our Father Braho's hand, if he called us and we were sorry that we were not big enough to beat the evil Qamil... We came out from the places where we were hiding, we took some stones and went to the field to almost throw them to Qamil ... Father Braho's voice was as if he was soaked with tears, as if he was holding them, swallowing them. He was crying inside. We did not have the heart to disturb him and we stayed a few steps away, ashamed. Our Father Braho, who was not afraid of any king from those who had stepped on our country and he had endured all the tumultuous times- so many the deaths in the family! - now he was heartbroken! " ... we couldn't hold our tears" (Kuteli, p. 25).*

From such excerpts, readers get excited about the man Father Braho who has no one to share the burdens of life with. He forgets the state and the laws that overwhelm the poor of Kuteli's time, but is now suffering from his own grandson, Qamil. Thus, he universalizes the little man in the great world of pain and sorrow. Here is the culminating scene of the mill's disappearance, which is not explained in detail, but remains as that modern prose that is deliberately not clarified to the point of proliferation:

*"The powerful wave had torn up the foundation of the mill. A great woe was heard: the roof slipped down, collapsed in the turbulent waves along with our Father Braho.*

*We jumped up, put our hands together in terror and took the road to the village crying and languishing:*

*- Oh, Father Braho! Oh Father Braho! Oh Father Braho! Oh Father Braho!*

*- Ohhhh, Father Braho! ..." (Kuteli, p. 29)*

By this tragic end, he wants to speak to the children of a neighborhood in Shkumbanore, but also to all humanity: follow the right path, look for a superhuman, and if you do not find it, create a God to have someone to pray to solve family problems that have been and are serious.

Although Father Braho tries to keep his distance from the little ones, he finds rest, finds the lovely minors and makes them beloved characters. With them he creates the contrast and the antithesis in the face of the *Qamils* who trample on the material and spiritual good, as we noticed in the above sequences. By detaching these fragments, Kuteli illustrates the views, ideas, typification of a concrete time and a certain artistic and sometimes factual space, becoming more like monuments, documents or sad testaments.

When we read Father Braho or any other story of Mitrush Kuteli, the man, whether a reader or a scholar, is so much embodied in the spiritual preoccupations of man as a universal creature.

### Kuteli's style

We are also focusing on the semantics of Kuteli's style. We shouldn't merely scratch the surface when considering the meaning of style. Instead, let's embrace a more suggestive and creative notion, understanding that style is manifested through language, syntax, phrases, and internal rhythm. These

are important signs of style, because the essence of style lies in the way thoughts are conceived and emotions are experienced. Specifically, Kuteli at Father Braho presents his inner world, his ideals for preserving the inherited wealth and the hopes for the grandson to happily continue his life with this inheritance. The grandson is portrayed as the prodigal son and Father Braho is filled with despair. From this despair come from the depths of the soul the words full of sorrow, full of poisons addressed to the grandson, for whom he had high hopes. It is this state of mind that expresses the true Kutelian style with words chosen in relevant moments, which can be considered as a definition of Mitrush Kuteli's style. He creates with a sui generis realism that is clearly seen in many stories, especially in "Father Braho of Shkumbanore". We see such a realism in the disturbing dialogue between the grandfather and the grandson, who must inherit the forest, the fields, the cattle and even the mill, with which he had a deep spiritual obsession (Kuteli, 2004, 2010, 2015).

Time and space clearly appear in Kuteli even with the old vocabulary, with the passive vocabulary, as the lexicographers who deal with this aspect call it. So, by the way, he uses the relevant word at the appropriate time. In Father Braho or in other characters are found the words that he created at a certain time and left in oblivion another time. From the character of Father Braho we hear the word *rresheke*, which was used when water was filled using this household furniture. I want to emphasize that home furnishings have their evolution as material culture through different times. The word *takie* (is a kind of hat with a narrow tip made by white fabric), *sepet* (chest), *mëngore* (vest of shijak), *shishane* (old rifle) etc. The language of Kuteli's characters is rich with the vocabulary created by the respective time and space.

## CONCLUSION

Kuteli creates a modern, unique and completely original literature in terms of construction. It gives us prose with social, psychological themes, focusing on man, the individual and his inner and outer world. Thus, Kuteli brings us structural, narrative innovations, that is, it brings an innovative prose that we can freely compare with modern European and world authors.

Viewed as a whole, this prose, like the others, testifies to the well-known fact that literary art knows no regional, state or time limits. The only limitation to a writer's affirmation is the language, that is, the translation of his works. While in the economic field there was Balkan affirmation, in the field of literature, especially in prose, so far, there has been little effort to translate Kuteli's works into world languages.

Among the first to write in English on the issue of Kuteli's internationalization should be mentioned Stuart Mann in 1950: "Two other authors who have evoked Mann's interest and they are Gjergj Bubani, a talented poet who has written under the influence of Greek poetry and Dhimitër Pashko (Mitrush Kuteli), who would later be affirmed as a distinguished prose writer, critic and translator" (Gërmizaj, 2004)

Kuteli remains a specific prose writer whom Albanian literature missed in the twentieth century. His prose has universal and undeniable values. These values have been pointed out by many scholars. Kuteli's prose is a completely original literary miracle with unique artistic nuances in Albanian literature.

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