

Chapter – III

The Chronicler in Stone

The suggestion that the writer might be anything other than the amanuensis of history's progress is a heresy against the doctrine of socialist realism. In Kadare's novel *Chronicle in Stone* (1971) the child uses a mirror to reflect light down to the nether world of the water cistern deep in the cellar, reminding the imprisoned rain drops of their provenance among the upper realms of light and air. This image indicates why the writer could wield such influence in the socialist state so dependent on words to shape reality. At one level the communist dictatorships were collective writing enterprises dedicated to the propagation of the idea over reality, of dogma over truth. In as much as a writer constructs an alternative world, he reverses this relationship. But he nevertheless works with the same tools. No writer in a dictatorship has been more aware of this relationship than Kadare. As he matured, Kadare came to realize that the writer and the dictator share something in their control over the worlds of imagination and reality. Kadare's political responsibility in the period of the communist regime is anatomized in this chapter through four works. The works are

Chronicle in Stone (1971), *Winter of Great Solitude* (1973), *Twilight of the Steppe – Gods* (1976) and *The Three Arched Bridge* (1978).

The contextualization of the original idea for the *Chronicle in Stone* in the conversations at the Gorki Institute reinforces the sense of distance and perspective which is powerfully evoked in the epilogue to the novel as the writer experiences flashes of memory in the bright modern boulevards of foreign cities. In 1964 Kadare published approximately thirty pages of descriptive episodes from his childhood under the title, “The Southern City”, in the journal *Nentori*. These were extended and republished in 1967 in a collection of short stories, “The Southern City: Short Stories and Reportage”. The completed full-length novel *Chronicle in Stone* appeared in 1971.

Perhaps one of the lessons of *The General of the Dead Army* was that the private past precedes the public past and that the way to the nation is through individual and personal memory. The archaeological metaphor of national past and socialist present raised the problematic relationship of history with individual identity. At the end of this novel the tragic old woman, Nice, represents on a personal level the unanswered questions of the past. *Chronicle in Stone* is about the meeting of two worlds, as seen through the eyes of the child and retold from his adult perspective. The child does not yet understand the nature

of this meetings; the adult writer, looking back, recasts his fragmented childhood memories, together with documents and imported reminiscences and recollections, as a chronicle, a narrative structured by the passage of time. Memory is allowed open and free access to the origins and development of consciousness. The contrast with the dislocation of the past and the present in *The General* could not be greater. The obligations of socialist realism and doctrine have no place in this memoir of the writer's childhood from around 1939 until early 1944, the period immediately preceding the establishment of the regime.

A powerful sense of the past and the present is created through the loose association of events, places, and personages. To the contrast between objective and subjective time frames is added the sense of historically determined subjectivity as the relationship between the child's perception and the adult voice deepens. The overwhelming, often elegiac, sense of time passing gains a further aspects in the chronicle of decline and destruction, as the traditional life of the Albanian Ottoman town fragments and ends in civil violence. The march of history continues as the child plays, interacts with family and friends, encounters the new and the strange, learns to read, begins to think for himself. In the act of remembering the adult voice revisits its origins. By the end of the story the voice of the narrator exists in a

history, and an adult identity has formed in organic relationship to its environment. Everything is in flux and the child's consciousness is formed in the process of observation of events and characters. It is this process of formation of the child's consciousness which lies at the core of the work, explaining the adult writer's view of the present as the outcome of a history characterized by breakdown and violence. Memory re-establishes continuity for the adult who has travelled so far from his origins in the final epigraph.

In *The City without Signs* Gjirokastra was the depressing provincial destination of the young Tirana intellectual. In *Chronicle in Stone* it is a living entity, the symbol of an ancient culture. The physicality of the country – of mountains, valleys, rivers and of the town itself, which begins to emerge in *The General*, re-emerges as the writer's native land in *Chronicle in Stone*. The work opens with images of the precariousness of the human order on the Albanian landscape. History is natural history, not human history, and the man-made is insignificant in the timescale of the rocks and water which make the town. It is imagined as a prehistoric creature with a carapace of stone, cast up on to the mountainside after a storm:

It was a strange city, and seemed to have been cast up in the valley one winter's night like some prehistoric creature

that was now clawing its way up the mountainside.

Everything in the city was old and made of stone, from the streets and fountains to the roofs of the sprawling age-old houses covered with grey slates like gigantic scales.

(Chronicle 17)

During a storm the child's parents realize that the water cistern below the house is in danger of overflowing and undermining the foundations. The hinged guttering must be disconnected and the over-filled cistern emptied. The child imagines the fall of the raindrops into the cistern below the house as a descent from freedom to unfreedom, from the realm of the gods to the gloomy, sunless netherworld which in Kadare's writing is associated with the Albania of the communist regime:

Here the raindrops' life of joy and freedom ended. In the dark and soundless cistern they would recall with dreary sorrow the great space of sky they would never see again, the strange cities below them, and the lightning-ripped horizons, [...] But for the moment they knew nothing of their fate. They ran, happy and noisy, across the flat slate, and I felt sorry of them as I listened. [...] I lay wondering

whether man or water suffered more in captivity.

(Chronicle 13-14)

The imagery of freedom and imprisonment, however, contrasts with that of order and chaos. Nature is a potentially disruptive force and the incarcerated raindrops represent a threat. The presence of unruly forces plotting against domestic and civil order alarms the boy, who remains an onlooker as the adults frantically empty the tank in order to safeguard the house. The captive, displaced entities threaten the balance which has been established between the house and its environment and which depends on the timely intervention of the boy's father to release raindrops back into their natural course:

As each bucket was emptied out, I said silently to the water, "Go on, get the hell out, if you don't want to stay in our cistern". Each bucket was filled with captive raindrops, and I thought it would be good if we could weed out the nastiest ones first, the ringleaders; that way we could lessen the danger. *(Chronicle 16)*

The image cluster of freedom, imprisonment, and rebellion is indicative of a recurring theme of confinement and control, foreshadowing questions of change with which Kadare concerns himself throughout his creative life. The sense of the hierarchy of forces in the

vertical metaphor of above and below, colours the child's early experiences, creating the cognitive structures for his understanding of power. Later in bed that night the boy imagines himself and the house flooded down to the hillside along with the cistern and its overflowing water. The different universe of above and below and of the displaced entities-water, river, mankind-which expend their lives in range and conflict, frightens the child. In the dialectic of anarchy and order which is the subject of this novel, the writer-as-child seeks stability and safety. Danger comes from chaos, anarchic energy, destructive nature. Threatened by powerful forces from every side, the boy seeks security in the status quo that existed before the waters of the cistern were stirred up. He seeks to mitigate the conflict, to keep the powers of disorder at bay, and to liberate the rebellious element in order to protect the house and to safeguard his existence. Once the dangerous water-level has been reduced and the forces of anarchy expelled, the boy resumes his dialogue with the water. However, the cistern answers, "in a hoarse, strange voice" (*Chronicle* 19), and the child realizes "that its anger had eased, but not completely, for its voice was duller than usual" (*Chronicle* 19).

Unnoticed by the adults, the child begins to explore his own imaginative powers as a nascent creative writer and artist. Mirrors,

spectacles, and windows play an important role in *Chronicle*. They are associated with light, sight, blindness, and visual unclarity. In *Chronicle*, windows are misted or distorted by rain, the ageing dictator has become increasingly blind, the youthful rebels wear dark glasses, and the child with bad eyesight finds a lens which clarifies the outlines of his world. Kadare remembers himself playing with a piece of mirror in order to reflect the sky down to the imprisoned souls below.

This is the archetypal artist's role, distanced, disengaged, and mediating between the upper and the lower worlds. His position is a privileged and slightly dissociated one, and hence has something of the realm of freedom about it. He is at liberty to stand on the sidelines, observe, write, and think. He reflects down to the waters of the cistern the light which reminds of the possibilities of freedom, a potentially unsettling act of subversion of the regained order. Kadare manipulates reality in such a way as to reflect light back on life itself. But the activity is ambiguous: does the memory of freedom help or hinder the raindrops in their imprisonment? "I lay wondering whether man or water suffered more in captivity" (*Chronicle* 19). There is no question of identification, of the artist becoming the mouthpiece for these raging souls. The child will experience late childhood and early adolescence as times of war, civil upheaval, and revolution. Change is a menace and a

danger. The writer's early response to this environment of change is to situate himself between the two sides, to take the classic position of the artist vis-a-vis the real world, standing apart and reflecting on reality in order to comprehend. Later, in the dictatorial environment he would be criticized from both sides for not clearly showing his attitudes or identifying himself as either a dissident or a supporter of the regime.

The child views the aftermath of the storm in the next morning. The river has overflowed its banks, threatening the bridge, one of the archetypal Balkan image of stability:

I looked out at the countryside, transformed during the night, and thought that if the river hated the bridge, the road surely felt the same hatred for the river, and the torrents for the walls and the wind for the mountain that checked its fury. (*Chronicle* 20)

In *Albanian Spring* (1995) the battle between the dictator and the writer is represented in similar terms as a fight to the death between two different, but equally matched adversaries. The town is a symbol of human intervention in the natural environment. It is prehistoric and eternal, a natural formation of rocks and stone, pre-dating memory or history and calmly withstanding the elemental battles, its "stone carapace" (*Chronicle* 8) protecting "the tender flesh" (*Chronicle* 12) of

life. Its heart is the ancient fort built in defiance of their Turkish invaders, in which the townspeople find shelter from British and German bombers as the war proceeds.

Change is coming to the town in the form of modernity, seeping in at the edges and gradually suffusing the fabric of social interaction, loosening and dissolving ancient ties. Not even the plagues of the previous millennium, nor the Turkish occupation four hundred years ago, have prepared the townspeople for this revolt from within:

The words were casting off their usual idiomatic sense. Expressions made up of two or three words would agonizingly decompose [...] Words had a certain force in their normal frozen state. But now, as they began to melt and break apart, they released a stunning energy. Their decomposition scared me. I did all I could to stop it, but in vain. Chaos reigned in my head as words, devoid of logic and reality, abandoned themselves to their dense macabre. [...] Everything was upside down, falling apart, breaking up. [...] The world was falling apart before my very eyes. Surely that was what Kako Pino meant when she constantly repeated, “It’s the end of the world”.

(Chronicle 89-90)

In an episode which foreshadows the ending of the Albanian - Ottoman class structures, the child watches as fire, set off by communist agitators, consumes the city hall and the deeds and titles office:

I plastered my face to the window pane and looked out at the teeming street. Now and again the pane misted over. The land and houses, freed from the power of the deeds, strained to break from their foundations. Something deep below them, which had anchored them for centuries had gone. The stone houses in motion roamed dangerously near one another, risking collision and destruction.

“They’re burning, they’re burning!”

Only the streets, which belonged to everyone, tried to maintain some degree of order in the chaos. [...] “The Reichstag also burned like this” said Javer, pointing to a place on the globe. (*Chronicle* 194)

The prime suspect for the fire in the municipal offices is the deranged boy who searches the town at night for the body of his lover, thrown into a city well by her outraged parents:

When the police arrested the young man with the kerosene and the rope in the middle of the night, everyone thought that the Nero of the city had been caught at last. But it

turned out he was not Nero but Orpheus, seeking his Eurydice in the wells of our courtyards. Trial. Executive measures. Property. All suits having to do with real estate are temporarily suspended because of the burning of the registry of deeds. Cinema tomorrow: *Grand Hotel*, starring the famous actress Greta Garbo. (*Chronicle* 197)

The practice of drowning or asphyxiating disobedient daughters occurs several times in the novel. In the light of the inhumanity of such aspects of traditional life, the communist rebels appear to offer progress. The young man who spends his nights searching the town's wells and cisterns powerfully represents the perversion of human feelings in this environment. That he is mistaken for a terrorist is ironic, since he is a symptom not a cause of the problems.

The Reichstag fire of 26 February 1933, symbol of the Nazi dictatorship and of the reigniting of the European conflagration, appears as the harbinger of things to come in the Albanian town on the fault line between Ottoman past and Soviet future. At the same time American cinema has arrived. *Grand Hotel* (1931-32) tells the stories of a group of characters whose paths cross in a classy Berlin hotel one weekend in 1932. Neither Nazism nor the crisis of the Weimar Republic appears in the depoliticized stories of innocence, fraud, and death, although

Hollywood has not been entirely successful in expunging the pervasive sense of criminality, loss and alienation from Vicki Baum's original novel, *Menschen im Hotel* (1929). The apparently random linkages of the *Chronicle* manifest the workings of history, the convergence of the non-contemporaneous events of the Balkan town into a broader European narrative of conflict and upheaval. Modernity will come suddenly as the partisans set up a Soviet communist state and put an end to the traditions and ways of life which both sustain the community and civic order, and perpetuate pre-modern barbarity. Under the pressure of occupation, collaboration, reprisal and retribution, civil society, based on Ottoman foundations, breaks down. The traditional enmities between the wealthy urban Ottoman *agas* and the Christian Orthodox peasants are provoked by military occupation. Class, marked by religion in this typically southern Albanian environment, is the first point of fragmentation. Finally even clans and families are split by something new, modern, and hitherto unknown. The old Muslim women in the salon upstairs, observing the world below through their lorgnettes, represent the combined voice of ancient and eternal Albania. These figures, in whom the young writer finds the ancient choric voice of Albania, are hardly the stuff of communist doctrine. They provide a background lament as things go from bad to worse under the successive

occupations of Greeks, Italians, and Germans during the late 1930s and early 1940s when the writer is still a child. They give expression to something which the child also, in his unreflective way, recognizes, namely that in this changing world, it will be the younger generation of intellectuals who will take responsibility for the new order.

In the wake of the Italian occupation and the increasing misery, the people turn to traditional magic as a means of warding off further evil. The budding intellectuals and political radicals, Isa and Javer, interpret the return of pre Muslim practices in terms of the interests of the occupation forces:

In Mane Voco's yard. Ilir and I listened to Javer and Isa talking about witchcraft. [...] Several times we heard them use the words "mysticism" and "collective psychosis." Then Isa asked Javer, "Have you read Jung?" "No". said Javer. [...] "All this is clear enough. This psychosis serves the interests of the reactionaries by diverting public attention from the real problems. Here, look at the newspaper: "Magic is in some sense part of the folkloric heritage of the people". "A fascist theory", said Isa. [...] "Those barbarians with feathers in their hats are happy to resurrect any medieval

custom, as long as Mussolini can get something out of it.”

(Chronicle 46-47)

These practices were in fact part of the Muslim, and Christian beliefs and rituals of the mental life of the people. The new ideas of the young radical intellectuals, Isa and Javer, represent another layer of belief, which will be superimposed over the existing layers as has been the way in Albania for centuries.

Unlike the old women, these young intellectuals have a life before them. In the environment of occupation, social disintegration and civil war, and with the communism of foreign-trained intellectuals such as Enver Hoxha filtering back into the country from the mid-1930s onward, young people find themselves in the situation of either taking or losing control of their lives. The apocalyptic situation of the end of the world is for them one where all is to be lost or won. Kako Pino's refrain is comical in this episode, but it turns out to be true, as she is found hanged in the final pages of the novel with the word “saboteur” *(Chronicle 70)* scratched across her body. The culprit is not named-it could be the Germans, or Javer revenging the execution of Isa.

Javer and Ilir are prototypes of the communist partisans and intellectuals who would make up the post-war ruling party. Isa is executed after assassinating the Italian commander, and Javer goes

underground after killing his uncle in reprisal for Isa's death, and carrying out further retaliatory murders of fascists and saboteurs. He will re-emerge in the battle for Tirana at the end of the war in the 1974 novel, *November of a Capital City*.

Spectacles become the motif of the intellectual, symbolizing the new way of seeing that would turn Albania into a modern communist state. Early in the novel Mane Voco's son Isa begins wearing glasses. Isa's glasses are "the only thing that seemed alive on his battered face" (*Chronicle* 229) when he is mutilated and hanged. The young revolutionary Enver Hoxha too wears glasses. Enver Hoxha is mentioned several times, as the local boy who went to study "in the land of the Franks," (*Chronicle* 226), and "a commissaire called Enver Hoxha" (*Chronicle* 267) who says that there will be communism in the new Albania:

A notice was posted on what remained of a wall of the ruined house [...] "Wanted: the dangerous Communist Enver HJoxha. Aged about 30. Tall. Wears sunglasses."
(*Chronicle* 225)

The sunglasses are an ambiguous image signaling both sightlessness and a sinister version of the glasses of the intellectuals. If the spectacles of the intellectuals give access to the worlds of modernity,

of Marxist- Leninist dogma as well as Hollywood film, the black eye sockets of Kadare's blind seers are the means of access to their underworld of Albanian reality. The darkness of the cistern is associated with the blind poet, Homer (*Chronicle* 52). The boy recognizes the "majesty of blindness in the crones" (*Chronicle* 89) who function as the voices of human experience. They reappear in *Winter of Great Solitude*, petitioning the leader, Enver Hoxha. As the partisans enter the town, the Muslim cleric, Sheikh Ibrahim, blinds himself in desperation, claiming, "better no eyes at all than to see communism" (*Chronicle* 241). While Islam, the religion of the Ottoman upper class, barely figures in the socio-cultural environment of the child, the Muslim cleric's self-blinding suggests a turning away from the light of communism, and modernity for the dark past of the Ottoman night.

The spectacles of the intellectual, the harbingers of change, also affect the author-as-child, bringing clarity and the hard lines of modernity to him, the following generation, as well. He finds a spectacle lens in his grandmother's chest. The spectacles establish a link between the child and the young revolutionary intellectuals, only a decade older than he, who will become the cadres of the new regime in the late 1940s and 1950s. The ruthlessly sharp outlines created by the glasses both appal him and enable him to see more clearly the films which nurture his

imagination and to read the books introduced to him by Isa and Javer: Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the psychology of Carl Gustav Jung. The Italian brothel, the glasses, later the aeroplanes of the British and the Germans, are signs of a modernity which will hang the world from the traditional one of usage and familiarity to one determined by the rules of economics and efficiency. The "new and bright" world of communist enlightenment contrasts throughout Kadare's work with the misty world of eternal Albania. The image of the present with its sharp lines and piercing light has little of the positive spin of Western modernity: rather it is the harbinger of the type of economic efficiency, rule-bound bureaucracy, and uncompromising scrutiny which would characterize communist social planning and everyday reality. In the symbolic scheme of the work, the writer-as-child is located between the two worlds. He takes the lens he has found in his grandmother's attic to the cinema in order to see clearly. It enables him to escape the nether world of fog and haze. But it also turns his world into a set of precise details, a society of contracts against the old, hazy community of nature, accommodation, and mutual compliance. The lens is the counterpart of the mirror that the boy uses to reflect a piece of the sky, of freedom, to the imprisoned waters of the cistern below. Light, in its reflected and refracted states, is the medium of the writer, it is an attribute of the

upper world but like the fire of Prometheus, it is dangerous, shining fiercely into the dark corners where life exists.

As the British bombing raids increase in frequency the citizens abandon their homes for the cellars of the citadel, the heart of the ancient city. Here the boys experience history in the journey downwards and inwards in to the medieval origins of their town. Like Dante in the Inferno they hear the stories of the past, of the Ottoman times which shaped and distorted the nation's identity. The severed head of a disobedient pasha rolls past them and the chained and rotting bodies of officials who had fallen foul of the Porte haunt this place. This Ottoman motif of beheading would provide Kadare with one of his most important symbols for the failure of Albania to have found a modern leader after the early uprising of Scanderbeg. The Ottoman practice of capturing and beheading any figure of opposition represents for the Albanians a syndrome of the loss of potential leadership and the focus or centre of the nation's spiritual as well as material forces. *Chronicle in Stone* ends with the occupation of the town by the Germans.

In the winter of 1943/44 between the departure of the Italians and the arrival of the Germans, the Ballists and the communists battled for power while engaging fire with the exhausted Italian battalions and

secretly negotiating with representatives of the Allied powers. The southern countryside and the towns, Korca, Gjirokastra, Elbasan, and Berat were occupied by the Partisans. The hatred between the communists and the Ballists, the followers of the Balli Kombetar or National Front, is palpable in Kadare's novel. After the execution of Isa, Javer assassinates his uncle Azem Kurti, a Balli Kobetar commander responsible for Isa's arrest. The killing of Azem Kurti is described in graphic detail as Javer takes a pistol from his pocket and kills his uncle at the family dinner table. The deed sets off a flood of retribution. Once the town is in the hands of the partisans, summary justice is meted out to those considered to have collaborated with the Ballists, the internal fascist enemy of the communists. The tanner Mak Karllashi and his son are executed in front of their doorway and the daughter who refuses to leave her father's side is also gunned down. When the partisan responsible for the girl's death is executed shortly after, the imposition of summary justice suggests that the uncompromising liquidation of fascists and the re-establishment of order will be the overriding priority of a partisan government. The partisans return to the hills and the citizens seek refuge in the outlying villages until the surrender brings about the cessation of German bombing.

Kadare does not end with the victorious re-emergence of the partisans after the German retreat. The appearance of the partisans is carefully placed in the interval between the Italian withdrawal and the German occupation, in order to avoid the political problems associated with the representation of the beginning of the new era. The execution of Mak Karllashi by the partisans remains an important incident and the chronicle ends with the town not the politics as its focal point. The stone town, which supports life in its cracks and crevices, has again proved itself to be more lasting than any of the occupying forces. That it is an ecosystem for its people, Gjirokastrans and Albanians, and not for political regimes, has been demonstrated yet again with the departure of the Italians and the Germans. Presumably it will survive the communists. However, the ending is not confrontational. Kadare's aim is to establish a continuity. The sense of the break between the past and the present identified at the end of *The General* has been overcome with the image of continuity in the town as a life-world. Despite the violence, upheaval, destructions, civil unrest, and mutual hatred which occur as the traditional order breaks down, the town survives, and while individuals die and are killed, their stories survive in the history of the town. The final death is that of Kako Pino, the harmless old woman who beautified brides for their weddings and whose cosmetic

instruments are mistaken for a saboteur's equipment. Life will go on, the child becomes the man and the adult writer remembers the people whose footsteps, faces, and voices are imprinted in the rough cold stone of the city, giving him the language and the memories which will survive even during the darkest years of the dictatorship. The author's postscript represents the town as the stone remnants of the accrued wisdom and experience of the old woman, the bearers of ancient and eternal Albanian identity in spite of their individual fates. Kako Pino, Grandmother Selfixhe, and others are etched into the author's memory:

At the street corners, where walls join, I thought I could see some familiar lines, like human features, shadows of cheekbones and eyes. They are still there, frozen for ever in stone, along with the traces left by earthquakes, winters, and scourges wrought by men. (*Chronicle* 277)

History lies at the heart of *Chronicle in Stone*: as natural history, as social and personal history, memory, remembrance and memoir, chronicle and documentation. The fragmented texture, including childhood memories along with adult reflection, interleaved sections of anonymous chronicle along with episodes of town life renders the work tentative and exploratory. Nevertheless, the sequential nature of the chronology foregrounds the relationship of the past to the present,

although in ways very different from those ordained by historical materialism. *Chronicle in Stone* is also Kadare's most intimate and personal work whose opening suggestions of whimsical humour are undercut by episodes of cruelty and tragedy.

The stone town bears the traces of its human and natural history, however, it is the writer who recognizes the lines of human experience alongside those of climate and change. *Chronicle* marks an important step forward in Kadare's development by linking the writer directly to the land through individual experience and identity and radically contradicting the requirements of socialist realism. Kadare places subjective authenticity at the centre of his creativity in this important novel. While earlier works such as *The Monster* and *The General* were written in a spirit opposed to socialist realism. *Chronicle* takes the rejection further by placing the creative consciousness at the centre of personal memory and national identity. The author here, for the first time, is explicitly the carrier of group memory and identity. Individual creative consciousness, not objective history, embodies and gives voice to the nation. At this stage the challenge to the dictator and the regime remains implicit: it is the writer, not the dictator who is the voice of the nation. Not the new man of Albanian communism, but the eternal Albania of the writer's memory and creative consciousness will be the

subject of its history. This is the beginning of a battle to the end for the voice of Albania between the writer and the dictator. It is Kadare's great theme, linked with his portrayal of his country as an ethnos wider and deeper than communism or modernity. In *Twilight of the Steppe-Gods* (1976) written half a decade later, Kadare retrospectively formulates his return to Albania as a descendant in order to rescue his native land. As Constantine, the Albanian Orpheus, who passes between life and death to rescue his beloved sister Doruntine, Kadare is crossing between literature and reality in order to redeem Albania from its confinement under the dictatorship.

The appeal to memory in *Chronicle in Stone* constitutes the beginning of an answer to the final question of *The General of the Dead Army*: where to go from here? How can the past and the present be re-connected? Can this connection be made positive? How can we come to terms with history, rather than burying it in the frozen soil where it harbours its destructivity or rewriting it in accordance with dogma and political convenience? The writer's answer is personal. He seeks the origins of his subjectivity and his adult identity. In doing so he suggests answers to further questions about his country. For in his memories lie clues to the denial of the past. Where the past remains closed in different ways for Italians and Albanians alike in *The General*,

Chronicle in Stone revisits the childhood of the writer, taking the first step towards a reconnection of the past and the present. In the stories of the inhabitants, whose lives are fleeting moments in the history of the town, the continuities of the centuries are preserved, from the magical practices dating from earliest times through Christian and Muslim, Byzantine, and Ottoman civilizations to the dawning of the new era of communism amid flames and summary executions at the end of the work.

Chronicle in Stone was denounced in a letter to Ramiz Alia in June 1971. A part of it was published in the daily newspaper *The Courier*. The letter writer, a teacher and young writer in Berat, criticizes the work for its lack of socialist principles, its ugliness, and its surrealism, and suggests that it be withdrawn from circulation (Margarinois, "Palace" 29). The novel defies the regime in form as well as content. The figure of Enver Hoxha appears, but the work remains primarily a study of the past as the concrete pre-history of the present. *Chronicle in Stone* documents the formation of the writer's consciousness in the era preceding the communist *Gleichschaltung*. In counterpoint to the encomiums paid to Hoxha's Stalinist purism and Albanian patriotism at the high point of the regime, Kadare reminds his

fellow countrymen of the origins of Albanian communism in civil war, terror, revenge, and summary justice.

Moreover, it is the subjective authenticity of the narrative voice, not the objective authenticity of socialist realism, which gives meaning to Kadare's struggles against dictatorship. In the city of his birth the child finds the images that will accompany him through life, and with which he begins to construct an alternative Albania in words and memories to write against that of the dictatorship. Over the following decade Kadare would reformulate his relationship to the dictator and the regime, experimenting with the idea of the corrective mask, the enlightenment model of political education by precept and literary example; later he became more and more preoccupied with the innate conflict between the writer and the dictator, building in the figure of Prometheus an alter and counter-ego of the dictatorial Zeus. In *Twilight of the Steppe-Gods* he describes his recognition that the creative imagination, the mirror which sends a slice of sky to the imprisoned ones below, has become his existential justification for returning to his captive nation.

By 1969 Kadare had begun to gain fame beyond Albania. In 1970 Jusuf Vrioni's translation of *The General* was authorized for publication in France. In addition Kadare's prominence was beginning to encroach

on Enver Hoxha's aspirations. Hoxha too wanted to be admired in the West for the education and literary gifts which he attained from France. By 1970 Hoxha was rumoured to be thinking of dedicating a greater part of his time to working, with a book about his childhood already finished and one about the break with the Soviet Union under way. He was sixty-two years old. Since the 1950s he had achieved levels of control only dreamed of by his Eastern European colleagues. Hoxha's literary ambitions constituted an extra treat to Kadare, who wrote of the situation:

For the first time I realized that it was terrible to be known in a Stalinist country under the control of a tyrant as ferocious as he was cunning and who, unfortunately, also claimed to be a writer. (Kadare, *Albanian Spring* 110)

Kadare's enemies in the Sigurimi, or Directorate of State Security (the secret police service under Mehmet Shehu), and the old guard of the Politburo repeatedly referred to him as an agent of the West. This was one of the most dangerous accusations that could be made in this state obsessed by external threats. As his international fame emerged, so too did his need of a writing strategy to protect himself at home from both the paranoia of the dictator, and from his old enemies on the left and in the Sigurimi. Until this point Kadare was considered to be both a writer

of talent and a writer whose talent was dangerously inclined towards decadence and subjectivism.

The image of Enver Hoxha as patriot and wartime partisan leader had appealed to the young Kadare. When he discovered as a child that Hoxha, the man who led the resistance, was from his own quarter in Gjirokastra, he was amazed and impressed. As communist partisan leader Hoxha had liberated Albania from Italian and German occupation and in 1961 he achieved that which no other European communist leader had managed: the liberation of Albania from the soviet bloc. Kadare remained impressed by this historical achievement of the Albanian leader.

With these mixed views, around 1969, Kadare began to contemplate a strategy which would both flatter and educate the dictator and create a protective alibi for himself for his future work. He traced the origins of the idea back to a poem written in the 1960s, "The Sixties" in which Enver Hoxha appears as an epic figure redeeming his tiny nation from the clutches of the Soviet monster. Planned as an accolade to Hoxha in the style of the hymns to Stalin, it also evoked the lasting impression of the national hero, although Kadare passes it off in *The Weight of the Cross* (1991) as nothing more than a piece of political expediency designed to stay on the good side of the regime. The poem

received lukewarm praise from official quarters. It was clearly not tribute enough from the national laureate-to-be. But he now was planning a novel that would stave off the attacks for some time.

At this time Kadare writes that he was still convinced that the break with the Soviet Union would lead to rapprochement with the West. Kadare's model at this stage is Marshal Tito, hailed in the early 1970s as offering a potential third way between Soviet communism and the West. Kadare was bitter at the Europeans' lack of initiative in offering the hand of friendship to Albania at this point when the country appeared to be teetering between the East and the West. The failure of the West to respond to Hoxha's manoeuvre, leaving him stranded and the Albanian people abandoned, was for Kadare a "Second Yalta" (Pipa, *Contemporary* 90).

The new work would be based on Hoxha's world known historical role in the epic break with the Soviet Union. Kadare read psychoanalytic literature in order to try to understand Hoxha's behaviour, attempting to catch the dictator in his way, and finally comprehend the man. *Winter of Great Solitude* (1973) was to be Kadare's alibi and his protection over the following decade. Hoxha would appear at a moment of hope. The fictional representation of the leader would be designed as a mirror for the dictator, showing him at his

best, cleansed of dictatorial traits and offered as a corrective mask. Having presented the idealized image of the dictator and become a household name, Kadare could no longer be simply dispensed with. This novel would open the doors of the prison.

Kadare gained access to the documentation of the meetings of Hoxha, Shehu, and the other members of the Albanian delegation with Khrushchev and the Soviet leadership at the meeting of eighty-one world communist leaders in Moscow in 1960. The omnipresent Nexhmije, Hoxha's wife supported and facilitated his request, opening the secret archive to him. Her reasons for doing so are conjectural but interesting. Nexhmije was a hard-line Stalinist devoted to maintaining the stability of the regime and her own and Enver's position in it. She was wily enough to recognize in Kadare a potentially valuable ally as well as a dangerous enemy.

In 1971 Nexhmije invited Kadare to discuss the novel with her. It was at this time that the writer's only private meeting with the dictator took place. During the meeting with Nexhmije, Hoxha walked into the room by chance and chatted with Kadare for several hours about literature. Hoxha charmed the writer with his famed European urbanity, speaking for hours about the Moscow conference, his youth, his love of France and his origins, mentioning in passing Kadare's recent memoir,

Chronicle in Stone, and their common origins in Gjirokastra. The intensity with which Hoxha spoke of France and his youth brought to the author's mind the rumour of Hoxha's homosexuality, which was such a dangerous topic, but which in this context seemed to promise some hope in a character so different from his Eastern European colleagues.

Kadare wrote quickly, substantially finishing the manuscript of *Winter of Great Solitude* by the end of 1971. The novel would be like a ring through the nose of a bear, making Hoxha dance to his music. He would disarm the dictator with its beauty, appealing to his subtle and refined taste in literature. Everything in the novel was true, writes Kadare, except the portrait of the dictator. A section was shown to Kadare's friend, Todi Lubnonja, Director of State Broadcasting and Television, who passed it on to Ramiz Alia at the latter's request. It seems likely that Hoxha read the manuscript, which Kadare had given to Ramiz Alia; indeed, he may well have instigated Alia's request.

The story is set in the winter months between September 1960 and March 1961, the time of the break between Moscow and Tirana. Journalist and translator, Besnik Struga, is chosen to accompany the Albanian delegation to Moscow for the summit meeting of the eighty-one heads of international communist organizations in November 1960.

The plot moves quickly to the Moscow meeting, which takes up Book Two and is based on Kadare's access to the then secret files.

Discussions at the meeting touch on the importance of the Vlora naval base, Khrushchev's flippant comments regarding Soviet reserves in the aftermath of the previous summer's wheat shortages, the cooling of relations, and the need for socialist solidarity. The well-known members of international communism are present: Andropov, Kosygin, Mikoyan, Ulbricht, Ho Chi Minh, Gomulka, Dej, Thorez, even "La Pasionaria", the Spanish partisan, Dolores Ibarurri. Kadare emphasizes the heroic opposition of Hoxha and Khrushchev in which the suffering, fighting Hoxha is the underdog, isolated and bullied by the Soviet Union and its sycophantic member states and global allies. "[Khrushchev] vaguely senses that the other is right. [...] For his part, Hoxha is completely transfigured" (Vickers and James, *Albania* 201). There is little discussion of ideological issues other than the broad need for solidarity and the role of the Soviet Union as the world leader of socialism.

Kadare consolidates the historical break implying that it occurred at the heroic confrontation of the two leaders, whereas in fact it had been brewing for well over a year and had its roots in broader political issues. Although primarily engaged as a journalist and translator, Besnik Struga interprets for Hoxha at the Moscow summit meeting. At a difficult

point in the proceedings, during a stressful and exhausting day, he makes a mistake in the translation of a Russian proverb. This contributes to the heightening of tension, to bitterness and disagreement between the two leaders and to the criticism and ostracism of the Albanians by other members of world communism. While Enver Hoxha dominates the Moscow meeting in Book Two, the rest of the plot revolves around the translator, Besnik, his family and friends, and in particular around his relationship with his fiancée, Zana. This is the point of contact between the great world of politics and the small world of personal relationships. For as an indirect result of Besnik's involvement in the Moscow meeting, his relationship with Zana suffers and finally breaks up.

Besnik returns to Albania distraught at the role he has played at the conference, but is constrained to remain silent on the topic of what transpired until the regime formulates its response and clears the embargo imposed on members of the delegation. Preoccupied with his failure and the fate of the nation, he is evasive with Zana about the date of their wedding. She, fearing that he has found another woman in Moscow, turns to alcohol and in a drunken moment seduces her French tutor and neighbor, Marc, the son of a disgraced bourgeois family in the flat below. Zana's mother, Liria, decides to end her

daughter's relationship with Besnik once and for all by denouncing him to his boss and local Party member. Besnik is required to make an official explanation of his behaviour, but refuses on the grounds that this is none of the Party's business. His application for Party membership, the passport to professional success, is postponed, further worsening his emotional and psychological crisis.

Kadare paints a broad canvas of secondary figures. Besnik's father Kristaq is an ex-partisan and hero of the Albanian communist movement, famous for having blown up the tomb of the Queen Mother during the resistance. His younger brother, Beni, is typical of Kadare's disaffected young people of *The City without Signs*. Beni drinks too much, spends his time hanging around with his friends listening to popular music, and grows his hair long. Constantly reminded of the achievements of his father's generation, he lacks self-esteem and a sense of direction but is rehabilitated in the novel after discovering self-fulfilment through work and self-sacrifice in the communist cause. Zana's family, too, is represented in detail. She is the daughter of a prominent family of intellectuals. Her sister, Diana, is married to a leading writer, Skender Bermema. The Bermemas become embroiled in scandal when a young relative is engaged to the son of an ex-Party member, excommunicated after the events of 1956 in Hungary. Below

the Bermamas live old Nurihan and her son Marc on the ground floor of their dispossessed house. Nurihan listens to foreign radio broadcasts and gossips with her friends and cronies, embittered remnants of the bourgeoisie and land owning gentry, who include Rrok Simonjaku, proprietor of a second-hand goods store in the city.

The figures representing the past, particularly old Nurihan and her friends, shrink over their radios, hoping to hear signs of political change from long-wave broadcasts. Kadare harbours little sympathy for these figures of the past, even though he also makes some minor narrative gestures to render them less unsympathetic. When Beni, the scion of a partisan communist family and younger brother of the protagonist, Besnik, is involved in a drunken scuffle, the old bourgeois, Rrok Simonjaku does not identify him to the police. Nevertheless, Nurihan and her friends are conniving, snide, and nasty. It is hard to believe that a figure such as Jusuf Vrioni, Kadare's colleague and translator who suffered miserably on account of his privileged pre-war class background, could not have been affronted by these portrayals. And yet, one of the most sympathetic portrayals in the novel is that of Nurihan's son, Marc, a cellist with the symphony orchestra, whose fate has been determined by the class status and wartime actions of his family.

The break with Zana and the ensuing disappointment in Besnik's personal life has its origins in the meeting in Moscow. However, it comes to a crisis as a result of the unethical behaviour of Zana's mother and the complicity of Party members. It is in the nature of the Party that personal issues became politically charged. The regime is implicitly criticized for creating a perverted and artificial life-world among the Nomenclature and the professional and educated classes in the capital.

Alone and adrift after Zana has called off their relationship, Besnik seeks a sense of inclusion in the wider community. In an epiphanic moment he recognizes his place in the communist scheme of things as he comes to the realization that even he in his role as translator contributed to Albania's independence. Nevertheless, by the end of the novel, the outlook is distinctly bleak. Besnik's emotional life is in tatters, the country is still suffering from a bitterly cold winter, and the final image is of people struggling against snowstorms to repair television and radio antennas which will no longer receive news or information from the outside world. The West is out of bounds, and even the Warsaw Pact countries are now blockaded. Only relations with China are strengthening. The novel ends with the death of Nurihan and the birth of Diana Bermema's child on a cold day at the end of winter 1961.

Besnik Struga is peripheral to the epic events of the Moscow meeting, and his fictional mistake in interpreting, which drives the plot line, is trivial in the scheme of things. The extent to which it contributes to the break between Hoxha and Khrushchev, or whether it is simply the factor which undermines Besnik's peace of mind, is unclear. However, this indirect relationship between the private and the public, the personal and the political lies at the heart of the novel's message. At the end Besnik is shown to have achieved a sense of personal resolution through his conviction that he has in his own way contributed to Albania's maintenance of her national integrity, despite the translation mistake and the loss of Zana. The narrative reflects Besnik's thoughts in the final paragraphs, his hopes that Zana would return to him, his sense of loss as he realizes that she is gone forever, and his consolation that the nation, at least, had been saved, even if he has been sacrificed:

The people had withstood the blow. During the ordeal they grimaced with pain and may have flinched, spitting with the bitterness of it all, but they stayed alive. The losses were large, leaving gaping wounds here and there, but losses can add to the grandeur of a people. For me, too, loss brought something, he said to himself. Deep within himself he felt an inner calm, a strange mixture of

purity and warmth. After all was said and done, it was now completely clear: in the armies of communism he was one of so many, just a simple, almost anonymous, foot soldier in the mid-twentieth century, on whom history had laid part of its heavy burden. The howl of the siren seemed to have become a part of the sky. I've been waiting for you all afternoon, he thought. I've been waiting for you centuries. (*Winter* 289)

This novel of the simple soldier of communism nevertheless ends not with his country but with his loss. The theme of the sacrifice of the personal for the public could not be clearer-nor any more questionable in Besnik's thoughts despite the epic-heroic tenor of the writing.

While Kadare can be seen to have fashioned Enver Hoxha into a positive hero of socialism and to have painted a broad epic canvas of the events of 1961, the novel ends on an ambivalent note as the economic, cultural, and social consequences of the break in relations begin to affect everyday life. The Soviet and Warsaw Pact ambassadors and technocrats depart, leaving Albanian projects unfinished and dangerously undermanned. Hoxha's heroic actions affect the whole of his country in disastrous ways. Not only is the freeze political; it hardens relationships all the way down from the summit in Moscow to

the most intimate levels of interpersonal relations. The stubborn intransigence of the leaders is replicated at all levels as characters were either conformed or excluded from society. Interpersonal relationships seem afflicted by obstacles to communication that are born of personal insecurity, social distrust, and entrenched political taboos. Above all, the embargo on the events in Moscow, which was not officially lifted until late in 1961, affects the relationship of Besnik and Zana, who appear incapable of speaking openly and freely, even in private, or of trusting one another. This is hardly surprising, given the ideologically hardened attitudes of those around them, the distress which the Bermema family suffers as a result of a distant cousin's engagement to the relation of a "class enemy" (*Winter* 161), Zana's circumspection and narrowness, and Besnik's ambitions and insecurities. The next step up from the family in social affairs, the workplace, is dominated by the Party and by the malice of figures such as Besnik's boss, who is delighted to have a pretext to exclude his junior colleague from Party membership. It is the Party which colludes with Liria in denouncing her future son-in-law for purely personal reasons, and the upper levels of the Party and the Nomenclature are characterized by political correctness, intimidation, and manipulation.

The literary trope of a harsh winter survived is undercut from the beginning by Kadare's implication that winter has become the permanent state of Albanian social life. He begins the novel with an image of the inhabitants of Tirana struggling to re-erect their radio and television antennas in the September storms, and finishes with the same image on the snowbound roofs of the capital. Throughout the novel, and in its sequel, *The Concert* (1988) radio contact with the rest of the world becomes a metaphor for the state of Albanian isolation. Access to the world via radio and television would diminish, not increase, as the previously accessible Italian and Yugoslav broadcasts were scrambled and punishments raised for illegal listening. Enver Hoxha's ideological purity achieves a great solitude which appears to do little for the inhabitants of Albania in the novel. Dashnor Mamaqi, the secretary of the Tirana Committee of the Party, identified the tone of disappointment and unhappiness in his 1973 critique of the novel: "the atmosphere is gloomy and the novel is permeated with a sort of existentialist anguish" (O'Donnell, *A Coming* 113).

Winter of Great Solitude is a flawed work, but is pivotal in Kadare's development as a writer. For here he engages with the figure of Enver Hoxha, the holder of power since the communist takeover in 1945 and a figure whose name had become synonymous with the nation.

The novel has been widely criticized for pandering to the image of the dictator as a man of ideological conviction, inner strength, and international importance when in fact his involvement was self-seeking, ideologically crooked, and determining by the conflict between the two communist superpowers, China and Soviet Union. However, this novel also represents an important stage in the writer's engagement with the dictator. Here for the first time Hoxha is represented in detail as a realistically conceived figure, not as an intangible presence, or as an allegory of power in historical costume. The structure of the dictatorship-the committee system, the Party, the Nomenclature, and the politicized society of the capital-is also represented, where in earlier works the relationships of power between the bureaucrats and the dictator were vague and indefinable. In the context of the regime, the possibility of realistic representation of these aspects of contemporary life (in particular Liria's denunciation of Besnik) was predicated on the idealization of the dictator.

And yet this idealization is more than just a strategy of representation. Kadare's admiration for the fighter and patriot and for the land that he represents is visible. In the revisions for the second (1976) edition he shifts the focus slightly, underscoring Hoxha's role as an instrument of history, of the birth of the modern nation. Hoxha's

personality is still predominant, but it is increasingly viewed as a product of historical circumstance, without which the nation would not have survived the post-war reorganization of the Balkans. Albania is more than Enver Hoxha. In this version Hoxha represents history, the problematic coming to self-determination of a country that was accustomed to tutelage. Kadare was not the only Eastern European intellectual to accept Stalinism as a modernizing force, but he was clearly moving beyond this position by the mid-1960s. In *Winter* he brings together his admiration of Enver Hoxha, the partisan and patriot, with a profound questioning of Hoxha's nationalistic communism at the point in 1960 when the post-war order of Europe was being sealed in the east as well as in the west.

By the end of the 1960s things seemed to be looking up again after the first years of the cultural revolution. Social and cultural life improved, the alliance with China was no longer taken seriously, and rumours circulated that Hoxha was about to make a pronouncement against the cultural revolution. Hoxha's cultural preferences for French and European music and literature were widely known and it was announced that the dictator had encouraged his colleagues in the Central Committee to express themselves freely in French and English as well as in Albanian. Hoxha had put the liberal Ramiz Alia above the old guard

warriors, Mehmet Shehu and Hysni Kapo, as the “human face” of Stalinism (Vickers and James, *Albania* 200). Significant numbers of the intelligentsia hoped, naively perhaps, that Hoxha was waiting for signs of an approach from the West, and that the Chinese alliance was simply a holding action, designed to keep the Soviets at bay until Western contacts could be established.

In retrospect Kadare represents the writing of the novel in terms of a warm up in Albanian relations, both internally and with the Western world. Todi Lubonja, the Director of Radio and Television, encouraged Kadare to persevere with this work, which would help the dictator to liberate himself from his demons. Kadare expresses his gratitude to Lubonja, along with another highly placed liberal official and friend, Agim Mero, both of whom supported him in his work. Lubonja was aware of the dangers inherent in Kadare’s project, but the writer was excited by the prospect of the dictator taking on the challenge offered to him.

The novel was intended to suggest a possible option for Hoxha in this environment, namely withdrawal from the day-to-day running of the country. The frail Alia was in every way a man designed to do the leader’s bidding. The old Stalinist war horses, Mehmet Shehu and Hysni Kapo, could be further demoted, and the dictator could work

towards weakening his Stalinist image with a less criminal Leninism. However, all was not what it seemed in this most opaque of political environments and Hoxha was about to strike.

Ramiz Alia read the complete manuscript of *Winter of Great Solitude* in the autumn of 1972. During several months passed the writer heard nothing. The atmosphere of détente and optimism in the capital since the end of the 1960s continued into the winter of 1972. Hoxha returned from winter holidays in Vlora at the end of the year. In his reading of the situation Kadare suggests that Hoxha himself was at an impasse at this time, still hoping for an approach from the West, but isolated from the Soviet Union and feeling exposed and humiliated by the Chinese after Mao Tse-tung's revisionist moves, in particular the interest in rapprochement with the United States, first expressed via intermediaries in 1970, which resulted in Nixon's visit to China in February 1972.

The strategy of creating an alibi for his writing by offering the dictator an idealized image, which would function as the model of the good dictator, was a risky move. Politically astute, even cunning as he was, Kadare was no match for Hoxha. Over-confident, even optimistic about the changes in policy towards China, Hoxha had not seriously accepted the possibility of complete seclusion, and failed to foresee the

frost of the early 1970s. Encouraged by the restlessness of young people and the sense of social and cultural change as well as by the engagement of progressive intellectuals such as Lubonja and Pacrami, he had played his card. He and his novel were caught up in the ensuing political machinations.

The rumour of the book's existence polarized the two main factions around Hoxha: the old-guard Stalinists whose power base lay in the Sigurimi, and the liberals, headed by Ramiz Alia, but held in contempt by figures such as Nexhmije Hoxha, Mehmet Shehu, and Hysni Kapo. In addition Nexhmije, wife of the leader, hard-line Stalinist, and a partisan combatant in her own right during the war, had a great deal of influence as a member of the Central Committee and as a power behind the throne. The manuscript was passed back and forth among the factions, each sizing it up for their political purposes for or against the author, given the extremely touchy subject of the supreme leader himself. Enver Hoxha withdrew into ominous silence. The novel was neither hailed nor prohibited, but lay in check between the dictator and the factions around him.

Time was passing, the West showed no interest in rapprochement, and the dictator had to make a move. At a meeting of the Central Committee he drew attention to ideological deviations and

announced the existence of a conspiracy close to the heart of government. As ever, he would divide and rule, and internal political intrigue would be used to justify increased vigilance and control. Meanwhile Kadare's manuscript was authorized for publication and sent to the printer. It appeared in January 1973 in a print run of 25,000 copies which was soon sold out. On its appearance, Kadri Hazbiu, Minister for the Interior declared, "I read forty pages of it and I spat forty times" (Pipa, *The Politics* 106). Each side thought that it had won, and hoped to see Kadare's scalp held aloft as a tribute to liberalism or to orthodoxy.

The crackdown occurred in early 1973. As part of the terror, a press campaign was launched against the novel, accusing its author of anti-socialist activity and hostility towards the dictatorship of the proletariat and the class struggle. Not surprisingly, the use of the word solitude in the original title, with its suggestion of criticism of the Supreme Leader, was controversial. The newspapers were flooded with critical letters and meetings were convened to discuss the work. Kadare suspected at the time that Nexhmije was behind the campaign to use the novel against him, and gives substance to his accusations in the light of revelations which came about after 1991. Hoxha himself remained quiet, proof for Kadare that he was tempted by the possibilities of self-

representation and change implicit in the representation of himself in the novel. However, this puts Hoxha into a difficult situation for it is his wife, Nexhmije, the Sigurimi, and the old-guard “left-wing”, who press for retaliation against the writer and his supporters with the Soviets watching with interest and waiting for his response, and the liberals hoping for change. Hoxha knew that he would not find any writer to match Kadare. If the novel were banned, his flattering image as the hero of Albanian independence and nemesis of the Soviet revisionists would have to disappear from view. The Soviets would rejoice and the left wing of the Party would appear victorious. If the novel were allowed to remain in circulation, he would remain in debt to this writer who was nevertheless challenging him both through his representation of an Albania alone and impoverished in the post-war world, and as the spokesman for Albania in France and the world.

A request for the withdrawal from circulation of *Winter of Great Solitude* was submitted in May 1973 to the Central Committee by the Secretary to the Committee of the Party of Tirana. The reasons cited were Kadare’s misrepresentation of the history of the break between the Soviet Union and Albania, the inclusion of themes of existentialist anguish, contemporary bourgeois theory of the sexual revolution. Surrealism, generational conflict, alcoholism, prostitution and other

social ills, and an attitude of ancestral rather than socialist patriotism.

Initiated by this critique, a controversy raged for several months over the novel. The novel remained in circulation, but the crackdown took place, strengthening the dictatorship and giving the liberals to understand that they should not take heart at their apparent victory,

Kadare revised the manuscript, as required, and submitted it for discussion by the Party and committees. A further list of requirements was drawn up and Kadare's ongoing revisionism was noted, along with the absence of positive figures among the intellectuals and their nostalgia for Russia, the ironic treatment of socialist principles, and implicit endorsement of liberalism. The depth and detail of the official responses and analyses of the novel are an indication of how seriously literature and the written word were taken in Albania and in the socialist countries in general.

A major change of perspective is brought about in the revision through the inclusion of a supernumerary, penultimate chapter. This added chapter emphasizes Besnik's redemption by idealizing his heroic mediocrity (i.e. in his brilliantly oblique response to the critique of the unhappy ending) and strengthens the historical perspective. Besnik sits in his office reviewing letters that have been sent to his newspaper from throughout Albania in the wake of the events of the previous winter.

Unlike other letters about current events, these letters about the winter of 1960 already begin to take on the contours of an epic “the dimensions of things were transformed, incorporating elements of ancient epic” (*Winter* 282).

In this section, too, the ancestral patriotism that was criticized in the first version is emphasized, reflecting Kadare’s growing sense of national identity in opposition to that of the regime. Nevertheless, the ending of the novel is strongly pro-Albanian and anti-Soviet. Little mention is made of the West, other than as the source of counter-revolutionary bourgeois gossip of old Nurihan and her friends:

The interpreter does not translate well,
Perhaps he does not know Russian language?
(*Winter*300)

Besnik is astounded. This minor detail may also gradually disappear in the epic process of reduction, but the motif emphasizes the merging of Besnik’s fate with that of the nation. These words come to the aid of a drowning man like the floating branches in a flood:

He was amazed at finding himself in a place where it is
only rarely granted to anyone to see himself. His
amazement gave way to another feeling, of appearing to
see himself disembodied. He lost sense of time, unaware

of how long the state of enchantment lasted. The verses were still there, on the table, two broken branches, surging towards him in the epic flood. (*Winter* 301)

They and he will disappear into the depths, leaving only the oceanic totality in the process of epic inclusion and transformation. In explicitly placing Besnik's central role into the romantic flow of ethno-national history, Kadare strengthens the theme of his protagonist's submission to the greater good of socialism, emphasizing the communal element where in the earlier version the sense of personal loss predominates. At the same time, Kadare's ancestral patriotism also suggests a flow of history deeper and broader than the present or the post-war- communist- era. In the second version, Kadare signals a more distanced view of the epic-heroic figure of the dictator. He, too, is merely a figure in Albanian history, alongside Constantine, Scanderbeg and Ali Pasha, on the path toward nationhood and national identity.

Nexhmije's detailed corrections and emendations of the reworked manuscript shed light on her character and on an aspect of the regime. She provides a list of phrases and expressions which need to be changed and suggests alternatives. Nexhmije's interventions are multiple, minor, even trivial. Nexhmije lacked Enver's brilliance and cunning. She contributed the force of a dogmatic fundamentalism. Underlying her

comments however, is a recognition of the importance of the text and of the necessity of providing the correct formulations for the guidance of the people. She, like other powerful figures, intended that Kadare should either change or be destroyed. The dramatist and faithful party-liner, Uruci, wrote to Nexhmije supporting the novel and its author and was deported for his pains.

Ultimately this novel would be remembered in terms of the representation of Hoxha and of his heroic stand against Khrushchev. All mention of the irony and the political satire is avoided in the official history of Albanian literature of 1980. The strongest aspect of the novel lies in the scene of conflict in which Comrade Enver Hoxha, takes on the 81 Communist and Workers Parties Conference held in Moscow in November and December 1960. Kadare knew how to depict with warmth and truthfulness the preeminent, revolutionary Marxist-Leninist virtues of Comrade Enver Hoxha, his bravery, his heightened sense of principle, his sang-froid in situations of extreme difficulty, his unwavering confidence in the rightness of Marxism-Leninism, in the power of the Albanian people, and in the steadfastness of the Party, which has sallied forth into battle against the new enemies of world communism.

The belief in pedagogy and the possibility of correction was ubiquitous in the Marxist-Leninist regimes. It underwrote the rituals of

self-criticism and the show trials; it enabled political change and invited manipulation. There was an entrenched belief in the upper levels of the regime, often cynically applied and misused, that everyone could be brought to recognize the right path through assiduous study of the appropriate dogmas and teachings. A Stalin or an Enver Hoxha could use the processes of self-criticism and correction to identify, break down, and if necessary liquidate opposition. In *Winter* Kadare tried to manipulate this homage to the belief in change and improvement, turning the regime's strategies back upon itself. Just as socialist realism aimed to provide an iconic image of life in the communist future by showing the positive and progressive workings of history in individuals and communities, so Kadare hoped to encourage the dictator to view himself in terms of a positive dialectic. He tried to turn this thinking back onto the regime itself, believing that literature could act as a corrective mask, which accepted by the dictator as his good face, would exert a better effect.

The idea of using literature and the imagination to educate the powerful more or less subtly in the right use of power can be traced back to antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages. As the "mirror for princes" it became an important form of political literature in the absolutist period, exemplified in works such as Erasmus's *Education of*

a Christian Prince (1516), and Francois Fenelon's *The Adventures of Telemachus* (1699), written in order to educate and instill a sense of duty into the future kings of France and Burgundy. Literature in the dictatorship, too, Kadare hoped, would provide gentle but firm pressure, a brace, to allow the healthy development of the socialist regime. Like Erasmus in the *Praise of Folly*, Kadare hoped to be able to transform the tyrant through *Winter*, by offering him a corrective mask. He would agree to wear it and would become its captive. But it was in vain. Unlike his wife, Enver Hoxha knew that he, the dictator, was above correction, even from his nemesis, the writer.

At this stage, Kadare still thought that the corrective mask might serve the ruler's covert intention to seek rapprochement with the west. He knew that Hoxha's motivating interest was his personal vanity, not the fate of Albania. Like Tito he might be flattered by the attentions of the West if he received the right encouragement and pretext.

Winter of Great Solitude was the only work in which Kadare deliberately tried to intervene in the political processes, occupying a space between his second world of literature and the first world of reality. Other works took political themes, such as *November of a Capital City*, the short novel about the liberation of Tirana by the Partisans in 1944, written in 1974 in the wake of *Winter*. And he

continued to write more or less obliquely about political themes. But he never again engaged the dictator directly in the political field. In retrospect Kadare is defensive of his decision to write *Winter of Great Solitude*.

“I never regretted having chosen this path. Without the novel, *Winter*, eighty per cent of my work would never have been written” (Pipa, *Contemporary* 110). The novel created an alibi for the completion of other works. From 1969 when he applied for access to the files until 1972 when the novel was finished, Kadare was left alone. During this period he wrote the historical novel *The Castle*, and the autobiographical *Chronicle in Stone*. With the storm that broke over *Winter* in 1973 and with the hardening and isolation of the dictatorship, his period of protection was over.

In January 1974 Kadare wrote the poem, “At Midnight the Politburo met...” more commonly known as “The Red Pashas”. In this poem Kadare accuses those around the dictator of the major responsibility for the corruption, nepotism, and disarray of the country. The poem belongs to a tradition of Central European political literature in which it is not the king or leader, but his corrupt advisers who are to blame for the ills of the country. This literary product of enlightened absolutism sought to improve politics by appealing to the sovereign to

cleanse his government of its corrupted servants. It was most successful in those cases where the critique exposed the contradictions of enlightened absolutism of the systemic weakness which gives power to a weak mortal. In post-revolutionary Soviet literature, for example, Lenin is surrounded by fallen or corrupted communists, or the ideal of communism is surrounded by a corrupted praxis. It is also a form of corrective mask. Kadare's poem was thus not a direct attack on Hoxha, but rather on the party, including the Politburo and the Nomenclature:

States are not destroyed from the rooftops
though the water seeps in somewhere,
They're destroyed from their foundations.
Socialist states are subject
To this principle too. ("The Red Pashas" 79)

The Party Secretary informed him that on orders from above he should leave the city immediately and abstain from literary work. The message was clear: to stop writing would mean to change his identity completely, to cease being Ismail Kadare. The plan to change the dictator had backfired badly:

"Listen, he said to me. What the Party wants is for you to change radically" [...] Using psychoanalysis I had researched the warning signs in the dictator. The symbols,

the butterflies, the silk-worms, the dressing up ... I went on dreaming, without doubting for a moment what fate had in store for me. It was I who had to change. [...]

Little by little I became aware of the hard reality. My interlocutor indicated clearly to me that I was not allowed to write any longer, apart from the odd reportage of sketch. Later may be a short story, or perhaps a novella, but a novel? Never again. "A novel, no" he repeated.

(Kadare, *Albanian Spring* 180)

Yet the controversy brought literature to the attention of the whole country, not just the party, the intellectual, and the Nomenclature. The country's leading writer had dared to criticize the regime.

"The Red Pashas" became a focal point in the controversy over Kadare's status under the dictatorship. It was written in early 1974 at the time of the frost associated with the break with China and the turn inward under the guise of Albanian nationalism. Kadare sent the manuscript to the magazine *Drita* in the second half of October 1975. From that point on its fate was unclear. It was not published and the manuscript disappeared. However, in an environment where access to copying was restricted, where loose or unfinalized formulations in

manuscripts and drafts could be dangerous if seized by the authorities, and where the finalized version disappeared into the type of secretive bureaucracy that Kadare would depict in *The Palace of Dreams* (1993), all traces of a work could indeed vanish. The artist and writer Maks Velo published a documentation of the controversy in Albania in 2002, and the general director of the Albanian national archives, Shaban Sinani, set about searching for the manuscript in the regime's archives. He discovered it, and with the author's permission, published it, proving that it existed (<http://www.albanianliterature.net>).

After the crisis of the mid-1970s over *Winter* and "The Red Pashas", traces of the early defiance remained but the older writer became more self-conscious, cautious, and premeditated. The outcome was a tacit stand-off between the writer and the dictator which would obtain until the publication of *The Palace of Dreams* a decade later.

If Kadare's first autobiographical novel, *Chronicle in Stone*, documents the writer's discovery of subjective authenticity as the conduit of individual, national, and ethnic identity, *Twilight of the Steppe-Gods* (1976), written approximately five years later, charts the writer's awareness of the sacrifices involved in committing himself to literature in the communist environment. Both works portray aspects of the writer's coming to terms with himself, his vocation, and his nation.

Twilight of the Steppe-Gods revisits the break with the Soviet Union from the subjective viewpoint of the young writer, at the critical point where national and individual history intersect, namely at the time of his return to Albania in 1961. The autobiographical fiction confirms the authenticity of the subjective voice against socialist realist doctrine. The young writer comes to recognize the extent to which his Albanian identity is rooted in language and culture, and hence the necessity of returning to his native land in spite of the oppressive nature of the regime there. A decade and a half after his return, having witnessed the dictator's consolidation of power over the regime and the people, Kadare looks back with very different eyes.

Twilight of the Steppe-Gods begins in the summer of 1959 in a Soviet writers' retreat at a seaside resort near Riga. The young Kadare is bored with the company of mediocre middle-aged writers from throughout the Soviet Union. The theme of youth, disaffection, and generational perspective arises as he meets a Ukrainian girl with whom he can discuss taboo topics such as the suicides of Fadeyev and Mayakowsky, the superficiality of socialist realism, and the failure of Soviet culture to have produced an interesting or profound literature. For the youngsters the reality of the ageing, tired and submissive writers contrasts with the socialist-realist idealism of their works. They are

surprised and disillusioned by the gap between literary imagination and daily life for these symbols of the revolution. Kadare feels as though he is living in a museum of preserved specimens:

In addition, the dualism of that world had something abnormal, I would even say something frightening, about it. It reminded me often of the monstrosities which I had seen in jars of formalin at the museum of natural sciences.

(Twilight 16)

The Soviet writers in Riga represented the older generation, for whom the formula of socialist realism and the history of the revolution have become second nature, and whose reality does not intrude into the idealized realms of the Soviet hero. They have experienced Stalinism and the war and are exhausted and happy to have found some sort of niche where they can live out the rest of their lives in peace and comfort. Opposite of Kadare's room was that of Paustovsky who taught at the Institute from 1948 until 1955 and was under the work of writing his memoirs, *The Story of a Life* (*Twilight 20*). Later in the novel he reappeared in the context of the Pasternak denunciations, obliged to be present, but speaking neither for nor against his colleague.

The Moscow Gorki Institute for World Literature was the premier training facility for the writers, critics, and literary Nomenclature of the

Soviet Union. However, Kadare's fellow students there include a wider selection of Soviet types than the retired, successful, and exhausted writers of post-war socialist realism whom he meets at the seaside retreat in Riga. At the Institute are people at all stages of their lives, accommodated in the vast building in the centre of Moscow for a variety of reasons. He encounters writers from the length and breadth of the Soviet Union, who have played the game and survived the Stalinist era only to find themselves in a form of limbo. Many have suffered the dramatic reversals of fortune which were so common in the Soviet system, as a result of bad judgment, political change, or intrigue. Some like his friend, the exiled Greek communist Petros Anteos, are outsiders who refuse to compromise in the post-war environment of real-existing socialism. Some have failed to make the transition from partisan to apparatchik and have fallen by the wayside. Others, such as the melancholy Lithuanian Jeronim Stulpanz, are still young but seem destined to suffer the fate of the Soviet writer, to live in a state of perpetual inauthenticity, the result of the dishonesty of their writing. The images of life in the Institute become more and more bizarre as the young writer witnesses the scenes of degradation and humiliation of the writers around him. He explains to his new Russian girlfriend Lida how in cathartic group vomiting sessions the drunken writers metaphorically

and physically regurgitate those subjects that they will never dare commit to writing:

The regurgitation of subjects. That's what they call it. On nights like this, they recount the subjects of works that they will never write. Some then set about vomiting and it is from them that the sessions derive their name. [...] They will write other things, which are often completely the opposite. (*Twilight* 118-19)

In these outbursts the real content of Soviet literature is to be found:

Bits of subjects expressed in low voices penetrated my ears, sometimes from the left, sometimes from the right. There were limping party secretaries who stole pork from the kolkhozes, fake ministers, oafish and decrepit generals, members of the presidium, of the Politburo, individuals who believed in God, who spied on other and who buried a part of their salary underneath their *isbas* "for a rainy day". Some stories described the luxurious dachas of high party officials, their drinking, the bribes that they received, and their children's dancing in the nude. Others evoked different sorts of things, revolts, if not true insurrections, in various areas of the country, they

spoke of covered-up massacres, of the increase of religious belief, of deportations, of prisons and crimes, of the monstrous differences in salary between the workers, the “masters of the country, and the upper –level cadres of the Party and the State, the “servants of the people”.

(Twilight 124-25)

Kadare refers to the “aridity” of socialist literature since Lenin (*Twilight 45*) and in his contact with his fellow- students he experiences a vision of the wretched, dying, and abandoned languages of Eastern Europe.

The vision of a group of poets, estranged from their national languages and lost in a desert of Russian, is a terrifying vision of his own future. These writers, who have turned their backs on their languages in order to write in the language of Soviet Marxist-Leninist doctrine and Russian cultural hegemony, arouse Kadare’s revulsion. The writing of the of Soviet hacks in residence at Yalta and Riga was merely bad, having long since lost touch with reality in its ideological compliance. The exiles and refugees on the sixth floor of the Gorki Institute is anathema to the young Albanian. The writing moves from satiric realism to nightmarish surrealism as Kadare imagines a writer’s hell in which language has dried up like water in a desert, leaving him

gasping for words, in this powerful evocation of linguistic death Kadare expresses his fear of loss of identity as a writer in the Albanian language. In the confrontation with those writers from Eastern Europe who have sacrificed their ethno-linguistic identity, Kadare discovers the depth of his sense of Albanianess. It is a Herderian expression of the existential significance of language as an individual and a national identity-marker. The Gorki Institute is a vision of what he would become were he to identify as a Soviet writer. Kadare moves among these tortured souls, but, like Dante, is not one of them.

The socialist writers on the sixth floor, who have renounced their native languages, and the denouncers, the apparatchiks, the liars and the sycophants, along with his friend, Stulphnz, who has not yet renounced his native language and culture, represent what he might have become: a Soviet party hack, an apparatchik, or a soul in limbo, separated from home and alone in the Soviet Union. The writers of socialist-realist utopias in Riga bore the young Kadare, the apparatchiks lining up to denounce Pasternak appal him, and the group vomiting sessions on the fourth floor disgust him. But it is the refugees and exiles who have renounced their native tongues who arouse his contempt.

At the Gorki Institute Kadare learns what it means to be a Soviet writer. He studies the works of the European tradition, of decadent

modernism and bourgeois subjectivism, and comes to understand the dynamics of writing as a social and political act. As a member of the Albanian *Aufbaugeneration*, the generation which grew up with the establishment of communism and the construction of the postwar nation, Kadare was something of an outsider in the Soviet environment, where communism was already a way of life. His poetry shows signs of Western modernism and bohemian rebelliousness and he must habituate himself early to self-criticism, the ritual of confession and self-exculpation for those suspected of heterodoxy. In classes Kadare is criticized for bourgeois formalism, and he is censured for the subject of a planned novel about the general of a “dead army”.

As we entered, the professor approached me and smiled coldly. “Your subject was marvellous.” She said, and continued to smile. “A living army commanded by the ghosts of a dead general and a military chaplain”, she continued. It’s a wonderful idea.”No, that’s not quite right”, I murmured, although I didn’t really want to have to provide clarification; “it’s the opposite, actually. It’s about a dead army commanded by a living general and chaplain.”Oh, yes?” she said and leaned her head to the side as I thought to myself: “when did I tell her that?” I

didn't remember anything. "Even better", she replied, "I find it an even more attractive idea. Have you heard of the Pasternak affair?" "Yes". (*Twilight* 139-140)

He has been warned. The implication that his story has become known through word of mouth is not lost on him. This is part of the dynamics of writing in a closed society and belongs to his ongoing education. Boris Pasternak's love story set during the Russian Revolution became a cause of celebration in the Cold War when the author was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1968. Pasternak finished *Dr Zhivago* in 1955 and offered it to the Moscow literary journal *Novy Mir* in the following year. It was rejected on the basis that it misrepresented the revolution and the structure and leadership of Soviet society. In 1957 an Italian translation appeared with Feltrinelli, and by 1958 the novel was circulating in various languages in the West. It was not so much the foreign publication which caused trouble for Pasternak. The authorities had let the Italian publication of *Dr Zhivago* pass without comment since the text remained well beyond the reach of Soviet citizens. The Nobel Prize, however, could scarcely be kept from the Soviet people or ignored by the Party. Kadare's comrade, the Greek partisan, poet, and exile Petros Anteos, refers to Pasternak as one of the

phantoms in the battle against Stalin and explains the dialectics of Soviet cultural policy to the young Albanian:

“It’s three years since *Dr. Zhivago* was published in the West and they didn’t talk about it then. Now that he’s picked up the Nobel Prize, they have to take a position. [...] Maybe they’ll want to deport him”. (*Twilight* 142)

Pasternak was a member of the pre-revolutionary bourgeoisie whose early symbolist poetry placed him at the forefront of European modernism. Individuals, not history or the proletariat, are at the centre of his humanist world-view. History separates people and causes anguish in Pasternak’s novel. However as Anteos points out, it was not the theme of *Dr. Zhivago* that had suddenly rendered Pasternak dangerous. The conferment of the Nobel Prize directed toward Pasternak the internal political tensions arising from Khrushchev’s post-Stalinism. It was imperative for Khrushchev that Pasternak identify himself in terms of the post-Stalinist Soviet Union and reject the award from the West. At this stage, following the critique of Stalin when he could not afford to be seen to be losing control of the ideological sphere, Khrushchev could not allow any suggestion that the Western acclaim of the writer could be seen to influence Soviet affairs. Hence the attack on the ageing and unwell writer was relentless.

As the ritual of denunciation and harassment takes place, Kadare watches and learns from the events that he would see repeated in Albania in respect of *Winter of Great Solitude* and *The Palace of Dreams*. The creative intelligentsia behaves in a class fashion, manipulated from above and replicating the processes of harassment throughout their ranks.

The process against Pasternak takes its course. After the media, harassment the formal proceedings begin. At plenary sessions and hearings the leading figures of the Union of Writers line up to speak against Pasternak, and petitions are sent to the regime demanding his expulsion from Russia. The posturing of Ladontchikov, an apparatchik and “hero of Soviet Positivity” (*Twilight* 140) whose only honesty of feeling is to be found in his anti-Semitism, fills Kadare with a sense of revulsion and cynicism. Figures such as Yevtushenko and Kuznetsov, who had allowed their liberal ideas to be instrumentalized in the anti-Stalinist thaw, now see themselves potentially isolated, excluded from the Nomenclature, and their privileges endangered unless they too denounce Pasternak’s counter-revolutionary humanism. At the Gorki Institute the rhetoric and grandstanding is imitated by the students. In fact their education lies in internalizing the rituals of denunciation and auto-critique, not merely in learning the craft of socialist realism.

The counter figure to these Soviet writers is the Greek refugee, Petros Anteos, who spent the years after the defeat of the communists in the Greek civil war in Kadare's home town of Gjirokastra before finding refuge in Moscow. Anteos represents a narrative link to Kadare's past, both to the period of war documented in *Chronicle in Stone* and to the immediate post-war era. Anteo and the memory of the Greek partisans who had been treated at the hospital in Gjirokastra bring a level of reference to the privations and difficulties of the war years, as a contrast to the milieu of the Nomenclature and the failed bureaucrats of the Gorki Institute. In this moribund and inauthentic communist environment, Anteos represents "the old epic spirit of the revolution" (*Twilight 100*). He has maintained the link between word and deed, in darkest exile from his native land (*Twilight 101*). Kadare cannot understand how those who spoke out against Stalin at the height of the criticism of the personality cult can now support Khrushchev in the attack on Pasternak. Soviet politics has moved beyond such simple ideological identifications and Anteos explains how denunciation and political opportunism function in the post-Stalinist political environment. Looking back over this affair from the vantage point of the mid-1970s when he was writing *Twilight*, Kadare must have become aware of the ambiguities of Pasternak's position. Pasternak's

international reputation was both a protective force and a point of weakness for the writer in 1958, a time of political and ideological sensitivity. After the publication of *The General* in France in 1970, Kadare, like Pasternak, had some protection from the more extreme forms of molestation, but it also rendered him a political target.

Kadare's girlfriend Lida considers writers a suspect group, best when they are dead, since in life they confuse the boundaries between art and reality. Appalled by the vomiting session, Lida rejects the young man when she realizes that he too is a writer. Later she writes to him, expressing her pity for him as a writer involved in this bizarre world of dishonesty and inauthenticity. Disgusted with his profession, Kadare experiences a wave of self-contempt and hatred for his fellow-writers.

The encounter with Lida brings home to him that he is first and foremost a writer, and hence a part of that bizarre limbo between life and death, between reality and art, truth and illusion. He tells Stulpanz that as far as Lida is concerned he is dead:

“Ring her one evening and tell her that I have left, or that I’ve gone mad, or even no, wait, tell her that I’m dead! Do you hear me? Tell her that I perished in an air catastrophe!” (*Twilight* 123)

To be a writer means to accept metaphorical death. At this point the news breaks of Khrushchev's rift with Hoxha. Politics intervenes in the story of the education of the communist writer. Kadare, along with the rest of his generation of future intellectuals, technocrats, and functionaries, must discontinue his studies and return to Albania. In the already tense atmosphere another crisis occurs. Smallpox has broken out, and the capital is put under quarantine. Kadare prepares to leave the Soviet Union and sees Lida for the last time at the entry of the metro station Novoslobodskaya.

Albanians have been prohibited from all further contact with Soviet citizens. Kadare realizes that the relationship must end. The separation is cast metaphorically in terms of the legend of Constantine and Doruntine as the sick poet meets his lover one last time before returning to the grave:

What had I done! My temples were flushed, my forehead hot. My spirit was confused and, if she had asked me: "why do you have earth in your hair?" I would not have been surprised. It's a promise that I made to her, I said to myself: I had given her my word last summer, earlier, in fact, a thousand years ago. (*Twilight* 214-15)

Kadare's narratives of his childhood and early adulthood in *Chronicle in Stone* and *Twilight of the Steppe-Gods* are driven by the need to come to terms with his identity as a writer, an individual, and an Albanian under the dictatorship. The personal history of *Chronicle* is the means by which he begins to reconnect past and present, establishing a mode of subjective authenticity which is intrinsically opposed to socialist realism. The spirit of the Soviet Union is evoked in the image of the gods of the steppe as a desiccating, killing force blowing the life out of everything in its path: "they spoke their half-dead tongues and the words whistled like a sandstorm, dried out by the unrelenting desert sun" (*Twilight* 74). This image expresses the aridity of the dictatorial environments of Eastern Europe, of the Ottoman Empire and Asia Minor and of China reflected into fiction. The dictatorial environment is symbolized above all in the image of the decapitated head, the headless body, the turban of the Ottoman grave-stone, and the bodyless head of the idol on the dusty steppes: "the scaffold on which they used to cut off heads still stands there, a short distance from the walls, like a moon standing out on the horizon" (*Twilight* 75).

Neither Enver Hoxha nor the Albanian socialist regime is mentioned in *Twilight*, but by the mid-1970s Kadare had experienced the distortions of creativity under totalitarianism. The degradation of the

Soviet writers, the harassment of Pasternak, and the decline of Fadeyev, Mayakowsky, and others into depression, alcoholism, and suicide prepare him for the life of the writer in Albania, where the situation was worse than in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev. On his return, he gave up poetry as his primary form of expression in the hostile Albanian writing environment. Prose writing offered a compromise between words and power.

Albania's Chinese alliance finally ended, and it would go alone in world communism. Death and loss appeared to be the companions of the Albanian isolation, which reached its peak in 1978. In the cold of the Myzeqe Kadare imagined Albania itself as an orphan, with neither the dictator nor the writer still alive, "separated, isolated, in another era [...] like an orphan [...] at the mercy of fate" (Kadare, *Albanian Spring* 160). In the Myzeqe Kadare observed the full extent of the regime's desecration to Albanian traditions and history. Churches were destroyed, crosses ripped down, and communist slogans scratched into the stonework:

Albania was disintegrating. You didn't need to be a clairvoyant in order to understand that communism, having thrown the country to the ground, was now

emptying it of its substance. [...] Albania was coming undone before our very eyes. (Margaronis, "Palace" 30)

This Albania demanded his attention. In the wake of the failure of the pedagogical exercise of the corrective mask and entering middle age amidst the reminders of mortality and the losses of the cultural revolution, Kadare sought a deeper engagement with the national identity that had provided him with such strength over the previous decades and in which, he claims, he found an alternative to the Albania of the present.

In the 1970s Kadare brings together literary allegory with the historical novel in a body of works depicting his country's past from the perspective of the present. Kadare's development of the genre of the historical novel under communism is one of his greatest achievements. As the title of his 1976 collection of poems implies, "Time", history and the passage of personal/individual and communal/national time became a dominant theme as the writer entered his forties (Pipa, *Contemporary*107).

Kadare's unique style of historical writing is nowhere better exemplified than in *The Three-Arched Bridge*, in which the early formative events of Albanian history are presented. From 1976 until 1978 he worked on this novel. In *The Three-Arched Bridge*, he evokes

the “eternal Albania” which is the inspiration behind so many of his works from *The General of the Dead Army* onwards, and which surfaces in the minds and imagination of protagonists such as Mark-Alem in *The Palace of Dreams* and even Besnik Struga in *Winter of Great Solitude*.

The Albania of *The Three-Arched Bridge*, he writes,

Was not unrelated to the tragic everyday in which I lived.
And so, the stones which the bridge is constructed from
are of the medieval era [...] while the anguish and the
terror are of the communist era. (Kadare, *Dialogue me*
155)

He saw himself as both writing a novel and recreating the Albania of his imagination, a different, phantom Albania which would act as a challenge to a defiance of the present:

That other Albania had chiefly to constitute a defiance to the real Albania, the arid and gloomy Albania of communism. It would be a phantom, an eternal source of remorse, but also, and in spite of everything, a hope of resurrection. (Kadare, *Dialogue me* 157)

In a well-known and often-quoted speech from the mid 1960s, Enver Hoxha likened the stonemasons of the new socialist infrastructure and industrial plants. For Hoxha, legends such as the ancient story of

human sacrifice in the building of the Rozafat castle at Shkodra provided the foundations for modern literature. In this legend three brothers, stonemasons working on the castle of Shkodra, are told that they must pledge to sacrifice the first of their wives who arrives with food at the worksite the following morning. Otherwise, the walls of the castle will continue to collapse. The older two brothers break their word, warning their wives to stay at home, but the younger keeps his vow or besa, and to his horror his wife appears at the building site, unaware of the cruel fate in store for her. This foundation legend of modern Albania becomes something much more ambiguous for Kadare:

In this story I mainly dealt with the ancient theme of sacrifice. That was one of the fundamental themes of communist propaganda: sacrifice for the sake of the future! It justified everything: poverty, boredom, and especially oppression. There, I described a sacrifice which was nothing other than a premeditated murder, and thus a crime. (Kadare, *Dialogue me* 162)

Kadare's novel takes the form of a chronicle written by the Catholic monk Gjon Ukcama written in the year 1377, just over a decade before the Battle of Kosovo and at the time of the early Ottoman incursions into Albania. The story concerns the building of a bridge in a

fictional north-eastern Albanian setting, probably in the area of Mirdita or Puka. An unknown traveler suffers an epileptic fit on the banks of the fictive river *Ujana e Keqe* (“wicked waters”) (*The Bridge* 12) and the vagrant fortune-teller prophesies that this is a sign for a bridge to be built. Shortly afterward a mysterious foreign deputation arrives at the town to propose the building of a bridge. They appear to be in the pay of rich business interests of unknown provenance, whose interest in crossing the river at this point suggests that the bridge will have wider strategic importance in a time of change. Gjon Ukcama is summoned to translate for his lord, Count Stres of the Gjikas, but struggles to understand the curious multilingual babble of the foreigners. They offer the count a profitable deal on the rights to construct the bridge. Count Stres, preoccupied with the illness of his daughter and in debt as the result of a conflict with the Duke of Tepelena, agrees, although he is already under contract to the owners of “Boats and Rafts” (*The Bridge* 20) for the fording of the river at this point. The building of the bridge commences and is surrounded by rumour, suspicion, and uncertainty as mysterious damage occurs overnight during the building. A man is apprehended and immured under bizarre and murderous circumstances in the bridge’s central pylon. The monk, Gjon Ukcama, wants to set the

truth straight about this appalling episode in the construction of this first stone bridge in his homeland.

The company “Boats and Rafts” traces its roots in Albanian tradition and history Roman times. The company’s dealings with the local counts and princes were based on contracts that had honoured on both sides for centuries. The contract between the owner of “Boats and Rafts” and Count Stres is historically credible within the feudal framework of a lord who needs money to pay off debts arising from military conflict and to attend to his sick daughter’s needs. The ambiguous power relationship between feudal and early capitalist interests is reflected in the relative weakness of the company’s bank in Dures to force the Count to honour his agreement with “Boats and Rafts” in this pre-national environment. The princes must be paid off, bribed, or otherwise cajoled into allowing bridges to be built; the people are wary and must be convinced; and cultural identifications and practices must be changed. The raftsmen who have been plying travelers across the rivers for centuries will lose their livelihood. The new structure is seen as an affront to the spirit of the waters. People are distrustful of the demonic machinery used to build the bridge: religion and superstition come into play on all sides as the bridge-builders stage

visitations and prophecies and the owners of “Boats and Rafts” stage counter-strategies.

The builders of bridges represent a new force of modernity altogether. The owner is not a lord, but a rich bourgeois who has bought up mines and the old imperial roads. They are surveyors and engineers, who measure and quantify carefully, remaining impervious to the folk customs and beliefs of the local populace. The threats of the old woman, Ajkuna, for whom the bridge remains the work of the devil, elicit no response from the foreign engineer and master-builder. For him the bridge is the symbol of the coming new order:

According to signs that he had been studying for some time, the lineaments of a new order that would carry the world many centuries forward had faintly, ever so faintly, begun to appear in this part of Europe. [...] and all this movement, he said, was a sign simultaneously of life and death, of the birth of a new world and the death of the old.

(The Bridge 101)

The town is a backwater place in central Albania, but it lies on the Via Egnatia, the ancient road which passed from Rome through Durres or Apollonia and across Albania on the way to Constantinople. With the increases in trade from the caravans passing through Arberia to

Macedonia and beyond, and with the growing interest of various powers in the harbor at Orikum, new forces are coming into play. Money is to be made from the construction of roads throughout the peninsula, in which bridges rather than ferries provide reliable passage in all weathers for larger and larger numbers of travelers. Bitumen mines used by the Romans but long since abandoned, have suddenly become valuable again for war and road building, and bitumen is sold everywhere, “to the Turks and Byzantium on the one hand, and to all the counts and dukes of Arberia on the other, fomenting quarrels on both sides” (*The Bridge* 23).

At the annual hunting party of Count Stres, a Countess from the northern Balsha clan mentions anxiety over the Orikum (ancient Vlora) naval base, which has again become a source of conflict. The reasons are not given, but it is noted that one fork in the newly revived road from Rome to Constantinople leads to the military base at the town. Orikum is partly under the jurisdiction of the Byzantines and partly under the Albanian Komnenis. On the basis of ancient legal documents, Aranit Komneni attacked and claimed full possession of the base. The Byzantine rulers, anxious to appease the Albanians at a time of dwindling power, have agreed to an intermarriage to maintain part ownership but are nevertheless forced by the Ottomans to cede their share. Aranit Komneni seeks to form a coalition of Albanian princes to

protect this most important Adriatic port but dies without support from the Albanian lords. His son-in-law Balsha II uses Komneni's death to claim Orikum for the new principality of Albania – also without support from the Albanian lords. As the novel draws to a close we learn that the situation at Orikum is about to come to a head with the occupation of the Komneni lands by Balsha II and the likelihood of war with the Ottoman Turks.

Kadare goes to considerable lengths to paint an Arberia emerging from Byzantine influence, on the verge of proto-national identity but about to be plunged into servitude under the Ottomans. His Arberia lies on the cusp between medieval and early modern development. Speaking to a fellow-monk returning to Rome from Constantinople Gjon Ukcama describes the new national identity of his fellow-countrymen in terms of popular consciousness as “*shqiptare*” (Shkiptars or Albanians) (*The Bridge* 30). Unlike the Serbs and the Bulgarians, the Albanians did not experience the formation of a proto-national political core identity. Responsibility for this failure lies not only with the foreign powers, but also with the Albanian feudal lords. “Quarrels among the Albanian princes and lords have been hopelessly frequent for the last hundred years” (*The Bridge* 43), writes Gjon Ukcama, alluding to the political developments which represented the beginnings of a feudal

consolidation that would fail to come to fruition in the creation of a single kingdom or proto-national structure.

Marriages with foreigners have not been any more successful, he writes, neither the liaison of the Topias with the French house of Anjou, nor that of the Komnenis with the Byzantine royal family. Of course, a principality such as French Anjou had been involved in the same sort of political processes in the ninth century as these Albanian lands in the fourteenth:

The lords of Arberia imagined they could settle these quarrels by marriages. But as I mentioned, the alliances thrown across this stormy sea have been merely like rainbows straining to climb a few degrees above the abyss.

(The Bridge 44)

Like the Byzantines, the leading Albanian clans, the Topias, Balshas, Muzakas, Komnenis, Dukagjins, Kastriotis and others, called upon the services of Turkish mercenaries to help fight their battles, introducing these Eastern warriors to the peninsula.

In this period in the second half of the fourteenth century, exactly six hundred years before the time of writing there was, as Kadare's monk laments, a lost opportunity for the Albanians to work together

rather than sabotaging their own interests through infighting and through the use of Turkish mercenaries.

The Three-Arched Bridge belongs to Kadare's cultural geography. That the bridge is symbolic of the land of Albania is already implied in the structure, its arches representing the three eras of foreign occupation – Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman. The bridge is an image of modernization and progress in a land over and through which historical forces have passed for centuries, but in which they did not coalesce or consolidate. Feudal fragmentation, primitive social conditions, and above all the position on the edges, between Byzantium and Rome, are responsible for destruction. The bridge represents both progress and unfreedom. Ideally it enables traffic and communication; in reality it becomes an avenue of imperialism, war and murder:

This was only the final act of a murder that had been in the wind for a long time. Its spurts of blood had already spattered us all, and its screams had died away long ago. The long duel between the men of the water and the men of the land had concluded with the victory of the latter. "Do not try to harm us again, or you will be killed". That was the cry that came from the first arch of the bridge.

(The Bridge 123)

The first Roman arch of the bridge represents the beginning of the history of imperial conquest and the shape of things to come for the Albanians. The conflict between “Boats and Rafts” and the bridge-builders thus acquires ideological and cultural connotations as well as associations of freedom and unfreedom. For the Albanian townspeople, “the demon of the waters, in the person of “Boats and Rafts”, was in bitter enmity with the demon of the land, who built roads and bridges” (*The Bridge* 21). The popular superstition has parabolic connotations, and Gjon Ukcama too refers to the conflict between land and water (*The Bridge* 142). The bridge is referred to as a “bat”, and as “the first misfortune inflicted on the free spirit of the waters” (*The Bridge* 21). At the same time, it is associated with the forces which cure Count Stres’s daughter of her mysterious illness. Gjon Ukcama is reminded of a story told to him by a Dutch monk from Africa about the battle to the death between the tiger of the land and the crocodile of the water in which the tiger would be victorious. The battle has an elemental ferocity reminiscent of Kadare’s parable of the battle to the death of the writer and the dictator in *Albanian Spring*.

Kadare’s bridge standing in defiance of nature, is a very different image of progress, modernization, and civilization in a hostile natural environment. For Kadare the bridge is an imposition of man-made order

over nature. It represents the constraint of civilization over nature, of dogma over truth, and of political structure over innate national identity in Kadare's romantic nationalism. In Kadare's mythology "eternal Albania" ceased in 1367 with the first steps into modernity, symbolized in the monopoly of "Boats and Rafts" over the fordable sites of the river. Albanian development stopped at this point, and everything since has been an imposition and a constraint from outside.

With this story of bridge-building, modernization, and sacrifice we find ourselves in familiar Kadarean territory. Here we have in a nutshell the dilemma of modernization, Kadare's ambivalence towards Albanian communism expressed as a parable of Balkan history: on the one hand the promise of modernity; on the other, constraint, force, and obligation, using all of the means of a dictatorship to ensure compliance to a foreign system and set of values among an impoverished and traditional people. The figures of the folklorist and the master-builder represent the two sides of the argument for modernization that Kadare, and with him a host of Central and Eastern European intellectuals, came to recognize as the antinomies of communist modernization, an extreme version of the European syndrome of progress and loss familiar since Rousseau. For many of these intellectuals, blinded by the possibilities of accelerated progress, the sacrifices were valid or at least justifiable.

Soon the confidence behind these judgments waned, and the contours of the conflict between freedom and constraint became increasingly clear in the communist environment. The antinomies of modernization and loss, which have been central to Kadare's work since *The City without Signs*, underpin *The Three-Arched Bridge*.

As the bridge is being built a new threat emerges. Damage is found on the central pillar of the bridge. The people believe that the demons of the river are fighting back. A collector of folktales turns up and gleans from the monk details of the Rozafat legend. He leaves and the monk suspects him of having been in the pay of the bridge-builders. Sure enough, soon afterwards bards arrive singing a changed version of the legend. The new immurement story is not about three brothers building a castle wall, but about masons building a bridge, which is destroyed at night by the spirits of the waters:

“Let someone come who is swilling to be sacrificed in the pipers of the bridge, the bards sang. Let him be a sacrifice for the sake of the thousands and thousands of travelers who will cross that bridge winter and summer, in rain and storm, journeying towards their joy or their misfortune, hordes of people down the centuries to come”. (*The Bridge* 104-105)

The only surprising thing about the inevitable victim, Murrash Zenebisha, is his ordinariness. “It would have been difficult to find anyone more commonplace than he”(The Bridge 14). By the time Gjon Ukcama hears of the event, the body has been walled up in the stonework, leaving only his shoulders and head visible. Suspicions, gossip, rumour abound, but the monk becomes convinced that Murrash was caught in the act of sabotage and murdered by the bridge-builders. The monk had been privy to discussions between the Count and the bridge-builders about the sabotage:

Murrash Zenebisha’s fate had been sealed on that day.

The road builders had found out that the water people were paying someone to damage the bridge at night. This person was the ordinary Murrash Zenebisha. He had done his job three times without being caught. The fourth time they had caught him red-handed and killed him. (*The Bridge* 122)

The new ballads reflect the bridge-builders’ interest in creating a myth of human sacrifice which will legitimize and sanctify the structure and warn against further sabotage. They encourage the belief that Murrash was immured alive, bringing this contemporary matter in line with the hyperbole of legend. As Gjon Ukcama writes, “The crime had

only one purpose - to inspire terror” (*The Bridge* 124). Murrash is cynically instrumentalized as a symbolic sacrificial victim immured in the central column of the bridge. The story is surrounded by untruths. In the unraveling of the crime in this peculiar detective story, questions of responsibility, guilt, and compliance are every bit as complex as those of sacrifice, loss, and gain, Kadare emphasized three different views of the sacrifice through the mouthpieces of the monk, the folklore collector and the master-mason responsible for the planning and construction of the bridge. Gjon Ukcama reads the legend as a metaphoric statement of the collective consciousness of the nature of self-sacrifice in constructive human labour:

The true kernel of the legend was the idea that all labour, and every major task, requires some kind of sacrifice [...]. What was new, and peculiar to the ballad of our people, was that the sacrifice was not connected with the outbreak of war or some march, nor even a religious rite, but concerned a wall, simple work of construction. [...] I wanted to say that in truth the drops of blood in the legend were nothing but streams of sweat. But we know that sweat is a kind of humble nameless servant in comparison with blood, and therefore nobody has devoted songs and

ballads to it [...] alongside his sweat every man sacrifices something of himself, like the youngest brother, who sacrificed his own happiness. (*The Bridge* 96-97)

For the monk, the legend of Rozafat is a metaphor of progress and sacrifice. He renders the barbarity of human sacrifice harmless in the legend by interpreting it as a metaphor of the individual's self-sacrifice for the collective. In this enlightened version of the myth, sweat becomes blood, symbol of the organized collective giving up of individual freedom, the loss without which civilization or progress is impossible. The violence is a literary device rather than a reflection of reality. The folklorist collects information about the sacrifice in order to manipulate it into a version of the popular Rozafat legend for the use of his masters, the bridge-builders. His cynicism in manipulating the story of the humble, nameless servant, the everyday Albanian worker, appals the monk. Whereas the latter tries to understand the complexity of the human situation, the ambiguity of sacrifice and progress, the folklore collector reduces the story to a set of hypotheses which can be manipulated to the advantage of the bridge-builders and presented as progress. For the master builder, the bridge is indicative of the appearance of the new order of things. The construction is nothing other than "a sign of life and death, of the birth of a new world and the death

of the old” (*The Bridge* 101). This bridge, he argues, is at least functional and useful, as against those other bridges built by the capitalists, the “Corpse-bridges”, (*The Bridge* 101) designed purely for the pleasure of the leisured classes. The bridge over the Ujana e Keqe, “even if washed in blood, is a thousand times nobler than those”, (*The Bridge* 102). Hence for him too, the immurement becomes a part of the mythology of change and progress: unfortunate, but necessary, and hence not worth lingering over. His is the voice of the technocrat wedded to progress.

The monk alone recognizes the moral ambiguities concealed in the sophisticated words of the modernizing project. Through his eyes we see the ways in which the bridge and the sacrifice are understood, manipulated, and used. As the monk announced at the outset of his chronicle, his aim is to represent events as objectively as possible, in view of the fact that “people continue to spread legends and baseless rumours about it, now that it has been finished” (*The Bridge* 129).

Soon even Murrash’s fate becomes ordinary. People become used to the sight of the body in the bridge pier and his family have begun quarrel over the money. At first the people are unwilling to use the bridge. But a stray wolf, and then some sheep cross over. Later a convoy arrives carrying pitch for the naval base at Orikum. War is

brewing. Balsha II, the leader of the northern Albanian principality, has deployed troops over the Komneni lands on the death of Aranit Komneni, and the Byzantines have ceded their share of the Orikum base to the Ottomans. In the last part of the novel a skirmish breaks out on the bridge between Turkish scouts and local sentries, heralding the bloodshed to come. The novel finishes with Gjon Ukcama's apocalyptic vision of the Ottoman invasion of Albania and attack on Europe:

“My eyes darkened, and just as I had seen that pale patch of blood under Murrash Zenebisha's neck, so it seemed to me that now, under that moonlight, I saw whole plains awash with blood, and mountain ranges burned to ash. I saw Turkish hordes flattening the world to spread the realm of Islam. I saw the fires and the ash and the scorched remains of men and their chronicles. [...] That coming night would be long.” (The *Bridge* 184)

The sacrifice preoccupies the monk to the point where he feels the bridge closing in over him, suffocating him. Faced with the lifeless plaster mask of Murrash, he is terrified by the vision of his own fate. “We two are very close, monk”, his eyes seemed to say” (The *Bridge*

184). The sense of identity as victims is strong, and the monk returns to complete his chronicle before the arrival of the invaders.

Viewed from one angle Kadare's text appears to be historical, a representation of the Balkan edge of the transitional world of fourteenth-century Europe. Viewed from another angle it is shot through with references to the post-war communist Albania. Kadare double-codes his text, running it simultaneously along historical and allegorical tracks. Much of the story can indeed be interpreted in terms acceptable to the regime. The theme of the Orikum base located on the Pasha Limani inlet, for example, must be read as a reference to the break with the Soviet Union in 1961 in which the question of Soviet access to the Vlora naval base played a central role. The romantic nationalism of the bridge as symbol, the presentation of Albania as the victim of imperialist powers, the threat of the Ottomans and the references to industrial sabotage echoing accusations made at the time of the Soviet and the Chinese withdrawals, can all be read allegorically as references to the writer's present. The bitumen and tar which are so important to trade and conflict can also be seen to allude to oil and the first global oil crisis of 1973. Above all Murrash Zenebisha is the archetypal worker sacrificed to capitalism. These aspects of the story could certainly be used by the regime in the service of its own xenophobic and isolationist

Albanianism-but only by being taken out of the context of the novel as a whole.

Nowhere is the difficulty of Kadare's stance clearer than in *The Three-Arched Bridge*, where so much of the story can be interpreted in terms acceptable to the regime. It is not surprising that this writer, who refused to seek creative outlet in modernist internalization, absurdism, or other forms of literary opposition within the dictatorship and but who continued to engage with Albanian reality in his writing, should find himself mirroring the concerns of the regime. The interests of the writer and of the dictator intersected particularly over the issue of the spiritual leadership of the nation. However, Enver Hoxha had also demanded that the historical fiction leave the Albanian reader in no doubt as to the truth of history:

The emphasis laid on the values of the past of our people should not create even the slightest confusion in the minds of the people of our time of socialism. It is our duty to cleanse the treasures of our national culture of their bad aspects, and these treasures should serve the socialist order we are building. (Hoxha, "Literature")

Yet in *The Three-Arched Bridge* Kadare seems to have made it his goal to contradict the supreme leader's injunction to represent

history with clarity as a single truth. Ambiguity is its keynote. There are too many jagged edges for orthodox Enverist interpretations to sit easily with this novel.

In 1971, there were only fourteen Catholic priests still alive in Albania, twelve in labour camps or prisons and two in hiding. In the following years the regime caused international outrage with its execution of a Roman Catholic priest, Shtjefen Kurti. In December 1973 the eighty-year-old Orthodox Archbishop Damian Konessi died after six years of imprisonment. As part of the regime's battle against religion the official newspaper *Bashkimi* published in July 1973 an article calling for "Folk intelligence" to be situated in every village in order to provide a base "for working against religious survivals". In the following year the three remaining Catholic bishops were sentenced to prison for conducting religious services in private. In mid-1975 the survival of religious customs was denounced and at the end of the year *Bashkimi* included a further attack. In the aftermath of the prohibition of religion in 1968, Enver Hoxha substituted a politically sterilized form of Albianity as the national cult. In 1960 the Albanian Institute of Folklore was founded and was active in researching, publishing, and popularizing Albanian national material. The Institute for the Preservation of the Monuments of Culture had been founded in 1965,

presenting the regime as the legitimate heir of Albania's heroic past. After the mid-1970s even churches, monasteries, and other religious monuments were preserved. In 1971 the first national conference for folklore studies took place and in 1978 a major folk festival was held in Gjirokastra. Unlike most of the official celebrations, this one caught the people's imagination and appears to have been a genuine success. The event was turned into a five-yearly celebration of Albanian identity. However, while the architecture and the art were celebrated, the religious belief inspiring them was condemned (Vickers and James, *Albania* 256).

Kadare shared with the regime a highly valorized, Herderian, and romantic reading of his nation's history. Hoxha may even have been influenced by Kadare's reading of the nation's history in poems such as "What are these Mountains Thinking about?" However there are crucial differences between the writer's and the regime's representations of Albanian history. The exploitation of Albanian nationalism that underpinned Hoxha's communism represented a provocation to the writer, who had come to view himself as a spokesman for a deeper and more profound sense of national identity than that propagated by the regime. Kadare's romantic nationalism does not end with the Ottomans. He reveals the extent to which the Hoxha regime is a repetition, not a

supersession of the past. Thus the apocalyptic vision of the coming of the Ottomans at the end of *The Three-Arched Bridge* can also be read as the symbolic recurrence of an ever more profound force of unfreedom taking control over Albania. This spirit of Eastern European Marxism-Leninism, or Stalinism, as imported by the Albanian regime, is itself a repetition of that history which saw the Topias and others at the time of Gjon Ukcama importing Turkish mercenaries to fight their internal battles.

Whereas the regime's history insisted on unity of voice, Kadare's history does not. Above all, his Catholic monk is rational and questioning, not dogmatic, and his popular national consciousness is located in the people, not in the leadership, which is characterized throughout as divided, self-interested, clannish, and partial. Kadare's reading implies patterns and repetitions in his country's history, in particular between foreign invasion and national isolation, where the advent of Marxism-Leninism is tacitly identified with the former category, as the entry into the country of an alien dogma anathema to Albanian identity, tradition, and customs. The comments of the folklorist and the builder, the monk, and the lesser characters on the building of the bridge and the sacrifice of Murrash Zenebisha, reflect Kadare's awareness of the extent to which history is controlled and

manipulated. At a time of transition of generations and leaders, after the depredations of the cultural revolution and the constitutionalization of communist atheism, Kadare reflects on the theme of historical change, modernization, sacrifice, and loss. From Gjon Ukcama's narrative perspective, Enver Hoxha's isolationist reading of Albania's interests in 1977 can certainly be interpreted as a form of Albanian nationalism. But it can equally be interpreted as yet another variation in the eternal manipulation of national history, yet another spin on the legend of Albania, in order for the regime to stay in power and for the sacrifice of the Albanian everyman to continue. Against those for whom Kadare's work is a literary simulacrum of Hoxha's nationalist-communist ideology, perhaps the strongest argument is that of narrative voice and self-referentiality. The voice of the skeptical monk in 1377 is that of the author in 1977. It is not the voice of the holders of power – of Count Stress, of "Boats and Rafts", or of the bridge-builders. This Catholic narrator aims to present history as chronicle, not dogma. From the facts, and interpreting the multiple voices of self-interest, he aims to chronicle the truth.

In the face of the threat facing his land in 1377, Gjon Ukcama, the skeptical and enlightened monk is terrified. The self-referentiality that would become more pronounced in Kadare's late work under the

regime makes itself felt here as the monk's objectivity gives way in the face of death and the extinction of his writing. The dichotomy of the engaged and the disengaged writer breaks down as the essential function of writing, the truth of the witness, is endangered. This theme of the last pages of the novel would increasingly concern Kadare over the next six years, until the death of Hoxha. His packaging of the message of the dead writer in the 1984 novel, *The Shadow*, with its powerfully self-referential theme, is an indication of the seriousness with which he viewed the threat to his existence. In this roman a clef the author's death is the key to the unlocking of the manuscript from its secret vault, allowing his voice to continue to speak to the living world. The metafiction of *The Shadow* ensures that like Constantine he will be heard from beyond the grave.

Gjon Ukcama's reflections echo down the generations to warn his countrymen six hundred years later of the apocalypse of unfreedom about to break over their land. As Albania was entering its period of most extreme isolation under the communist regime, this warning could hardly be construed as nothing more than a historical condemnation of the Ottomans or a patriotic call against a threatening outside world. In works such as *The Three-Arched Bridge*, Kadare implied a multilayered and skeptical reading of history and the present, alert to the possibilities

of misrepresentation, manipulation, and misuse. The vision of a free Albania which is nothing more than the consciousness of the people of being Albanian, survives at the end of the novel in the voice of the monk, but its survival is by no means assured. This last representative of reason and Western skepticism may be sacrificed, immured into silence, leaving only the dogma, only the one truth of the regime's Albania.

At the beginning of the 1970s Kadare looked inward to himself, his origins, and his adult identity in the autobiographical work *Chronicle in Stone*. Later, in *Twilight of the Steppe-Gods*, he revisited his experiences as a student in Moscow. The revision of his origins and his identity as a writer laid the basis for the works of his mature period, in which he grapples with the fundamental questions of his existence: the possibility of survival as a writer in the environment of communist modernization: the battle for the existence of the other, "eternal" Albania which comes to exist in a parallel world to the communist present: and the search for the origins of the present in the historical novels dealing with the end of the Byzantine era, the arrival of the Ottomans, and the chaotic beginnings of Albanian modernity in the year 1912-13 and under the Zog regime. In *Winter of Great Solitude* Kadare tried his most audacious literary technique, namely to offer the lure of a

corrective mask to the dictator, to flatter him to change. It failed, but the process of writing led to an engagement with Hoxha which was no longer displaced or projected into allegory, symbolism, or historical costume. After *Winter of Great Solitude* Kadare was no longer in doubt about the nature of the dictator or the dictatorship. With the death of the dictator in 1985, Kadare's work enters a new, penultimate phase coinciding with the first transition of power in communist Albania, in which the dictator and his nemesis and alter ego, the writer, enter into their final battle. In these five years before the collapse of the regime, Kadare would confront the dictator head-on in a series of works in which the dictator appears as the principle of closure, order, death, and control and the writer his foil, nemesis, and alter ego, spokesman for an Albania of hope, of coming to terms with the past, and of opening to the future.