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Beyond Hatred: Balkan Conflicts in the Works of Ismail Kadare

Introduction

In one of his very finest stories, the noted Albanian writer Ismail Kadare (b. 1936) stresses the common suffering of the Balkan peoples during the more than five centuries of Ottoman Turkish rule. From the Sultan's palace in Istanbul has come a decree that was

impressive and oppressive at the same time, like a great party at a funeral. All the women and girls in the western part of the Empire, all the Albanians and Greeks, all the Serbs and Romanians, all the Bosnians and Bulgarians, would have to drape their countenances from now on with a veil, as soon as they reached their thirteenth year of age, just like all the Muslim women. (1)

The rest of the story traces the delivery of the veils and the surprising fate of the caravan driver. This theme of shared oppression at the hands of a common occupier is repeated in many of Kadare's works, yet this author's reputation as a close-minded Albanian nationalist has reached staggering proportions. (2) This misperception would seem to be due in part to the fact that so many of his works remain untranslated into English, and it owes something as well to the emergence of communal conflict in Kosovo as a major international issue in the 1990s, about which he has spoken out a great deal from his new home in Paris. (3) At any rate this incomplete understanding of Kadare's take on Balkan history and politics obscures a very important point: his works realistically portray the potential for reconciliation in the region. Since the Turks have essentially played no role in the Balkans for a century, it is the Albanian-Serbian relationship that is at the heart of Kadare's ameliorative but realistic conceptualization of Balkan literature and history. This paper aims both to delineate the major sources of information about the nature of Balkan rivalries in Kadare's oeuvre and to provide an interpretive framework for his fiction that highlights the power of reconciliation rather than the superficial characterization of him as a chauvinist.

The Albanian-Serbian Relationship in Kadare's Fiction

The most famous writer ever to hail from Albania is still alive, and writing, today—

mostly in Paris, of all places. Ismail Kadare broke onto the world scene in the 1970s with his widely translated novel *General of the Dead Army*, and since then he has kept up a frantic pace of novels, short stories, poetry, cultural history, interviews, literary criticism, and political activity. Considered a leading candidate for a Nobel Prize in Literature, Kadare's wide-ranging works treat common European themes in many eras and also provide a nuanced, if not always accurate, presentation of life in the Balkans from the Middle Ages to today. His works are also rich in ideas and often admit of multiple interpretation, which helps account for the popular and critical acclaim they have garnered. Sixteen of Kadare's books have appeared in English, most of them, because so few scholars read Albanian, double-translated through French. A significant amount of information on Albania's relations with its neighbors to the west and north is found in the novels *The File on H.* and *The Palace of Dreams* and in the short story collection *Elegy for Kosovo*.

The File on H. contains more commentary on Albanian-Serb relations than any of Kadare's works. It will, therefore, be covered here in some detail. In the novel's somewhat awkward story line, two Irish-American folklorists, Max Ross and Bill Norton, arrive in the Kingdom of Albania around the year 1930 to record epic poets with the newly invented "magnetophone" (tape recorder). They hope to prove that contemporary Albanian culture is derived from the same sources as classical Greek civilization. Their project centers on comparing the Albanian poetic and military traditions to those described by Homer (the "H." of the title). What they find, in addition to an inept, spy-ridden bureaucracy and a bumbling provincial governor with a dissatisfied and flirtatious wife named Daisy, is a simmering cultural feud between the Albanians and the Serbs, located next door in Yugoslavia.

Ross and Norton are convinced that they need to hurry because scholars have ascertained that the Balkans is the last place on earth where epic poetry is still being *created* as well as sung. Specifically the region housing this "laboratory of verse," this cultural "foundry," this production of "Homeric marrow" covers "the whole northern zone of Albania but extend[s] also into parts of Montenegro and reached a few parts of Bosnia, inside the Yugoslav border." (4) But the rhapsodes and *lahuta* players are disappearing.

By taping and transcribing the works of these singers, known as rhapsodes, who are "the main wheel in the machinery of the epic...publisher, bookseller, and librarian in one, and ...posthumous co-author," they want to compare different versions of the same story and isolate the mechanisms of memorization and forgetting. They will also examine how rhapsodes "convert contemporary events into epic poetry," or "Homerize modern life." (5) By thus studying the production of epic poetry, they hope to be able to answer many lingering scholarly questions about the identity of the poet or poets we know as "Homer." A necessary supposition of their work is that only by studying Albanians can they push the frontiers of scholarship forward; the Albanian culture has preserved the most common classical elements—here, poetry, but elsewhere in Kadare, the blood feud—and it is more ancient than that of the Serbs.

The authorities believe that the two visitors are spies and they shadow them at every turn, repeatedly and comically misinterpreting their actions. Neither of the government's two English-speaking spies is available, so translation of Ross' and Norton's incriminating documents and conversations must be entrusted to a local monk (a frequent symbol of a repository of both classical and modern knowledge, and a bridge between peoples, in Kadare's works). Finally,

having recorded many rhapsodes, the two foreigners return to the capital city. They must return home, because Norton has glaucoma and is going blind. Someone then breaks into their hotel room and destroys their accumulated tapes and files. The attack, it turns out, was engineered by “Slav chauvinists” who feel “barbaric and murderous jealousy” over the ancient roots of the Albanians. (6)

The book states, mostly through the jottings and musings of the two outsiders, that Albanians and Serbs are “enemies” who have “been in ceaseless conflict” for a millennium. The book also explains why, in escalating steps of disputes over territory, culture, and then actual survival. The historical conflict is primarily territorial and began with the Slavs’ first appearance on the Balkan peninsula in the 7th century. Norton informs us that the Albanians, or rather their classical progenitors known as the Illyrians, were already established in the Western Balkans, and were in contact with classical Greek civilization, when the Slavs arrived. These Illyrians had initially occupied considerably more territory than the state of Albania does today. The Serbs displaced the Albanians: “All of a sudden, they [the Albanians—jkc] were in the midst of a Slavic sea: a gray, unending anonymous Eurasian mass that could easily destroy all the treasures of a land where art had flourished more than anywhere on earth.” (7) The Albanians, pushed to the sea, learned to fight to protect themselves in their now small territory and made a kind of last stand, almost a Thermopylae, in the fertile region known as Kosovo.

The displacement at the strategic level was followed by competition at the local level “over land, over boundaries, over pastures and watering holes—and it would have been entirely unsurprising had they also disputed the ownership of local rainbows.” (8) The next level of conflict was also soon reached: culture wars. Albanian epics were appropriated by Serbs, who sang them in their own, distinct language and then left “the other nation the choice of being considered a thief or a mere imitator.” (9)

The ultimate level of conflict had been reached by the 20th century, with both cultures admitting their great and insuperable animosity and their desire to eliminate each other. (10) The reader witnesses one such attempt at physical destruction: the case of the attack on the scholarly materials of Norton and Ross, who have chronicled the vanishing folkloric traditions with the intention of preserving them.

The researchers finally come to the conclusion that epic poetry contains the Albanians’ “national testament” or “First Commandment”: a lamentation over “the nation’s division into two parts.” (11) Although this sentence is left ambiguous, three historical possibilities present themselves as possible meanings. Kadare could be referring to the linguistic division between northern Albanians (Ghegs) and southern Albanians (Tosks), which long prevented national unity and re-emerged as a sore point in the 1990s; to the religious division which developed in the late Middle Ages between newly converted Muslim Albanians and the older Christian groups (both Orthodox and Catholic); or, perhaps most likely, to the territorial division between Ottoman (and later independent, royal, and eventually socialist) Albania and the large neighboring region (or exclave) of Kosovo, which contains, with adjoining areas of Montenegro and Macedonia, nearly one-half of all Albanian speakers today and has been under Serbian rule since 1912.

The existence of this national testament links up with a prophetic, if quirky, observation shared with the two visiting scholars by the Albanian ambassador in Washington: that the very first word of the *Iliad*, that is, the first word in Western literature, happens to mean “resentment”

in Albanian. Thus, a shadow was cast over the whole history of a people. Perhaps the fact that the *Iliad* is also the first Western literature to be written down is proof as well of the deep roots throughout Kadare's oeuvre of the idea of "charged texts" which galvanize a plot and enable evil to occur.

The Serb-Albanian conflict is thus thoroughly dissected in this novel, and it is endowed with much more gravity than the Turkish-Albanian conflict that plays such a key role in Kadare's other works. The Serbian conflict can be properly seen as underlying Albanian history; the superimposed Ottoman conflict brought other threats and challenges, but it also ended up aggravating this oldest conflict of them all.

Elegy for Kosovo is a set of three related stories about Serb-Ottoman-Albanian relations and territorial conflicts over the still-disputed region of Kosovo. The first two are set against the backdrop of military events from the 14th century, while the final one, entitled "The Royal Prayer," is an extremely brief posthumous reflection, addressed to Allah, by the Ottoman Sultan Murad I, who was killed during the Battle of Kosovo in 1389.

This work seems at first glance to be simply a treatment of the Turkish conquest of the Balkans in the 14th century. At this level, *Elegy* represents another installment in the chronicle of Ottoman encounters begun by *The Three-arched Bridge* and carried forward by *The Castle*. But, as the final story in this collection reveals, the work is really about animosities, rivalries, and the preservation of tradition and maintenance of memory that had gripped the Balkan peoples before the battles with the Turks began, even if these hostile rivalries were then sharpened under Turkish rule.

The book describes how a combined force of Serbs, Albanians, Bosnians, Wallachians, Hungarians, and Croats was routed by the army of Sultan Murad I: "[w]ithin ten hours the Balkan wall fell and Christianity has been left open to the wrath of the Ottomans." (12) Here, indeed, is an evocation of common suffering. After the battle, two rhapsodes or minstrels wander gradually westward and northward looking for safety and shelter. One is Gjorg, an Albanian, and the other is Vladan, a Serb. They take refuge in a distant castle on the Danube, where they are called upon to perform for a small group of assembled nobles, who note with distress that their songs are filled with ancient calls to arms *against each other* and not against the Ottomans. After they have been ridiculed as violent rednecks, and witnessed fellow refugees betrayed and burned at the stake by the supposedly more tolerant West Europeans, a kindly and intelligent old lady urges them to make an important change in their art. Given the calamity your peoples have faced, she says, "you must sing of different things." (13) She then coaxes them to talk about many aspects of their societies other than the dispute over Kosovo, but they prove to be unable to "break out of the mold." (14) Nonetheless, they do imply that future generations of singers, if given different stimuli, will be able to memorialize different events.

The final story emphasizes this last point by noting that "even a few drops of blood are enough to hold all the memory of the world." (15) But it also underscores one of the main points of *The File on H.*: that the Turkish domination of the area will worsen the existing rivalry between Albanians and Serbs.

The Palace of Dreams is one of Kadare's very best books in terms of characterization and plot. It also contains a nuanced description of Albanian-Ottoman relations in the late 19th century against a backdrop of a malevolent authoritarian state. The engaging plot features the meteoric and, at first, inexplicable rise to power of a young Albanian in Istanbul, Mark-Alem

Quprili, who works in the Tabir Sarrail, or Palace of Dreams, which is a giant archival and investigative agency of the Sultan's government.

The climax of the book is a police raid on a large *soirée* at the residence of Mark-Alem's uncle, an important vezir. This party has been called by his cousin Kurt to showcase some Albanian folksingers, here called rhapsodists, who were to sing their version of the Quprili family epic. This song about their famous family was known to the family in its Serbian-language variant from Bosnia, which was also an Ottoman province, but ironically the family had never heard the version in their own language because their family was estranged from most Albanians, who viewed them as collaborators. In the midst of the gripping performance, the Sultan's special police arrive, execute the three singers on the spot, and drag Kurt off to prison.

There are hints that the raid took place because the Sultan was jealous that the Quprilis were the subject of a major epic, or because the song was capable of awakening nationalism in the heart of Mark-Alem. But it soon becomes apparent that the bloody raid was part of the ever-shifting power struggle within the Ottoman government, and Mark's fate hangs in the balance as the political terrain shifts dizzyingly.

The paradoxical conjunction of shared traditions and rivalry between Albanian and Serbs is explicitly discussed, as in *The File on H.*, in terms of poetry and music. But then the Albanian characters themselves note the moral and practical complications of collaboration with their Ottoman conquerors:

Weren't you just saying the Turks shared power with us? Sharing power doesn't just mean dividing up the carpets and the gold braid. That comes afterward. Above all, sharing power means sharing crimes!...One day [the Albanians will] win real independence, but then they'll lose all those other possibilities...They'll lose the vast space in which they could fly like the wind, and be shut up in their own small territory. Their wings will be clipped, and they'll flap clumsily from one mountain to another until they're exhausted. Then they'll ask themselves, 'What did we gain by it?' And they'll start looking for what they've lost. But will they ever find it? (16)

Having presented such a grim picture of Albanian-Serbian relations in the past, are there any grounds for optimism in the future? Indeed, with the international gridlock over Kosovo dragging on, and with continued political unrest in Albania and the resurgence of the nationalist right in Serbia, it would seem that the chances for strife between Serbs and Albanians, even at the level of their respective states, are even greater than usual. But the chief grounds for hope here is, ironically, the very fact that Kadare details certain conflicts and seeks out their origin. We have also seen the importance of cultural "production," in the form of written or sung texts, in keeping rivalries active.

In the overall context of his work, however, Kadare emerges as a cautiously optimistic political voice. In this way he calls to mind the reputation of the great Bosnian Serb writer, Ivo Andrić, who was never a "cheerleader" for the cause of coexistence or social modernization but whose nuanced works allow for an at times considerable degree of optimism of interpretation.

Kadare and Andri_ have, concretely, two very important things in common: they effectively underscore the common humanity (albeit often through common suffering, but also through geography and traditions of the Balkans) of individuals from different religious and national groups, and they are inclined, when all is said and done, to point out specific bones of contention—specific territorial conflicts, religious practices, or varying interpretations of the same historical phenomenon—between the national groups rather than simply sail along on the surface of generalizations about “ancient ethnic hatreds.” To name causes and to give precise dimensions of problems is the first step towards improvement. The received message, or conventional wisdom, is not enough for these writers: they name issues, and in doing so, as every diplomat knows, they set the stage for at least some sort of convergence. These two common characteristics seem both very modern and very quintessentially Balkan as well.

Kadare and Progress: Perspectives from Kadare’s Non-fiction

We can continue our survey of mitigating factors for the well-attested animosity between Albanians and Serbs by looking at some of Kadare’s prefaces, historical studies, and interviews. Some of these factors can be grouped according to the historical epoch which generated them: the Ottoman period and the communist period. From the former comes the paradoxical phenomenon, discussed in *The Palace of Dreams*, of Ottoman rule bringing both political victimization and opportunity to Albania, whereas to Serbs it brought only victimization. Kadare makes the same point in the preface to a famous novel from Kosovo:

In the multinational empire of the Ottomans, the various peoples were treated in different ways. Some were especially despised and oppressed, while others were flattered and treated more favorably. Indeed it was always the policy of the Ottoman Empire to have the subjugated peoples expend part of their energy in local conflicts. The results were brilliant: never, or at least almost never, did the animosity cease---the lust for revenge, the spitefulness, and the envy between the nations...In this free-for-all, through a historical twist, the Albanians and Serbs ran into each other again as enemies: the Albanians on the side of the favored nations, the Serbs on the side of the enslaved and despised ones. By exploiting the Albanian predilection for fame and glory—typical predilections of all ancient peoples in the Balkans—the Ottoman succeeded in making the Albanians compliant through the bestowal of high (military and political) offices. (17)

The contribution of the latter time period to Balkan conflicts is a more complicated matter.

Kadare today is no fan of communism, or Bolshevism, as East European intellectuals often refer to it. He criticizes its diehard adherents, such as Slobodan Miloševi_ and his nationalist cronies in Serbia, whom he blames for the human rights nightmare in Kosovo. Of course, it is important here to recall that Kadare himself rose to prominence under the communist regime in Albania, and his self-imposed Parisian exile came only in 1990, when his country

stood at the brink of major change. Yet one can responsibly argue that it was through a variable (if, many would argue, ultimately understandable and artistically sound) formula of dissidence and collaboration that Kadare earned his fame in Hoxha's Albania. Despite some dubious maneuvering to curry favor with high party officials and the sometimes rancorous personal conflicts with other Albanian dissidents and writers, Kadare undoubtedly raised the standards of Albanian literature to a European level. Survival and success may be his chief sins, but the scholarly jury is still out on this complicated issue.

At any rate, Kadare's intellectual dissent (especially in marvelous novels such as *The Palace of Dreams*) is demonstrable and he can now state convincingly that Bolshevism has prepared the ground for some of today's hard-core nationalism. Witness these remarks from his introduction to a major recent French study on Islam, in which Kadare criticizes both sides in the supposed "clash of civilizations" in the post-Cold War world:

[The study of misrepresentations] helps us understand that the civilization of Islam is not a doctrine of terror, as it can be presented by superficial propagandists working in the Bolshevik style—any more so than the Christian civilization of the West is really a realm of pornography; the West is not the kingdom of Satan, culpable for the slaughter of Muslims in Bosnia, as the propagandists of the opposite camp maintain, using this same Bolshevik method. (18)

As the French public intellectual Alain Finkielkraut argued in his powerful defense of the assertion of national rights in today's Eastern Europe: "Though communism is dead, it has nevertheless handed on to its detractors a hate for any complexity as well as the rejection of a pluralistic world." (19) The sociologist Bogdan Denitch and the novelist and essayist Slavenka Drakulić are two other erudite observers of the Yugoslav scene who have noted similar trends. And it is a given among historians that both Yugoslav and Soviet communism ended up inadvertently fostering nationalism by anchoring their rule with regional and ethnic party structures and territorial units. Kadare also blamed the Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha for sacrificing the mostly Albanian province of Kosovo to Serbia to ensure his own political survival, since the Yugoslav strongman Josip Broz Tito supposedly had compromising information about Hoxha's early submissiveness to the USSR. (20) Thus we see the multiple ways in which communism has heightened today's ethnic conflicts.

Three other trends in Kadare's work mitigate the message of ancient conflict. The first is the obliquely pro-peace message of two of his most outstanding and enduringly popular novels: *The General of the Dead Army* and *Broken April* (*). These books address many kinds of violence in a variety of ways, but the reader is left with a strong impression of the futility of bloodshed and its enormous emotional cost (not fulfillment) to individuals. The second trend is a quiet optimism about the ultimate instability of despotic regimes—including ones engaged in exterminating foreign peoples. In his depictions of the Ottoman Empire, the Soviet Union, Mao's China, Serbia after 1980, and even occasionally communist Albania, Kadare stresses the regimes' inability to remain monolithic (21); the nature of politics is for hegemony to move around to various parties, perhaps not evolving into justice but certainly promising relief from

specific crises. Thirdly, Kadare has also made overtly optimistic statements about co-existence in the Balkans, such as his praise for the metaphorical and actual work of building bridges (22) and his grateful recognition of the solidarity expressed by many Slavs with the oppressed Albanians of Kosovo. (23)

In sum, then, Kadare's concern for creating social justice and eliminating the cause of violence between countries justifies the use of the term "progressive" to describe him. It is obvious that some of his views may derive from his long exposure to Marxist-Leninist ideology in the Albania of communist dictator Enver Hoxha. It is also possible, though exceedingly difficult to prove since he seldom comments on religion or spirituality, that his drive to better the world could have originated partly in the Muslim faith of his home environment. I would argue that, ultimately, Kadare is an exemplar of Enlightenment ideology, and that his conceptions of social and political rights and of a just international order constitute a sort of "Enlightenment minimum" common in our era. It remains to discuss exactly how he envisions himself contributing to the realization of these ideals.

Conclusion: Keys to Understanding Ismail Kadare

Although no general study of Kadare's works yet exists in English, his novels have met with tremendous praise on both sides of the Atlantic. They are often touted as penetrating studies of "dystopias" in the tradition of Kafka and Orwell; many of his works also examine the nature of the Albanian-Serb conflict and the legacy of Ottoman domination of the Balkans. These two characteristics of his work might account for Kadare's popularity, but they by no means exhaust the possibilities for understanding his fictional world and his personal motivation for writing. I would suggest three other main angles for arriving at this understanding.

First, there is an important set of thematic considerations that are not included in blithe comparisons to Kafka or invocations of the Battle of Kosovo of 1389. Kadare's oeuvre is voluminous, and he has sizable clusters of works on the following themes as well: the construction of Albanian identity or national character through studies of folklore; the preservation of this identity in times of war, ranging from Ottoman times through the Nazi era to the Cold War and the depredations of Serbian strongman Milošević; the nature and legacy of Ottoman rule in the Balkans, which is paradoxical for Albanians because they suffered from it but were also, through the co-optation of elite families, complicit in it; classical mythology, especially the nature of oral epic poetry (which links Albania to the world of the classical Greeks) and the works of Aeschylus treating the cycle of evil and retribution in society; and the representation of Albanians to the outside world, especially in the post-communist period, dealing with questions of "orientalist" stereotypes and the spiritual drift of the country. The final and most important of these thematic groupings is the one called to mind by Kadare's phrase "on every square foot, a crime" (24): the social problems of a traditional society and how they deprive individuals of fulfillment and the society of prosperity and peace. The most prominent of these problems or "crimes" in Kadare's work are blood feuds (the "vendetta") and the unequal legal and social status of women, but he also deals with homophobia, incest, and property disputes, as well as the deleterious effects of Bolshevik conformity and nationalist chauvinism. One of the reasons I find this theme so compelling is its link to the next paradigm.

Kadare has, I believe, a key personal motivation behind his writing. He obviously has

career and artistic concerns, as would any writer. And he has indicated, through both a poem and a story, his patent fondness for the story of Prometheus, the long-suffering but determined enlightener of humanity who lives in order to shake up the existing social order. He has devoted an entire book to his self-identification with Aeschylus, the great Greek dramatist who chronicled the progress of civilization from unchecked violence to order and prosperity by coming to terms with acts of murder that are at once justified (as revenge) and unjustified (because they grow monstrous or sow the seeds for more killing). (25)

But what I find unique about Kadare is his desire to work for social amelioration through his choice of subjects and through the construction of those works. As discussed above, he mentions the “Homerization” of modern life in the novel *The File on H*. This conversion or inclusion of “life” (ie, human struggles and conflicts) in art is nothing new, of course, but in a region as rife with problems as the Balkans, it becomes a powerful tool in the hands of such a self-aware artist, especially when the “texts” of which Kadare’s art consists are examined in the light of the third and final paradigm. Kadare has further stressed the progressive responsibility of writers in numerous fora. (26)

The third element of a fuller understanding of Kadare’s work is assessment of what I call his “charged texts.” This phenomenon is powerfully depicted in a short poem by Kadare entitled “The Arrival of the Imperial Decree”:

Allah! The imperial decree has started on its way.
The road to Albania is long.
All along the route, the Turkish crescent shines.
The seals are starting to bleed.
Allah! The imperial decree is about to arrive. (27)

The decrees in question are *firman*s, pronouncements by the Turkish Sultan that are inalterable in nature and supported by the approval of the official clergy, but, as Kadare shows over and over again, there is nothing specifically Islamic about these texts. That they are produced by people in power or people willing to commit violence is the key. The image of “bleeding seals” from the translation above is a suitably evocative one, since it is above all violence that is called forth from these charged texts. Within the world of Kadare’s works, texts take many concrete and abstract forms, among them books, poems, orders, transcripts of eavesdropped conversations, receipts, graffiti, posters, songs, dreams, drawings, and maps. These texts, as mentioned above, are negative and destructive in his works, because their function is to call down evil or to occasion violence. A new and full perspective on Kadare’s works, however, takes the examination of texts to another level: although they are negative within his works, he sees his works themselves as texts that are positive and constructive in the real world. This ameliorative inversion of the function of “charged texts” is attested by Kadare’s comments on the proper role of the writer.

Although steeped in evocations of violence and loss, another image from one of Kadare’s novels highlights the common ground held by Balkan peoples and brings us back to the thought with which this essay began:

They have made every effort against us, from the huge cannons to the infected rats. We have withstood and will withstand them. We know that this resistance costs us dearly and may cost even dearer. But someone had to rise up and stand in the path of this demented horde, and the choice of History fell on us... Thus, we might have ended our days in peace, by our ploughs and under the shade of the olive trees, but that would have been the peace of death...Those who come after us in this world will understand that we have not found it easy to rise in this gigantic war against the most powerful monster of that time. (28)

This passage refers to the fate of Albanian soldiers besieged by the invading Ottoman forces in a huge castle, but the image is roomy enough to apply to their neighbors, the Serbs, as well. The Serbs have traditionally depicted themselves as a “bulwark of Christendom,” too. Their similar sense of mission, shaped ultimately by their negative characterization of the invaders and the subsequent loss of political and economic independence, is amazingly similar to that of the Albanians. This fact is far from lost on Kadare. He knows that these peoples’ tenacity, and sometimes pugnacity, can indeed be directed at each other. But he also knows that it is concrete and discrete issues—and not ethnic “personalities” or national identities—that give rise to rivalries. Cultural production, or texts in their many forms, preserve these rivalries and can activate them. His own texts are largely ameliorative, aiming to set into motion reconsiderations and recalculations of social and political conflicts. To revisit the poetic image from above, one might state that the seals with which Kadare imprints his work are intended to soak up blood, not spread it further afield.

NOTES

(English translations of references in French and German are by John K. Cox.)

- 1) Ismail Kadare, “Die Schleierkarawane,” from *Die Schleierkarawane: Erzählungen* (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1987), translated into German by Oda Buchholz and Wilfried Fiedler, p. 8.
- 2) Some of Kadare’s more nationalistic writing, presumed by many to have been written to curry favor with the communist regime of dictator Enver Hoxha, is on cultural themes and has been translated into English. See *On the Lay of the Knights*. Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1979) and *The Autobiography of the People in Verse* (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1987).
- 3) See, for example, the materials collected in *Il a fallu ce deuil pour se retrouver: journal de la*

guerre du Kosovo, translated into French by Jusuf Vrioni. (Paris: Fayard, 2000); and *Temps barbares: de l'Albanie au Kosovo: entretiens avec Denis Fernandez-Recatala* (Paris: Ecriture, 1999).

- 4) *The File on H.*, translated from the French of Jusuf Vrioni by David Bellos (New York: Arcade, 1997) pp. 46-47.
- 5) *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- 6) *Ibid.*, pp. 198-199.
- 7) *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- 8) *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 9) *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 10) *Ibid.*, p. 134.
- 11) *Ibid.*, p. 141.
- 12) *Elegy for Kosovo*, translated by Peter Constantine (New York: Arcade, 2000), p. 40.
- 13) *Ibid.*, p. 97.
- 14) *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- 15) *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- 16) *The Palace of Dreams*, translated from the French of Yusuf Vrioni by Barbara Bray (New York: Morrow, 1993), pp. 68-69.
- 17) Ismail Kadare, "Nachwort" in Rexhep Qosja, *In solchen Augen liegt der Tod* (Innsbruck: Haymon, 1995), pp. 324-35.
- 18) Ismail Kadare, "Préface" to the *Dictionnaire de l'Islam: religion et civilisation* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), p. 6.
- 19) Alain Finkelkraut, *Dispatches from the Balkan War and Other Writings*. Translated by Peter S. Rogers and Richard Golsan. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), p. 10
- 20) Ismail Kadare, "Préface" to Bashkim Shehu, *L'automne de la peur* (Paris: Fayard, 1993). Translated into French by Isabelle Joudrain-Musa. Pages 7-31.

- 21) It is worth noting that in these works, as well as in many of his poems about armed highlanders and Albanian soldiers, Kadare usually depicts problems with the Serbs as just a variation on a theme: larger outside powers trying to assimilate or subjugate little Albania. Although the conflict with the Serbs has at times been especially rancorous, this is for three clear reasons: geographic proximity, which makes an actual conflict over the territory of Kosovo, culturally, strategically, and economically important to both sides, possible; the dispute over the origins of epic poems and musical traditions; and, less importantly in the long run, the post-1948 ideological quarrel of Hoxha and Tito, later complicated by Hoxha's relationships with both the USSR and China. That said, the overwhelming preponderance of Albania's struggle against "denationalization" in Kadare's oeuvre is directed against the Ottoman Empire. See, for instance, *Der Schandkasten* (transl. Joachim Röhm; München: DTV, 1996), the stories in volumes two and three of Kadare's collected works in French, and the stories in the volume mentioned in note #1 above.
- 22) "The Bridge" in *Ecrire les frontières. Le pont de l'Europe*, ed. Theodoros Angelopoulos, et al. (Strasbourg: The Council of Europe, 1999), p. 75. English in the original. Kadare's use of the bridge motif, like that of Ivo Andrić and Nikos Kazantzakis, is complex and not always optimistic, since bridges also demand great sacrifices during construction and open up cultures both to physical invasion and to exploitation by new economic or cultural formations.
- 23) See German interview in Note 26 below.
- 24) Ismail Kadare, *November einer Hauptstadt*, translated into German by Robert Schwarz (Kiel: Neuer Malik, 1991), p. 93.
- 25) See *Eschyle ou le grand perdant*, translated into French by Jusuf Vrioni and Alexandre Zotos (Paris: Fayard, 1995).
- 26) See *Entretien avec Bruno de Cessole* (Paris: Editions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1996) and "Gespräch mit Ismail Kadare" by Charles Haroche in *Sinn und Form: Beiträge zur Literatur* (1990), 42:4, pp. 706-714
- 27) "Arrivée du décret impérial" in Ismail Kadare, translated into French by Jusuf Vrioni, *Oeuvres: Tome onzième* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), ed. Eric Faye, page 143.
- 28) Ismail Kadare, *The Castle*, translated by Pavli Qesku (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2002) pp. 234 and 253.
- *) Space considerations preclude a discussion of these works here. *General* treats the aftermath of World War II and *Broken April* chronicles the devastation of a long-running vendetta on the life of a young man. Both books have been turned into movies. For the second book, see, for instance, *Behind the Sun* (2001) by the noted Brazilian director Walter

Salles.