

## **Chapter – II**

### **The Writer with a Sign**

Coming of age after the war, and with little memory of his country before the Italian occupation of 1939, Ismail Kadare belonged to the first generation of new Albanians. He was among the beneficiaries of his country's early years of post-war modernization. He left his birth place, Gjirokastra to attend university at the time that the teacher's training college in Tirana was upgraded to become the country's first university in 1957. Like many of his generation, he had high hopes for communism during his late teens. In his memories of late adolescence the sense of the freshness of life and the euphoria of national liberation merge with the expectation of social modernization. For the young Kadare the regime represented power and the possibility of change within his own lifetime. Radical modernization would transform society, liberate women, lift standards of literacy and education, open Albania up to the cosmopolitan influences of Moscow and Eastern Europe. As a member of the young intelligentsia of the 1950s he identified strongly with the more or less brutal cutting off of links with the past.

He was fortunate, too, in coming of age just as writing was allowed to recover after the wartime upheavals and when Enver Hoxha began to

nurture a new literary culture. The immediate consequence of the communist takeover for literature after November 1944 had been the annihilation of the nascent liberal public sphere and the execution or imprisonment of those writers who did not have the foresight to escape. In 1958 Kadare, like many of his generation, was sent to the Soviet Union for his professional education. At the famous Gorki Institute for World Literature in Moscow he would learn to become a socialist writer and member of the Nomenclature, trained as a writer and “engineer of human souls” (Rothberg, *The Heirs* 65) to construct the new Albania alongside economists, technologists, and administrators. He was able to read some of the latest Western literature, such as the works of Sartre, Camus, and Hemingway, which were beginning to be translated into Russian. Influenced by Russian and European modernism, he experimented with language and was criticized for writing poetry imbued with morbid decadence and bourgeois formalism. Mixing with émigrés, fallen functionaries, and intellectuals undergoing re-education, and observing the intricate links between politics and literature in the socialist state, the young Kadare began to draw his own conclusions. Kadare’s attitude to the communist regime as a young writer is the main focus of this chapter. His works, *The City without Signs* (1961), *The*

*General of the Dead Army* (1963), *The Monster* (1965) and *The Wedding* (1967) are the centre of this analysis.

Kadare emerged from a childhood of occupation, war, and anarchy, and experienced the early years of the post-war order as a freeing up of opportunities for self-development and even self-fulfilment. Kadare and his generation heard the message of European existentialism filtered through Italian films, French and American novels, and Soviet youth culture, and interpreted it in terms of their own concerns. With its focus on the uniqueness of individual existence and relegation of social considerations, existentialism proved powerful in encouraging the post-war generations of Europe to disengage from the problems and history of their parents' generation, and to focus on self-realization and the future. Kadare was alert to these movements of post-war youth culture and literature in Russia and in Albania.

Kadare began *The City without Signs* in Tirana, and worked on it at the Gorki Institute in 1959 where he tried composing directly onto audio tape as an experiment in modern composition, before finishing it in writing after returning to Albania in late 1960. The text was later revised and an excerpt was published in the literary review *Drita* in Tirana in 1961. The story contains themes of modernism, alienated youth, disillusionment, and cynicism influenced by post-war existentialism.

In the novel, *The City without Signs*, told in the third person, themes of artistic creativity, careerism, and cynicism are brought together in a similar plot. The protagonist of *The City*, Gjon Kurti, is sent out as a newly trained teacher to the provincial town of N... for his first teaching position. He is unwilling to leave the capital, his girlfriend, his friends, his philological research and hopes of an academic career, in order to face the daily grind of a class of unruly and provincial children suspicious of his citified ways and clothes. Gjon soon falls in with the local bohemian intellectuals, the poet Eugjen Peri and the chemistry teacher Mentor Rada, both of whom had also studied in Tirana and, like Gjon, miss its urbanity and student life. In Tirana they can discuss art and formalism, subjectivism and history, and recite poems such as Eugjen's "A Sunday in the Country" with its suggestive modernist metaphors of escape:

A squat, greying man in a bow tie, whose suit had a twenties cut. One of the respectable citizens of N..., a specimen of that precious stock of locals thanks to whom the city rigidly maintained the dignity of its mores and traditions. (*The City* 57)

Early in the novel Gjon has already let himself to go and is imagined as the survivor of a shipwreck, only just clinging to life. At

twenty-three he sees himself as a failure, and regards with envy the gifted young poet of the town, alter ego of Kadare, who has gained a certain notoriety in the capital, Tirana, and repudiates his provincial origins. Gjon is faced with two possibilities: either to accept his role in modern Albanian life and set about contributing to the provincial environment as a teacher and Party member like his friend Mercure; or become an embittered exile from the cosmopolitanism of the national capital, sinking into drinking and depression with an unsavoury group of friends. However, a third option occurs to him as a result of a chance comment by one of his pupils - a criminal careerism which will enable him to become professor of Albanian philology at the Academy in Tirana. Teaching his class about the importance of the earliest Albanian texts Gjon realizes that it would not be difficult to falsify such a document, and he sets about doing so with the help of Eugjen and Mentor.

The town's young people Gjon meets up with are cliches of disaffected youth, influenced by western popular culture. Gjon wants to escape provincial mediocrity, not Albania or communism. The socialist-realist world of work, optimism, and productiveness is barely perceptible in this environment of parties, alcohol, jazz, and sex:

“The whole world does that. In Europe it’s the done thing. You know that the population of France is not increasing any more . . . Haven’t you asked yourself why?”

“According to our geography teacher, it’s because of the difficulties of life under capitalism”.

“Your teacher is an ass. I’ll tell you the real reason: it’s because of abortions. Yes, abortions.” (*The City* 47)

The depth of the cynicism with which the young protagonists face their future is striking. Careerism lies at the heart of *The City without Signs*. Gjon succeeds because he can work with the system. He is not a natural talent like the local poet who has won acclaim at an early age. Unlike his friend Mercure, the devoted Party-member and committed intellectual, he does not accept communism as an ethical-political system or as a nationalist-modernizing ideology.

Gjon suggests to Mentor and Eugjen that they collaborate - the philologist, the poet, and the chemist - on the falsification of an ancient document. The argument is insidious, as Gjon deliberately blurs the distinctions between ideology and historical fact in order to sway his friends:

“We must be the loyal sons of the age, we must reject prejudices, idealist attitudes, pseudo-morality and all that

stuff [...] and become authentic materialists [...] Don't we too have the right to try to find a career in the good sense of the term? Of course we do. Don't we?"

"Yes, yes, of course. A Soviet poet, Yevtushenko, has even written a poem called *The Career*" [...]

"Listen, boys", Gjon said with deliberation, "I'm just asking you to try to understand me. To understand that in our age, we can no longer be content to be idealists and to think in terms of past times. When all is said and done, what difference is there between the discovery of an authentic manuscript or of a false one?" (*The City* 86-87)

Having convinced Mentor, the two of them set to work on Eugjen, who is shocked at the thought of taking the history of their country so lightly:

"Let's say that we show Albanian to have been used in written form before the fifteenth century. Who would be harmed in the least by that? We would be guilty with regard to Truth in the abstract, but completely innocent as regards our Homeland." (*The City* 90)

Gjon's plan is to write in Tosk, thus giving primacy to the southern dialect spoken by the majority of the upper-level Party

members, drawn from various primarily southern and Gjirokastran clans. The decision to forge a non-religious text would give a strongly secular cast to the origins of written Albanian, given that the earliest extant document in written Albanian is a baptismal prayer, and the earliest printed book, the fragmentary *Missal* (1555) of the northern Albanian Catholic priest Gjon Buzuku, is a liturgical piece associated with the northern Ghegs and Catholicism. Through the agency of the monk, the forged letter will plead the cause of the impoverished peasants to a bishop and feudal landholder, implying the early existence of a national identity brought about through class struggle. The lowly monk would be the only literate figure in this environment. The date would be 1387, several years before the earliest extant document in written Albanian, and just two years before the Battle of Kosovo. The Albanian nation thus would be shown to pre-date the Ottoman occupation. This letter is the work of the philologist, Gjon a second document, a ten-line fragment from the lost work, *Songs and Tears from the Great War* by the Albanian poet and patriot, Andon Cajupi (1866-1930), would be fabricated by Eugjen, reinforcing the message of the letter, that it is the exploitative classes, not foreigners, against whom the Albanians should wage war. Both documents would be transcribed using paper and inks prepared by the chemist, Mentor.

The boys agree to collaborate on a line which would be welcome to the powers-that-be in the Academy of Sciences, namely that the beginnings of a class-consciousness could be demonstrated among the southern Tosk peasants rather than the northern Ghegs. This document would support the work of the current president of the Academy. Gjon has clearly learned the lesson of speaking lies to Power in order to become powerful himself:

“And we’ll drag Professor O.B. through the mud ... on the subject of certain forms of the participle in ancient Albanian”, Gjon replied. “We’ll insert those forms into the text that will disprove his argument . . .”

“No, no. Above all no settling of accounts!” Mentor broke in. “If I remember rightly, he failed you three times in the oral exams.” (*The City* 102)

Gjon has learned the language of party-line altruism, giving the discussion something of the flavour of a sitting of the Union of Writers:

“Not at all”, Gjon replied. “For me the fate of the Albanian language takes precedence over, all personal considerations”. Eugjen sniggered momentarily. (*The City* 102-103)

The three young men judge the mood of the regime and project their forgery skillfully into the ideological debates in such a way as to reinforce the orthodoxy:

In the course of a conference organized for the occasion by the Academy, the president himself delivered the anticipated speech on the first of the two texts. He mentioned the incorrect interpretations given previously by numerous philologists, emphasizing that the new text would put an end to the hypotheses which he had just criticized. In an interesting commentary, the vice-president analysed the class character of the said text. (*The City* 145)

Under the influence of his pupil and lover, Stella, symbol of well-meaning ordinariness and communist innocence, Gjon momentarily reneges, conscious of the damage done to history and his nation. However, his doubts are quickly dispersed after he is attacked by a couple of thugs at the behest of his ex-girlfriend, Luiza, from whom he contracted syphilis and whom he was obliged to identify as his partner in order to gain medical treatment at the local clinic. After the death of Mercure in an industrial accident, Gjon returns to his cynical and ambitious plan, rejoining Mentor and Eugjen to visit the monastery of St Trinity where they plant their forged documents. Kadare makes Gjon's

motivation absolutely clear at this point: he is intelligent and ambitious, but uncommitted to the socialist project and frustrated and lonely in the provincial town, where he finds no-one other than the naive Stella, and where the one positive hero and believer, Mercure, has died midway through the novel.

“Look what a wretch I am.” “Why?” “Because I love the capital and don’t feel like renouncing it for life down there. [...] I don’t like the provinces. I only like my capital. Perhaps if I had a friend here I could fight this. But Mercure is dead and I’m all alone. I’ll finish up a drunk. I’ve got to get out of N.” (*The City* 137)

The discovery shoots the three young men to fame as the party journals and newspapers, in particular the youth magazine, stress the social and political import of the discoveries, and the President of the Academy of Sciences and the professors follow suit in exploring the indications of democratic-revolutionary and anti-fascist tendencies in this earliest piece of Albanian writing, Cajupi becomes an Albanian precursor of Lenin and his plea, “O lowly and poor people’s | Of Serbia and Russia, | Turn your arms against your rulers” (*The City* 145), is interpreted as an ancient call with contemporary relevance, to transform imperialist war-making into civil uprising against class oppressors.

Careers are ruined and political mileage is made as the discovery becomes a cause of local and national celebration. Gjon is offered a professorship at the Academy in Tirana but is tortured by fears of exposure. He dreams that his dead friend, the true believing socialist Mercure, has sent him a telegram of congratulations from beyond the grave. Gjon leaves the one person he loves, Stella, and boards the bus for the capital. The story finishes with an epilogue in which Eugjen, plagued by guilt, hesitates in front of the post office with a letter of confession in his hand. The final image is of the wet, cold, and grey communist everyday, the world that Gjon wants to escape, and that Kadare would return to in 1960:

All around him the fine rain continues to fall. An icy wind blows. Everything seems to be flickering in the shadows.

The trees, the light, the silhouettes of the people. (*The City* 153)

Gjon Kurti is ambitious and frustrated. Careerism is his only way out. The means he chooses are criminal, and hence extreme even in the Albanian context. However, Kadare's point is that the structure which ordained Gjon's fate as a provincial teacher creates its own contradictions. The centralized, bureaucratic structure which has decreed Gjon's fate is the force behind the action. Gjon Kurti, like most heroes

of Soviet socialist realism, goes through a process of discovery of self and the world. But unlike them, he does not come to find harmony between his own desires and the demands of his nation and the ruling party. Far from accepting his iconic role as a cog in the machinery of communist modernization, he becomes a careerist, whose success is based on personal weakness, ideological cynicism, and criminal forgery. In this sense the novel is a critique of a corrupt political system, rather than of generational conflict, as in Russia.

When Gjon first discusses his plan, Eugjen cites Yevgeny Yevtushenko's 1957 poem, "A Career". However, Yevtushenko's poem pits careerism against truth, criticizing the structures of power, and the opportunists who exploit them:

In Galileo's day, a fellow scientist  
was no more stupid than Galileo.  
He was well aware the earth revolved.  
But he also had a large family to feed.  
Stepping into a carriage with his wife,  
after effecting his betrayal, he believed  
he was launched on a career,  
though he was undermining it in reality. (63-64)

The dualism of this poem, its opposition of ideology and truth, strikes at the heart of communist ideology by positing a scientific truth beyond class-consciousness. However, the moral of Yevtushenko's poem is lost on Gjon, who proceeds to argue the opposite, namely that the forgery is an existential act free of obsolete morality. This is the life of the careerist who will vote with the party against Galileo. Gjon was to reappear in various forms in Kadare's novels as the opportunist, the weakling or coward, the power-hungry bureaucrat or the humiliated yes-man.

Kadare's novel reflects aspects of Soviet youth literature in its most radical phase. The episode in *The City* in which the boys discuss brothels and masturbate over pictures of Bardot and Lollobrigida reflects the tone of this Soviet literature. However, Kadare does not redeem his disillusioned young men. The renewal implicit in the rediscovery of socialist ethics, which is central to the socialist realist novels of the younger generation of Soviet authors, is absent from *The City without Signs*. In its place is a nihilism and moral and ethical emptiness which explicitly refers to the romantic despair of Byron and Lermontov and to the decadence of Wilde, but which lacks the sense of individual authenticity of the former, or the social provocativeness of the latter. The revolutionary romanticism is missing and the stories of alcoholic

binges, sex, venereal disease, and prostitution are sordid. The redemption of the young people does not take place. They remain deeply compromised by a youthful rebelliousness which becomes criminal in the socialist environment and all too easily uses nationalist-communist dogma to achieve its ends. Even the good young communist, Mercure, is tainted. He participates as an intellectual and a worker, and advocates openness in the spirit of the 20th Congress of the CPSU in which debate and discussion take the place of doctrine (*The City* 55-56). But he criticizes Eugjen's poem as reactionary and identifies the spirit of capitalism in his peers' attitudes and behaviour. In response to Luiza's appreciation of Eugjen's modernist metaphors, Mercure replies: "Are you trying to say that it would have been good to mention the brand of the cars as well?" (*The City* 56). He too, is ultimately an inflexible ideologue who places socialist doctrine above individual freedom.

Written partly in Moscow under the influence of Dudintsev's critique of Soviet bureaucracy and corruption in *Not by Bread Alone* (1956), *The City* uses the current forms of youth literature to launch a powerful critique of socialist careerism and hence of Albanian socialism. Even at this first stage of his adult writing career Kadare refuses to make reconciliatory gestures to socialist realism and the Marxist-Leninist view of history that could render this work acceptable

to the regime. There is little romanticism and less naivety in Gjon's youthful rebellion, and while he finds the possibility of redemption in Stella, the naive, provincial girl who believes in communism, he abandons her for his life of inauthenticity as a professor and Academy member in the national capital. The theme of careerism and inauthenticity inverts the central tenet of socialist realism, namely that the link between existence and activity be meaningful, bringing together ideology and praxis in authentic, lived individual life. While the story remains focused on the youthful protagonist's frustration, the target of the novel remains the environment "without signs" after which the novel is named. For unlike the Soviet environment, in which a generation moulded by Stalin was rejected by the young intellectuals of the 1950s, in Albania there was no possibility of such rebellion. Not only was the generation of the Stalinist fathers still in the process of consolidating its power under the patronage of Enver Hoxha, but the sons were without any signposts for their rebellion other than those of Western European existentialism.

*The City without Signs* establishes three important early themes in Kadare's work. The first is the theme of authentic versus inauthentic life. The cynicism, fatalism, and sense of loss and wasted opportunities of the young people evokes questions of what an authentic life is under

socialism. Gjon, Eugjen, and Mentor reflect the frustration of youthful hopes of achievement and advancement. Between the traditional world of family and honour and the communist world of productivity and unquestioning belief there is little to appeal to them. The egoism which renders them such modern figures finds no outlet. The good communists, Mercure and Stella, are, as their names suggest, distant from the reality of Albanian everyday life. The second theme, of the rebel without a cause, which underwrites much of post-war youth literature and film, expresses the lack of direction which resulted from the disintegration of belief systems over the previous century throughout Europe and America. The borrowed Westernisms of Kadare's young people are an empty response to disillusionment at the new communist state. In Kadare's southern Albanian environment traditional life and values had depended on structures of Ottoman civilization. The communism which was imposed after 1945 offered little by way of cultural depth. It was, from the beginning, a crude dogma relying on jingoistic nationalism and fear, and masquerading as a pure ideology in a corrupted world. There were few realistic identificatory structures for young people. Those who entered the bureaucracy and the Nomenclature did so in the understanding that this was a powerful new class entirely in the service of the regime. The themes of careerism and

rebellion are associated with Kadare's third theme, Albanian identity and the function of literature. The betrayal of Albania, which lies at the centre of the hoax in *The City*, contrasts strongly with the redemptive rediscovery of the Soviet motherland by the younger generation of socialist realist writers. This theme will become more prominent as Kadare comes to see himself competing with the dictatorship for the soul of his nation.

Kadare's critique of careerism and modernization in *The City* does not indicate opposition to socialism as such. "There was an era when, like everyone else there, I believed in socialism, in communism, because I didn't know any other world than that of the socialist dictatorship" (O'Donnell, *A Coming* 122). At this time he was a young man who had benefited from the new education policies, who had not yet experienced the dark side of the regime, and who could scarcely foresee how pernicious the regime would become. The disillusionment of Gjon Kurti in *The City* suggests an autobiographical component as Kadare struggled to adjust to life in the narrow home environment after his time in Moscow. Kadare had returned impressed with the city, the cosmopolitanism, and the scale of Soviet life. He was aware of the backwardness of Albanian culture and civilization and to some extent he identified with the young disillusioned and disabused figures of *The*

*City*. However, *The City* is at its most interesting in the divided loyalties that it evinces. The writer's disapproval of the young people in the novel is palpable and is not merely a product of the inner censor. Western culture is genuinely unpalatable in this novel, but socialism offers nothing either. In Kadare's later works, beginning with *The General of the Dead Army*, represents Albania as an example of the dissolute West and the centre of corrupted vision of communism.

Kadare's second novel, *The General of the Dead Army* (1963), would be his first great success outside, if not within, Albania. *The General* was written in its first version in 1962 and published the following year; it was not finalized until 1967 in the version which was translated into French in 1970. The idea for the novel was born in the cafe of the Hotel Dajti where the writer met an Italian diplomat charged with the mission of locating, exhuming, and repatriating the bodies of fallen Italian soldiers from Albanian soil. It seems that the project did not take place, although it is possible that the Italian request to repatriate fallen soldiers was not immediately rejected at this time. It is because, after the break with the Soviet Union, the Albanian Communist regime appeared to be open to the possibility of rapprochement with Western governments.

In *The General of Dead Army*, Albania's contact with the Soviet Union has been broken and the blockade is underway. An Italian military mission has been given permission to locate and repatriate the bodies of the soldiers who fell during the military campaign of 1939-43 between Italy and Albania. A middle-aged Italian general and a high-ranking military chaplain are to spend two years supervising the work. They also have a special charge from a still youthful and beautiful aristocratic widow to bring back the remains of her husband, Colonel Z., giving closure to years of uncertainty. The scion of a distinguished and aristocratic family and a decorated war hero, Colonel Z. was in charge of the Blue Battalion which executed Italian deserters during the Albanian and Greek campaigns. He disappeared without any trace towards the end of the Italian campaign in Albania in 1943. Kadare's plot is constructed around the fate of Colonel Z. and the mission to repatriate his remains.

Given the history of the Italian occupation of Albania, the general is not portrayed as negatively as one might expect. He verges on caricature, to be sure, but is represented with a warmth of characterization which contrasts with the chaplain and with the Albanian figures. Preening, self-indulgent, and egotistical, incapable of understanding his hosts' culture, he is anything other than threatening.

But his ignorance and self-indulgence are offset by a certain harmlessness and even ingenuousness. Full of his own importance vis-a-vis the generals who had led their men to disaster twenty years earlier, he sees himself as a national saviour and representative of a great and civilized country, returning the tens of thousands of Italian soldiers, betrayed by their leaders' incompetence, to their national soil. He views his mission in terms of a history of noble warfare stretching back to the Greeks and the Trojans, to the solemnity of Homeric funeral rites. His pretensions to soldierly values are laughable. As a peacetime general, who did not experience active service during the war, he is a comic and slightly ridiculous figure.

The General entertains erotic fantasies about Colonel Z's beautiful widow, Betty, imagining that he might woo her on his triumphant return, having laid to rest the remains of her dead husband. His jealousy of the dead Colonel and competition with the chaplain for the imagined favours of Betty provide a note of lightness in the otherwise unrelievedly grim story. The Italian general, the chaplain, and post-war Italy evoked through the figures of Colonel Z's family and widow act as a foil to the representation of post-war Albania. This Italy is a post-war European country oriented towards the future and the West. The image of a Western country intent on a superficial and cosmetic confrontation

with its past, which will enable it to move on into a promising future as part of Western Europe, is counterposed strikingly against that of an Eastern country whose communism has concreted over past damages and which remains in thrall to its unladen ghosts. At one level the novel is a critique of post-war Italian politics and society, of a defeated imperialistic and militaristic regime which wreaked havoc in Albania and which now, thanks to its Western European identity and with American support, can turn its back on the history of failed imperialism. However, Kadare is not primarily interested in Italian guilt or responsibility in *The General of the Dead Army*. In post-war European countries literature played an important role in the process of coming to terms with the past. In the Federal Republic of Germany in particular, where the burden of Nazism was felt so keenly by the younger generations from the 1960s onward, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (“coming to terms with the past”) became the dominant theme of post-war literature. In Italy, or France, this was scarcely the case, and while Italy contributed to the post-war construction of Western European democracy, little national retrospection took place regarding the depredations of Mussolini’s regime in the erstwhile colonies and occupation zones. The theme of mastering the past lies at the core of *The General of the Dead Army*. However, it is the Albanian, not the

Italian past, which is the focus of Kadare's novel. Kadare acknowledges that he wrote this novel when he was young, and without first-hand knowledge of post-war Western Europe.

The Albania of communist modernity lies superimposed over the unmastered past like an unhealed scar. The bitterness and resentment of still-grieving mothers, fathers, sisters, and wives appears throughout the novel, coming to a climax in the disruption of the wedding ceremony at the end. The point made over and over is that Albania has not been able to overcome its past. Kadare would later develop at length the metaphor of congealment or frozenness to describe this state of national paralysis. Despite the regime's propagation of national communism, the creation of the Albanian new man, and the socio-economic modernization, a sense of the dislocation of the past and the present predominates. This is not naive anti-modern romanticism or reactionary nostalgia for the kingdom of Zog or the stability of Ottoman colonialism, although romantic elements are present in Kadare's evocations of the national past. In this representation of Albanian history, Hoxha's socialist modernity begins to be seen as a symptom of the depredations of the past, rather than as a cause of socio-political distress in the present.

The novel opens amid the rain and sleet of November, Kadare's familiar trope of the winter of discontent under communism. It is a cold,

wet, and grey day. The signs of Albanian modernity, the airport, the roads and the buildings are black and grim. While the Italians have moved on, seeking the repatriation of the bodies of their fallen countrymen in order to find national closure, the past has not yet ended for the Albanians. They remain under the spell of the dead army, nursing the unhealed wounds of an unfinished war, constrained to remember but not come to terms with their tragic history. The landscape itself seems to warn of the dangers of the past, as the general looks out over the land that he is about to begin excavating:

The army was there, below him, outside time, frozen, petrified, covered with earth. It was his mission to draw it up from the mud, and the mission made him afraid. It was a mission that exceeded the bounds of nature, a mission in which there must be something blind, something deaf, something deeply absurd. A mission that bore unforeseeable consequences in its womb. (*The General* 16)

History holds secrets that the general will not come to terms with over the duration of his mission. The Albanian past is covered by a thin layer of earth and it still harbours virulent forces of destruction. The country is occupied by *thanatos* in the form of the dead army,

harbouring dormant microbes of war waiting for light and air to revive them twenty years on:

“The germ can stay buried there for twenty years, then suddenly jump out as virulent as ever. It’s terrifying,” remarked the general. “But true”, the priest added. “At the first contact with air and sunlight it returns to life”. “Like a wild animal coming out of hibernation”. (*The General* 172-173)

Death comes out of the blue as one of the workmen is infected from contact with human remains and dies, a late victim of the Italians whom he had fought against twenty years earlier. For his wife the job of digging up the graves represents the return of the past:

“She worried about him constantly. She had waited for him so many years during the war, and now she felt somehow that he was away fighting again”.

“He was always saying much the same thing himself: The Fascists kept me busy while they were alive, and now that they’re dead I’m still having to hunt for them, they’re still keeping me busy!”

“Yes! He fought against them so many years, and he beat them. But it was them that got him in the end. “What pig luck!”

“Like a revenge after death”.

“They waited twenty years for it too. But all the same, when he fought them he fought them fairly, in open war, whereas they killed him with a rusty button like filthy cowards”. (*The General* 176)

The mission of unearthing the past is deeply abhorrent to the general. In this novel about death, he is, paradoxically, the representative of life, and his mission seems absurd and unnatural. Like the West German general he later meets on a similar mission, he is a figure of *eras* despite his age and his profession:

The general sipped at his cognac and let his eyes wander about him, realizing as he did so how foreign the whole atmosphere of this place was to him. He suddenly felt quite alone. Alone among the graves of his dead countrymen. Dammit! he wanted to rid his mind of the sight of those graves-those places where his “brothers” lay buried -and not think about them again at any price. [...]

After all he was still alive. It was a right conferred by nature itself. (*The General* 20)

The general is thus a foil to the real subject, which is the suffering that the Italian campaign caused to Italians and Albanians alike.

Through the story of the exhumations in an endlessly grey and rainy countryside, the stories of Italian deserters are told and the disastrous effects of the occupation on the lives of the Albanians emerge. Only in the idyllic Albania of the past does the sun shine and do the birds sing.

In his ignorance the general assumes that the Albanians have turned their back on the past just as the Italians have. “It is a long time since the war was over. The past is forgotten,” (*The General* 199) he tells the priest later in the novel. It is the dead Colonel Z., not the living general, who represents death and killing, and who embodies the inhumanity, brutality, and perversion implicit in war. Colonel Z. was not a warrior, fighting the Albanians. His role was to execute those of his own nation who chose life as deserters rather than death as soldiers in the service of fascist imperialism.

Unlike the general, the chaplain has experienced the Italian campaign. He speaks certain words of the Albanian language and thinks he understands the culture of the Albanians. He straddles the past and the present, representing the continuation of Italian imperial and fascist

attitudes. His knowledge of the Albanians is a set of cliches from Italian fascist imperialism about their warlike nature and their death-oriented culture of Kanun and vendetta:

“The Albanians are given to war by their very nature”, the priest said. [...] deprived of war and weapons this people would wither away, its roots would dry up and it would eventually just disappear.”

“Whereas with war and weapons it will always regenerate itself?”

“So they believe. Though in fact weapons will reduce them to non-existence even more rapidly.”

“According to you then, war is a sort of sport for them, an exercise they need in order to keep their circulation going and stay fit?” [...]

“In other words, with weapons or without, they are a people doomed to annihilation.” (*The General* 132-33)

Later he similarly expatiates on the morbid Albanian culture of Kanun and bloodshed:

“The Albanians are not criminals in the common law sense. The murders they commit are always done in conformity with rules laid down by age-old customs. Their

vendetta is like a play composed in accordance with all the laws of tragedy, with a prologue, continually growing dramatic tension, and an epilogue that inevitably entails a death. The vendetta could be likened to a raging bull let loose in the hills and laying waste everything in its path. And yet they have hung around the beast's neck a quantity of ornaments and decorations that correspond to their conception of beauty, so that when the beast is loosed and even while it is spreading death on every side, they can derive aesthetic satisfactions from those events at the same time. [...] for centuries now the Albanians have been acting out a blood-thirsty and tragic play." (*The General* 134-35)

The young Albanian historian and specialist adviser to the mission, who comes in as the priest is speaking, dismisses this type of language as a form of genocide, "to spread the notion that the Albanian people is doomed to annihilation, to make people familiar with it and accept it" (*The General* 165). And indeed, once he has left, the general and the priest continue to discuss the Albanians in exactly these terms: "All we ask is that they should exterminate themselves. And the quicker the better" (*The General* 165). Their attitudes represent the views of centuries of foreign invaders, for whom Albania is simply territory to

annex or colonize. Neither the general nor the chaplain understands the wider context of Albanian culture and history or recognizes the broader implications of the war, or the questions of Italian culpability in occupying Albania.

In the course of their searches the general's team locates the bodies of Italian deserters, Germans, Greeks, a British pilot, and even the remains of Turkish fighters from an earlier era in the ancient fort at Gjirokastra. The dead bodies are all the same; only the insignia of identification differ. Albania is a land occupied not just by the Italians, but by a range of foreign aggressors over its history. It is this history of foreign occupation and its effect on his nation, rather than the particularities of the Italian campaign, which is the focus of Kadare's novel.<sup>5</sup> Responsibility for the Albanian present is directed towards those foreign states and empires that contributed to the disappearance of Albania from history after the fall of Rome. It lies with the Byzantines, the Normans and the Venetians, the Ottomans; after 1913 with the European powers who carved up the Balkans; and in the 1930s and 1940s with the Italians, the Greeks, and the Germans who invaded their country.

In the vicinity of Gjirokastra the general's car is stopped by an old peasant and his grandson, carrying with them the remains of an Italian

deserter who had worked for the peasant before being killed by the Blue Battalion in that unforgettable autumn of October 1943. As the soldier's body is measured up against the records and found to be exactly six feet one inch in height, the general and the chaplain both note to themselves that his dimensions match those of Colonel Z. There is no medallion to identify him, but he left behind a diary covering the period from 25 February to 7 September, 1943. In this bleak work the only glimpses of summer happiness occur in the pages of the deserter's diary. As a miller's labourer devoid of a name and an identity, he comes to appreciate the rhythms of Albanian peasant life and to experience moments of contentment and existential tranquillity in this limbo between identity and forgetfulness. This unknown soldier, who began the war as a loyal Italian in the Iron Regiment, and who lost his name and his identity when he gave his medallion away to the daughter of the miller as a wedding present, has also partaken of the timelessness of traditional life. Against the chaplain's evocation of a bloody culture of vendetta, the deserter's diary reveals an idyllic rural life untouched by violence or bloodshed. The sudden end to the deserter's diary, as he is located and executed by the Blue Battalion, introduces a note of personal tragedy into the weary and cynical account of death and exhumation.

We see the past through the eyes of the general, for whom it is a distasteful arena of death; the chaplain, for whom it remains a series of fascist clichés about national cultures; the nameless prisoner, for whom it is a springtime respite from war; and the government adviser to the mission, a young Albanian historian, for whom it is a record of foreign interventions, against which the Albanians had to generate some sort of protective structure. The young post-war Albanian specialist thus provides a key to Albanian history and the present. He does not deny the reality of the Albanian culture of vendetta, but he sees it in an entirely different light from the chaplain, for whom it is an unchanging national identity based on fascist attitudes towards race. For the historian, vendetta is an ancient code which became fossilized in the course of Albanian history as a result of the imposition of foreign legal and administrative structures onto the Albanians, and of the disruption of the processes of historical development that occurred with the Ottoman occupation. For him, the Albanian present has always been the product of its past. Kadare does not explicitly link the historian's views to the present, but the current regime, with its policy of faceless modernization, is implicitly also a product of these same historical forces. In its need to remake Albania as a modern and independent nation, the regime has cut its ties with the past, displacing ethno-national

identity in the interest of a gloomy and characterless prosperity based on an internationalist doctrine of modernization. Enver Hoxha is not mentioned by name, but the implication of the ending in particular is that the country has come under the sway of a powerful and deadly regime. Fatos Lubonja, in a rather stronger critique of Albanian history, writes of a historical syndrome of alternation between foreign powers and home-grown tyrants born of Albania's history of occupation. His country's attempts at self-liberation have, for Lubonja, been characterized by dependency on local strongmen (Elsie, *Dictionary* 60).

In Kadare's later fictional historiography, the figure of AH Pasha in *The Niche of Shame*, typifies the local *bajraktar* or chieftain as national leader. The point of the long discussions of Albanian history and culture in *The General* is to emphasize the relationships between the past and the present, rather than to criticize the regime. The novel does not mount a critique of socialism so much as a critique of the regime's response to the nation's history. The socialist present in *The General of the Dead Army* is so over-determined by the traumas of history that it cannot live with the past, but must bury it, refusing to accept or come to terms with its history. The Italian coming to terms with the past may be false and chauvinistic, but at least it represents historical movement and

orientation toward life, compared to the stagnation and morbidity of the Albanian situation.

Two arduous years are spent searching for and exhuming bodies, measuring, marking, identifying, and bagging them to be sent home. Like so many of Kadare's foreign protagonists, the general begins to be drawn into the Albanian world of the dead. His everyday life becomes dominated by nightmares, sleeping pills, drunkenness, and hangovers as the environment of death and decomposition seeps into his spirit:

Since he had noticed that, not only in his conversation but in every episode of his life, alien elements were creeping in little by little, the words of visitors he had received, fragments of letters or diaries of dead soldiers, he had tried to dam up this flow. But this had proved so powerful that the words and phrases, sometimes entire narratives by the dead men, kept invading his mind. [...] And his fear that if he kept making use of sentences or words deriving from people in the kingdom of the dead, he would fetch up there himself, this fear did finally pass. He had in effect joined up with them; day after day, season upon season, he had entered this universe and, never mind what he did now, there was no escaping it any more. (*The General* 163)

Finally the general and the chaplain come to the end of their mission. The earth has kept back its portion, handing back most, but not all of the Italian soldiers. The general imagines the burial ceremonies for his dead army. Charon, the mythological carrier of souls across the Styx, enters their names into his ledger as the workmen place the blue bags of remains into the coffins. The general's dead companies, battalions, regiments, and divisions will dissolve into "no more than a few tons of phosphorus and calcium" (*The General* 185). However, the remains of Colonel Z. have not turned up and his fate remains a mystery.

As the general leaves the mountains and high plains for the lowland, the capital and the journey home, he feels the relief of a survivor. The distinction between life and death begins to return as he feels the signs of life again. In his final nightmare he sees himself retained at the last moment. "The final torment of this pilgrimage [...] happened in a flash, the way nightmares come: after pretending to let him go, the mountains at the last moment, right on the border of their territory, had sought to force him back" (*The General* 188). At this point Kadare emphasizes again the characterization of the general as a "peacetime general" (*The General* 189), who was a junior recruiting officer during the period of the Albanian occupation, and who did not see active service.

Arriving at a country village on the eve of a marriage festival, sick to death of his morbid occupation, the general has already begun to turn away from the realm of death. Colonel Z. disappeared in this area, but the general no longer even wants to find his remains:

“To be honest, I’m not particularly anxious to find him.

This evening I have no urge to find any dead men at all.

For my part I just feel utterly delighted to have reached the end of our ordeal. And here you are wanting me to set off on some new quest.” “But it’s our duty...”, the priest said.

[. . .] The general was in good humour, very good humour.

The long and arduous pilgrimage that he saw in his mind as a vision of terror was at last at an end. But it wasn’t a pilgrimage. It had been a march through the valley of the shadow of death. (*The General* 190)

In this reawakening to the world of the living, the general listens to the sounds of the Albanian countryside which we had last heard in the notebook entries of the Italian deserter, the sounds of idyllic nature, a traditional and peaceful image quite different from that of the mud, icy rain, and bleak rocky mountainscapes of the dead army:

There was a little garden all around the bungalow, and a view of a section of the village from the veranda. The

general could hear the clinking of a bucket and women's voices from a nearby well, the lonely lowing of distant cattle, the sound of a radio that had just been switched on, and the cries of the children still at play, running to and fro across the square. (*The General* 191)

Settling into his quarters, the general hears the drumbeats announcing a village wedding. At this point he stands in the balance between past and future, death and life, Albania and Italy. The call of life is strong after two years in the realms of death and he wants to attend the village wedding to rid himself of the associations of death. The chaplain, still associated with the past, the dead soldiers, and mourning warns him not to go, but the general insists. They appear as figures of death in their black capes which contrast so strongly with the colours of the wedding guests. At first the general cannot adjust to this vision of life after his eighteen-month mission as an envoy of the dead:

Now the feast seemed to him like a great organism, powerful and amorphous, breathing, moving, murmuring, dancing, and filling the whole atmosphere around him with its warm, disturbing, intoxicating breath. [...] The general felt a warm breath of tender emotion flooding through his breast. He had the sensation of being laved in a delightful

bath of sounds and light. And the waves of sound and light pouring over him like the waters of a healing spring were warming him, purifying his body of all that graveyard mud, that foul mud with its unmistakable odour of putrefaction and of death. (*The General* 196&198)

The chaplain reminds him that they are the symbols and even harbingers of death for these people at this wedding, but he refuses to believe him.

“Death . . .? I don’t think it’s written on our faces, [...] It is a long time since the war was over. The past is forgotten. I am certain that no one at this wedding has a thought for past enmities.” (*The General* 199)

Inebriated and overwhelmed by the beat, the general joins the wedding dance, drunkenly mistaking ritual for merriment.

The drum beat out its summons yet again, like cannon firing. The clarinet resumed its lamentations, while the violins accompanied it with their slender, almost feminine voices. [...] The drum was beating with redoubled fury, the cries of the clarinet were pouring out in wilder and stronger waves, like sobs emerging from the throat of some Titan, and the violins’ strings were vibrating like lost

souls. The drum beat quicker and quicker, so that now, through the lament, it was as though great rocks could be heard thundering down from the mountains. The general [. . .] stood there seeing the sweating faces of the musicians, the mouth of the clarinet swaying up and down like the barrel of an anti-aircraft gun following a moving target, the closed ecstatic eyes of the dancers. Then the drum fell silent, the violins relaxed, and there followed an enchanted calm. (*The General* 205-06)

The wedding dance is one of Kadare's most powerful images of Albanian ethno-cultural identity. Here the dance recapitulates Albania's recent history of war and occupation. The general is both drawn to and burned by it. Like the epic poem sung to the *lahuta* accompaniment in *The Palace of Dreams* (1981), the dance is an image of culture as life or as the life-giving bond of the community. In the historical environment of the Albanians continuity has only been possible through this medium operating through music and the pared down, ritualized language of the epic.

An old woman, Nice, sits in the background, silently cursing the foreigner who occupied the land and killed her family. Old Nice is outraged as the general glibly turns from past to present, death to life.

For her, death and the past are not so easily forgotten. She breaks the silence with howling sobs, abusing the general. The only word he understands is “*vdekje*” (death). She disappears into the night and returns shortly to throw a muddied sack of bones before his feet, the remains of Colonel Z. She is his killer. Her fourteen-year-old daughter committed suicide twenty years earlier after being raped by Colonel Z. In retaliation the old woman killed the colonel, burying him under her doorstep the night her daughter died. The irruption of the bitterness and the tragedy of the war breaks the general’s alcohol-induced dream of turning his back on death and the past, and forces him back to his role as the general of death:

He put on his coat, took up the sack once more, hoisted it slowly up onto his shoulder, and left that place, bent beneath his burden, mortified, as though he were carrying all the shame and the weight of the earth on his back. (*The General* 215)

Nearing the completion of his mission, he had begun to turn back towards life, Italy, and the future, and the dance seemed attractive to him in its passion and intensity. But he does not understand this intensity as a product of a national history of destruction, of a history that generated vendetta and Kanun. Old Nice represents the truth of history and death,

against the general's falsification of history and life. She is the image of her country, mortally wounded and bitterly resentful of the world that has abused her and passed on. These are the forces which moulded Albania over its history.

On the road again that night, haunted by the presence of death and the memory of the old woman, the general finds himself headed back down towards the underworld:

The road, wakened by the sudden onslaught of their lights, was perpetually emerging for an instant from the chaos of night, pale and still half asleep, only to sink back into it as soon as they had passed. Every so often pairs of very white milestones flashed past on either side. Their whiteness was unpleasant. It sent a shiver up the spine. They made the general think of tombstones. (*The General* 222)

In an attempt to free himself from the realm of death the general throws the sack into the river, impetuously consigning Colonel Z.'s remains to oblivion in the turbid depths. He turns away from death and back to life, rejecting Albania and the past for Italy and the future. As the sack sinks, the general feels relief, in spite of his dawning realization that he has just ruined his chances of preferment at the hands of Colonel Z.'s thankful family, or of gratitude and recompense from the adorable

widow, Betty. Even the chaplain experiences a momentary sense of reprieve. The general's return to life has not brought insight or understanding - few Kadarean protagonists achieve this - but at least he is back in the land of the living. Albania, the realm of death, is left behind. But his experience has not left him untouched. Back in Tirana as he fumbles with a large denomination note in a bus he is mistaken for an Albanian by an old man. Like Bill in *The File on H.* (1997), the general has been changed by Albania and is no longer completely foreign. Albeit fleetingly, he too has inhabited the realms of death:

“He is a foreigner, comrade”, a tall youth with an oddly sedate way of speaking said to the conductress. “So it seems”, she answered, and began counting out change. “He must be an Albanian just back from America”, an old man sitting behind the conductress broke in. “There are some that forget our language completely over there”. “No, granddad, he's a foreigner, I'm sure of that”, the sedate-voiced youth repeated. “Oh no”, the old man insisted, “you mark my words, he's an Albanian just come home again. I can recognize them at a glance, I tell you. [...] My goodness, [the general] thought, even if I were a

shade they ought to show me a little more respect!” (*The General* 230-31)

While criss-crossing the country the general encounters a West German lieutenant-general on a similar mission. They meet again in Tirana. Both have made the transition back to life. To the Italian’s story of his irrational desire to dance at the wedding, the German adds his own story of the conflict between life and death. While excavating bodies at a provincial stadium, he notices a girl who watches and waits for her boyfriend at soccer-practice every day. As they leave arm in arm he feels “such an emptiness all around me, I felt my heart so heavy that the whole world seemed to me as abandoned and as meaningless as that dark, empty stadium” (*The General* 245). The Italian general understands his German colleague’s malaise:

“What disturbed you in her, it seems to me, was her youth, the fact that she seemed such an absolute manifestation of life. It’s such a long time now that we’ve been running up hill and down dale sniffing for death like hyenas, trying to find ways of coaxing it or smoking it out of its lair, that we have almost forgotten that beauty still exists on this earth.” (*The General* 246)

It seems that he has indeed learned something in his encounter with Albania. The ageing German's sense of falling in love with an unknown girl, like the Italian general's desire to dance at the wedding, is an expression of *eros* against *thanatos*. It is this that renders each of them, the Italian in particular, surprisingly positive figures in this novel of wartime memories. Unlike the Albanians they can return home to life and the future.

After throwing the Colonel's bones into the river, it appears likely that the general, with the tacit approval of the chaplain, will substitute the remains of the unidentified soldier for those of Colonel Z. in order to fulfil his obligations to the Italian government and to the Colonel's influential family. The past will continue to be falsified by the Italians as they celebrate the return of their hero and move into the future. The government of Italy has moved beyond the tragic past, even if the general entertains fantasies of leading Italy's post-war armies successfully to a new imperial future thereby undoing the failures of history. The Italian soldiers are repatriated, laid to rest, the remains of the Colonel will be interred in his marble tomb and life will go forward. The Colonel's widow will be free to remarry and his family to grieve for a legend and a national hero. Italy will enter the new decade as a modern European post-war polity. Albania, by contrast remains frozen in the

past. Any potential bitterness at the fortune of the Western Europeans is undercut by the comedy of the characterizations: the self-satisfied and rather pathetic Italian and the comically grotesque one-armed German with his curious turns of phrase. Of course the writer could not allow himself to express such bitterness, even if he wanted to. Even in the political limbo of the period directly after the break with the Soviet Union, such open expression of desire for rapprochement with the West was unthinkable. It would have breached the conditions of Aesopian language by expressing too strongly Kadare's rejection of the regime and socialism. Moreover, Kadare's representation of the Italian failure to confront the past renders his critique of post-war Western Europe clear. The irony of the situation is unmistakable. The Italian and the German Generals represent the two fascist aggressors, defeated in the Second World War, moving into a post-war European West symbolized by life and *eros*, not death. Albania, the victim, is left behind, a land of death, mired in the past.

The general's last day in Albania is 28 November, the day of national liberation from the German occupation. On the evening before, he and the German general watch the preparations for the following day's procession on the main boulevard from the University to Scanderbeg Square:

At the far end of the boulevard, near the University, big, dark squares were advancing towards them. The heavy (“muffled”, PM) tramp of feet could now be more clearly distinguished, and the orders, sudden and brief, carried icily through the darkness of the night. The two generals remained there, leaning on the balustrade of the balcony, eyes fixed on the advancing shapes. As the dark squares neared the bridge they could make out the cold reflections on the wet helmets and bayonets, the long columns of soldiers, the officers with drawn swords, and the gaps between companies and battalions. The earth shook under the heavy boots, and the curt cries of command rang out like bayonets clashing. The formations kept coming; the whole boulevard was now teeming with soldiers, and the street lamps lining the roadway were reflected to infinity on the wet, shiny helmets, looking as cold and mysterious as a world going putrid. [...] The boulevard was now all troops, metal, marching feet, thundering engines, abrupt commands, and all of it, as in a single body, streaming relentlessly on towards Scanderbeg Square. (*The General* 258-59)

This vision of the National Day army brings to mind the general's dead army, marching past, "in their blue bags with their black edgings" (*The General* 259), and plunges the general into drunken despair once again as he contemplates "that vast stretch of death," (*The General* 260) which is beyond his understanding. The imagery of "a world going putrid" is strikingly unexpected. So far contemporary Albania has appeared in muted terms as a place of modernization, a colourless but relatively benign communist polity, with no explicit reference to the dictator or the regime. The peasants in the countryside where the general spends most of his time seem unaware of modern politics, and the general's contact with the archaeological specialist, the translators, the diplomats and other members of the intelligentsia and the Nomenclature, remains minimal. However, in the final pages this blandness of representation of the Albanian present is dramatically broken. The National Day procession is an irruption of *thanatos* into the present, a ghastly reminder of the laws of history, of the power of the past. The image is one of both life and death: of the ant-like teeming activity of the soldiers and the putrescent colourlessness of dead matter. The body of soldiers is a strikingly militarist image, comparable to Golding's images of the fascist body corporate at the beginning of *The Lord of the Flies*. Contemporary communist Albania is a military machine focused

on the threat from outside, when in fact the germs of death lie buried deep within. *The General*, like *Winter of Great Solitude* ends with an image of cold war, of the freezing of relations between Albania and the rest of the world. Albania is isolated from its communist ally and protector, the Soviet Union, and the Chinese are not yet on the literary horizon, despite the high-level diplomatic activity occurring between China and Albania at this time. The West is seen as moving off into post-war prosperity and freedom while Albania is stuck between a frozen past and an over-determined, traumatized present.

Modernization and the past are the central themes of *The General*. The one follows from the other. By means of the archaeological metaphor of the dead army Kadare juxtaposes the relationships of death and life, past and present Albania and Italy. The opening of the graves releases stories of suffering, torment, and cruelty on both sides. Several views of the relationship between the past and the present are presented. In one of the unnumbered chapters interspersed throughout the novel, the voice of a dead peasant expresses the tragic pre-Christian and pre-Islamic worldview of traditional Albania:

The earth - the earth never lies. The grass grows up on it each year and it will be our lodging, for all of us, that is its promise ... As for the grave at the place they call Wind

Ridge, you'll not find an ounce of truth if you look for it there. Only silence shadows. Or rather something that you living folk, you'll never be able to grasp. Better to ask me no questions. My tongue would refuse to answer you even if I wanted it to ... Which is just as well for you! ... (*The General* 181)

Everything sooner or later will return to the earth which bore it. The past is simply past and the present and future will occur as a result of actions and events in the past which are unchangeable. Hence the present must be simply accepted. The regime's Stalinism represents a radical denial of this traditional nihilism. Communism is a modernizing ideology based on a post-Enlightenment doctrine of the dialectical relationship between the past and the present. As Stalin had done in the Soviet Union, Hoxha in Albania used the communist strategy of Unitarian government to accelerate historical progress. However, the young writer, like so many intellectuals of the founding years of the different socialist states, recognized the conflict between freedom and control in the socialist project. He felt it personally in the constraints on his own activities and he observed it throughout Albanian society. A possible way forward is suggested through the sympathetic figure of the young Albanian archaeologist, in *The General* who mediates between

past and present, Albanian and Italian, regime and populace. An intellectual sharing the generation and class of the author, he understands the need to both dig down into the past and to move forward into the future.

At this still not fully developed stage, conceptualization of history, change, and the relationship to the past is presented in the dance and the epic songs of Albanian traditional culture. The general dances to music which has incorporated into itself the experiences of the war. It is an ambiguous image: the dance is both a captive of the past and an attempt to master the past by bringing it into the present.

This theme of traditional culture as the Albanians' means of mastering the past by incorporating it into the epic history of change and development will become a central part of Kadare's romantic nationalism. Albanian epics which are the subject of the later novel, *The File on H.*, change and develop, gradually taking into themselves the events of the present, shaping and simplifying them into the stuff of collective memory. At the end of the revised version of *Winter of Great Solitude*, Enver Hoxha's combat with Khrushchev in 1960 emerges from the consciousness of the people in the form of the *issa* or heroic song. History moves forward, both changing and remembering the cultural archetypes of eternal Albania.

Kadare's critique of the regime in *The General* remains relatively muted until the final image of the National Day procession. Until that point, the Italian mission to recover the past and give it the patina of glory that will release their nation into the Western European future is the focal point. The Italian adventure in Albania remained conveniently inconspicuous in a communist corner of South-Eastern Europe. Encarved in marble and the rhetoric of national glory, the exploits of the fascist government can be considered closed, leaving Italy free to join Western Europe. The Italians are pompous, hypocritical, and false. But Albania, too, appears unable to come to terms with its past, refusing any version that is not part of the exaggerated cult of partisan heroism and national-communist victory. The question of how Albania is to move on is raised, but not answered, merely adumbrated in the final ambiguous image of the Albanian national day of death.

In *The City without Signs* Kadare had taken aim at bureaucracy and corruption -critical but still relatively safe themes for the young writer at this point of cultural thaw in Albania. In the novel there is a sense of the mistreatment of history, a sense that the mute past has been violated by the protagonists and by government officials willing to collude with a reading of history which supports their careerist motives. *The General* deepens the critique of history in the dictatorship by implicitly accusing

the regime of having buried the past beneath a militaristic and despotic socialism after the disastrous war with Italy and Germany. In his next novel, *The Monster*, which was written in 1965 and stands between the two versions of *The General*, this critique is strengthened in relation to a regime which misuses history in order to perpetuate its hold on power.

After the break with the Soviet Union a certain openness to the West was detected, primarily in the sympathetic portrayal of the general himself, as was the absence of positivity about the socialist present. A dangerous rumour began to circulate that Kadare was an agent of Western governments. Moreover, *The General* was soon translated and was well received in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, both revisionist enemies of Albania. With its negative portrayal of the present and with no mention of the Party or its leader, it was read by revisionist Yugoslavs as a critique of Albanian communism. The young author was hostile to the regime, and that he was discredited in the eyes of the supreme leader. The talented writer, who had come to the notice of the regime and was viewed by the dictator as a potential laureate of Albanian communism, was not untouchable. His honeymoon with power was over.

Perhaps the official coolness towards *The General* strengthened Kadare. Looking back from the 1990s he writes that he felt that he had

compromised with *The General* and that he wanted to give his imagination free rein in his new novel, *The Monster*:

*The Monster* was something entirely new. It appeared in 1965, after *The General*, in a literary journal. At that time I had decided that everything I wrote should take a different form. (Pipa, *Cotemporary* 78)

The comment suggests a certain personal dissatisfaction, as well as an intention to stretch the boundaries, of his own imagination as well as that of literature and socialist society. Perhaps at this stage he was giving free rein to different, even opposed feelings, hopes, and dreams of life back home in his native land. In *The General* he had sought the deeper causes of the contemporary malaise, those forces of history which had determined the nature of post-war socialist change and development. At this turning point between 1962 and 1964, as the dictatorship began to radically narrow and harden its social and cultural policies, setting them into place for the next two decades, the young writer recognized what was coming. Everything, from the choice of hairstyle through to literature and thought, was subjected to increasing control. The restrictions that he had accepted unwillingly as the conditions of return to his native language and culture, and which the promise of fame and success initially rendered less onerous for the ambitious young man,

were beginning to bite. And in donning the mantle of the national writer, he would be accepting not only the curbs and restrictions but would be entering a pact with the regime and taking on a responsibility for what was to come. In the image of the national day procession at the end of *The General* and in the following audacious work, *The Monster*, he profited from the short period of transition to give full rein to his fears. With these two works Kadare bids farewell to the callowness of *The City* with its derivative theme of Westernized youth, and achieves his recognizable adult novelistic voice. He has entered the Aesopian world of the conflict between writer and regime.

Looking back from the 1990s, Kadare wrote that he tried to write normal literature in an abnormal environment. The power of *The Monster* derives from the striking opposition of the ordinary and the extraordinary in two main narrative strands, the one an idyllic and completely ordinary love story, the other a bizarre and surreal evocation of Tirana in a state of emergency, under siege from shifting and indefinable forces symbolized in a mysterious Trojan Horse standing outside the city. Around the archetypal motif of the love story, mirroring the writer's own life (he married Helena, his wife shortly after returning from Moscow), Kadare weaves a brilliantly imaginative plot around the theme of siege and terror. Where Gogol's dead souls hover in the

background of *The General*, the Horse of Troy, the archetypal European symbol of war and the threat of foreign infiltration, provides the inspiration for *The Monster*. Kadare introduces a new element into the ancient story of Troy. His Wooden Horse stands eternally outside the gates of the city, harbouring dangerous agents and transforming itself over the centuries in a surreal image of political terror. The theme of the fear from outside masking the danger from within, which emerges at the end of *The General*, moves to the centre of focus in *The Monster*:

“*The Monster* is the story of a town in which one fine morning the Trojan Horse appears. Inside the horse there are characters from antiquity like Ulysses—who just wait for the day the town will fall. But I did something odd: Troy does not fall; the horse stays there forever. The people live in a permanent anxiety. They say, how are we going to live? [...] Because the totalitarian regime is founded on this paranoia about threats from outside, it needs an enemy to justify repression.” (Guppy, “Ismail Kadare”)

A young man returns from study in Moscow, falls in love with a girl, and lives happily ever after. Gent Ruvina is an academic and writer, working on a study of the siege of Troy. Lena is called Helen of Troy because of her platinum hair. She is engaged to the art-historian and

museum curator, Max. Both Lena and Max come from powerful clans and the marriage has been organized by their families for reasons of status and power. Max is a bureaucrat, member of the Nomenclature, and the scion of an influential family. Gent and Lena elope on the eve of the wedding, leaving the jilted bridegroom thirsting for revenge. The story takes place over a year from Gent's return in October (probably 1961) through to autumn the following year, by which time Lena is pregnant. In the Tirana of this time Kadare's Trojan Horse takes the form of an abandoned van lying on the outskirts of the city, dilapidated but still intact, raised above the damp ground on four short piles. In the light of day it stands out clearly, but when night falls it seems to move, disappearing into the night and fog:

When night or fog fell onto the plain, its contours became blurred and it disappeared from view as if it had never existed. This was particularly the case towards the end of October [...] it wasn't long ago that it was visible and no-one, to begin with, could say where it had arisen from or who had put it there. (*The Monster* 7)

Lena's jilted fiance, Max, bridges both worlds, contemporary Tirana and the inside of the Wooden Horse, linking the two stories, the ordinary and the extraordinary. He collects weapons capable of causing

appalling wounds. At the time of their engagement he told Lena that he would kill her if she were ever unfaithful to him, and now he plans to murder her and Gent one warm summer night. The historical-mythological parallel for the revenge of Max/Menelaus is set up early in the novel. “He told me clearly that if I’m unfaithful to him, he will kill me with one of those terrible ancient weapons which he has there” (*The Monster* 17), Lena tells Gent shortly after they meet.

On the anniversary of Lenin’s birthday on 23 April 1960, the Politburo candidate member Ramiz Alia delivers a speech critical of Yugoslav revisionism. The Trojan Horse features in Alia’s speech as the stock image of ideological revisionism and inner decay: The revisionists seek to infiltrate the countries of socialism, he wrote,

like the Trojan Horse [...] in order to undermine them from within and ... to overthrow the Marxist-Leninist parties and the peoples’ democratic regimes. Above all, at present, when one can perceive symptoms of a detente in international relations, the danger of revisionism, of dissemination of illusions on the question of building socialism, on the class struggle, and on the problems of peace, becomes greater [...] (Vickers & James, *Albania* 158)

In *The Monster* Gent returns at the time of the break with Moscow to a country bombarded with warnings against revisionism, the internal enemy and the danger of infiltration:

A short time later, it was announced officially that the students would not be returning. Along with the cold and rain of autumn, relations among the countries of the socialist bloc became colder and colder. And while the tense relations were not mentioned at all in the radio or the press, it was well-known by now what the situation was. The rumour-mills were gathering steam: capture from within of the socialist citadel, vigilance towards the new Trojan Horse standing out on the horizon. (*The Monster* 16)

Khrushchev's post-Stalinist revisionism is the Trojan Horse of an imperialist power at once cajoling and threatening Albania should the country not acquiesce to the new Soviet version of communist doctrine. A film of the sacking of Troy has been playing and the image of the horse outside the gates occupies the popular imagination. At a picnic the change in social relations becomes palpable as the image of the van enters people's consciousness:

For a good while its presence went unnoticed, but one spring day, in the course of a picnic, some people voiced the suspicion that the abandoned van was harbouring characters with subversive motivations. (*The Monster* 7-8)

Apparatuses appear overnight, jamming foreign broadcasts. Even those who earlier dismissed the rumours and fears now are incredulous to hear them questioned. Gent notices things that he never noticed before and revising his letter to Lena at the end of chapter two in the novel, he crosses out the words, “big abandoned van” in favour of “large Wooden Horse” (*The Monster* 56).

“You see”, he said to her as they were listening to the radio or reading verses touching on these themes in some literary journal or other. We are not the only ones to mention the history of Troy. (*The Monster* 16)

In a cafe a loud-speaker carries reports of political tensions, recriminations, and threats of war. An advertisement for a chess championship, strongly associated with the Soviet Union merges, via the image of the horse-headed playing piece, the Knight, on the advertising poster, with the wooden horse of Troy:

In a building near the post-office, a chess championship was taking place. In front a huge poster had been put on

display, with the silhouette of a sort of horse in the background. (*The Monster* 30)

Walking home, Lena looks for the imaginary Trojan Horse and in the dialogue gives expression to the extent to which the story of the Trojan Horse, Gent's doctoral thesis on Troy, the contemporary environment of *entente* between Albania and the Soviet Union, and her own fear of Max's revenge flow together in her consciousness:

“Do you know” “what I was looking for,” she said after a moment's pause. “Your, wooden horse.” [...] “Look, over there on the right. You can make out an isolated black spot. Maybe that's it?” “Perhaps,” said Gent. “Yesterday at university they were talking openly about the split in the communist camp. By the way, how is your doctoral thesis coming along?” [...] “Sometimes I seriously think: if the Horse of Troy were to appear one day on the outskirts of the city, in . . . I wanted to say in the flesh,” she exclaimed, laughing. “Made of planks and nails, just like it used to be.” “It amounts to the same thing.” “Ever since you spoke to me about your notes, I have often asked myself: what if the Horse were to appear one day and my ex-fiance were

to be found there dressed in his coat of mail?" (*The Monster* 84)

With each repetition, the motif of the Trojan Horse becomes more deeply fixed in the consciousness of the protagonists. Lena in particular projects the fear of Max into images of threat from outside. And Gent, working on his doctoral thesis on the fall of Troy, muses on the political context of the Horse, the gift of the Soviet Union, which is poised to strike at the heart of the Albanian state. The message of the novel could, perhaps, be taken as a confirmation of the regime's fears. Albania is a small isolated and besieged Troy against which the imperialist Greeks (Soviet Union) are waging war as a coalition of states bound by a single, pan-Hellenic (pan-Slav) ideology. However, where the enemies of the regime are clearly identified as the agents of the Soviet Union, the novel explores the social consequences of the creation of an environment of fear and suspicion: "everyone feels threatened in one way or another, sometimes without knowing quite by what" (*The Monster* 68).

Lena becomes the mouthpiece for the thought which lies at the heart of the novel and which puts the whole edifice of the political analogy into doubt, namely the possibility that the Horse is not the product of Soviet interference, but is an internal tactic of intimidation and control exercised by the Albanian regime:

Suddenly she looked at him [...] “And what if there was nothing true in all of that?” she said in an icy voice.

“What? Nothing true in what?” “Everything around us: the Wooden Horse, the tension, the growing dangers. If all that were nothing but fabrication?” “Fabrication by whom?” “I don’t know. I don’t really know anything. Maybe I’m just talking nonsense.” (*The Monster* 94)

Lena’s fear that the monster is not a threat from outside, but is the product of internal political machinations, suggests a sinister state of affairs. In this closed political environment it is difficult for the individual to know what is true and what is false. Everything seems nebulous, cloudy, and capable of sudden change. Are the threats from outside and the fears of subversion from within genuine or have they been created as a means of internal control?

The sudden environment of the six men in the Horse is shot through with ambiguity. It is at once the draughty abandoned van, a run-down Tirana ministry building and the “ancient” Horse of Troy. The agents inside represent a broad spectrum of the people -Lena’s fiancé (Max), an ordinary white-collar worker (Robert), an Illyrian (Acamante), a foreigner from a socialist country (Milosz), and a figure of European literature from Homer to Kafka (Ulysse K.). Their

commander is the sinister Builder, responsible for the construction of the Horse:

The builder began to evoke the dank, dark hours over the course of which the horse was built, the men who transported and nailed the planks and the beams of fir, while he directed the works in the chaos of that night. He described the beginning of the day and how, in the icy half-light, the Horse rose up, majestic and formidable, before hundreds of eyes bulging with fear. (*The Monster* 103)

His men are at once Greek infiltrators, Albanian bureaucrats, and revisionist spies. This ambiguity persists throughout. They are both subversives hiding in the wooden horse dreaming of rape and pillage, and frustrated office workers and functionaries chafing with the boredom of their everyday life:

“Do you want a bite to eat?” asked Milosh. “No, thanks. I had a snack in a grill.” [...] “Talk to me about women,” said a mellow voice. “Are there any good sorts knocking around on the streets?” (*The Monster* 30)

Inside the Horse agents await the day when the gates of the city will be opened, the van brought inside and they will finally emerge to

wreak havoc and destruction. They are cold, sick, bored, and morose with their millennial wait for the gates to be opened, and the longer they wait, the more lurid become the fantasies of murder, rape, and destruction with which they entertain themselves. The anticipated entry and destruction of the city and the atrocities that follow are related with sadistic relish. The Trojan weakening of defenses in ancient legend is reiterated in modern form as the Albanians cut their power-lines in order to allow the entry of the horse, and the sacking and plundering of the city echoes that of Troy, as a latter-day Hector is abused and butchered and Helen is hunted down:

Their hands and faces covered in blood, they ran down alongside the stadium, dragging a man by the arms and the hair. The man was struggling to escape, but with each-of his attempts, they struck him with pieces of broken beer-bottle. They must have broken the bottle for that purpose, each of them arming himself with a piece. [...] On the steps of the main university building the Builder saw Max dragging someone by the hair. With one hand, he held aloft his ancient lance, while with the other hand he grasped a gleaming tuft of coppery-blond hair. "He's found Helene," the Builder said to himself. "Pity that he

will have to dirty such beautiful hair with blood.” (*The Monster* 132-134)

The description of the sexual cruelty, generated by Max’s desire for revenge, is terrifying:

“I could do it in April, on a balmy clear moonlit night,”  
Max replied darkly. “I would wait, I know that a night like this will come, when the two of them, forgetting all precautions, leave the city and go for a walk on the empty plain which belongs to everyone. Then I’ll grasp my ancient lance and I’ll go softly, softly along the ground. I’ll find them, maybe nestling in each others’ arms, lying on the grass in springtime, drunk on love and the scents of the plain. [...] You don’t know, Acamante, what horrible wounds an ancient lance of this type can cause. [...] An enormous red wound with lacerations around its edges caused when the metal blade is withdrawn. [...] A wound which leaves our contemporaries terrified.” (*The Monster* 34 -35)

It is the figure of the Builder, however, who represents the most dangerous political aspect of this novel. He is the archetypal creator of political weaponry and the architect of power and control. Friendship,

subversion, infiltration, penetration, and violent aggression are his strategies, not his ends. He does not revel in the violence for its own sake and he is oblivious to the opportunities for plunder. Satisfied with the outcome of his work, the intellectual returns to the Horse, leaving his lieutenants to finish the job. Already the refugees are fleeing the city, their appearance unchanged since millennia:

Having almost reached the amphitheatre, he saw the first group of refugees pouring down a narrow street like a wild torrent. They were, for the most part, women holding infants close to their bosom and old people walking with difficulty; here and there among them some middle-aged men. One of them, wounded in the face, carried his old father in his arms. Their faces were ravaged by fire. Clearly they had just escaped the flames and the bullets and now they were trying to flee the city in all haste. [...]

Some held in their hands tiny statuettes which at one moment looked like the gods of the hearth and at the next like little busts of Marx. (*The Monster* 136-137)

The Builder quickly tires of the torture, rape, and theft. He leaves that to his underlings whose horizons extend only to ruthless brutality. He returns to the quiet of the Horse to savor victory in the abstract. He

uncannily mimics the gestures of a dictator and Kadare suggests the ways in which dictatorial control feeds on personal motives, utilizing and manipulating individual energies, creating victims and perpetrators, rewarding and punishing in the cause of an overriding political aim. The single-mindedness of the Builder is the most threatening aspect of the story, for it harnesses the fears, desires, and capabilities of disparate individuals, making one of many. The Builder is the first of Kadare's Hoxha figures, the engineers of human souls whose demagogic paternalism masques the Builder's megalomania. His long monologue in the middle of the novel is a study of the deformation of the dictatorial mind:

Whenever the need made itself felt, my Horse would appear suddenly on the horizon of rebellious peoples or cities. It weighed on and spread its shadow over their consciousness, perpetually evoking doubt, arousing fear and terror. No barbarous horde, epidemic of plague or dictatorship could turn out to be as effective as this. [...] It could reveal itself in any form whatsoever, and just as easily disappear without leaving any trace. [...] "In this world in which it seemed that all the possibilities of misfortune had already been invented, I had created a new

terror, more comprehensive than any other: political  
terror.” (*The Monster* 104-105)

A form of gloss on the political story is woven into the novel through excerpts from Gent’s speculative notes in preparation for his doctoral thesis on the fall of Troy, and in fragments of a novel about Lena and himself which appear in italics alongside the events on which they are based. Chapters ten and twelve each of which bears a subtitle, form a sequence in which the fall of Troy is retold from the Trojan perspective. One strand of the narrative follows Helena back to Sparta and her everyday married life with Menelaus, suggesting the life that Lena would have led with Max, contented and superior in his knowledge of having conquered and survived. Another strand explores the fate of the Trojan high priest, Laocoon, after the sack of the city. Sensing danger, Laocoon warned the Trojan ruler, Priam, against opening the gates for the Greek gift. However, in a scenario reminiscent of Hoxha’s court politics, he falls into disfavour and is purged. In Gent’s dissertation, he is the image of the intellectual in a dictatorship, warned against telling the truth to power and executed for doing so:

That afternoon at the meeting of the Council, I had the  
impression that everyone was aware of my meeting with  
the king. The looks of my enemies were more piercing

than ever. [...] was accused of being an enemy of peace and therefore a cause of the sufferings endured by the Trojans, etc. They called for my resignation. But that's the least that they have demanded. I have the impression that they will insist on more yet. Maybe my appearance before some tribunal or other. Prison, then; after that my death- why not? (*The Monster* 158-159)

The forgotten Trojan bard, Thremoh, Gent's anagram for the Trojan Homer, escapes the destruction, seeks exile in Hittite lands, and writes the Trojan version of the siege and the fall of Troy. However, his version, even in its written form on the new cuneiform tablets of his superior host civilization, is treated with incomprehension and suspicion in his new homeland. Laocoon comforts himself with the thought that at least Thremoh will have preserved the truth about the siege of Troy, that artistic truth will have been preserved even when the city and the minutes of the meetings of the ruling house and the records of its political decisions will have been destroyed by fire and the rampages of the invading Greeks. However Thremoh among the Hittites is the archetypal writer in exile, treated with distrust by a people who do not understand his language or his motives. The Thremoh episode tells the story of the lost literature of history. The narratives of the conquered are

not heard: their poets in exile lose the living language and are no longer able to put experience into poetry, and the fate of those few fragments that are preserved is to disappear among the detritus of history. The living word of the bard is consigned to the unfreedom of the cuneiform tablet, and the organic link between literature and life is broken. Political conflict, symbolized in the siege of Troy, ends the organic, chthonic, and communal act of literary remembering. The oral, bardic aspect dies. The act of writing and of the creation of the literary and historical record takes its place. However, its existence is not ensured. In exile Thremroh is unable to complete his mission-to save Troy in words. The clay tablets are lost in the decline of the Hittite empire and end up as the paving of a courtyard. Shattered by the hooves of Tamerlane's army, they finally disappear beneath the desert sands. Archaeologists have found one fragment, on which the last half of the fourth line alone is preserved: "Perhaps you will weep, Troy, but it will be too late, forever too late" (*The Monster* 173). The disillusioned and embittered poet dies in exile and his work is lost in the steppes of Central Asia.

This theme, of the writer's exile and loss, preoccupied Kadare and goes some way to confirming his claim in *The Weight of the Cross* (1991) that he considered seeking exile in Czechoslovakia (at that stage the most progressive of the socialist states in terms of its oppositional

subculture) as early as 1962. Thremoh's flight to the Hittites reflects Kadare's fear that he would be submerged and disappear in the Soviet environment and that his language and its literature would be lost. This fear underwrote his return to Albania. Albanian culture had survived against so many odds. He must continue to contribute to the vitality of his country which had survived partly in its poetry and song. It would be his role to commit that identity to writing, just as Thremoh had done. But the task must be carried out in Albania, drawing on the creative nourishment of his language and culture in spite of political repression. Kadare's romantic nationalism has accompanied him throughout his writing life, and this early theme of writing and cultural loss would be elaborated in detail in the literary essay "Aeschylus or the Great Loser" (1985) after Hoxha's death and in the final years of the regime.

At the end of *The Monster* the Horse turns back into an abandoned van and appears nothing more than a harmless wreck. Some picnickers throw empty bottles at it. But the threat has not completely dissipated. Shortly afterwards a pair of lovers are found dead, grotesquely mutilated in a spot that was favoured by Gent and Lena. The girl is platinum blond, like Lena. But she is someone else, and Gent continues his academic career unharmed. The romantic idyll ends with the promise of Lena's pregnancy, foreshadowing an uneventful life of love, marriage,

children, and contentment in a featureless, a historical present. The political novel ends with terror in the image of Gent as Laocoon. In a surreal final configuration he finds himself alone on the immense expanse of the plain, awaiting the emergence from the mud of the massive snakes which will punish him for his provocation of the gods,

Dragging themselves through the mud, they advance towards him. He has the feeling of being turned to stone on the spot, transformed into a marble statue, in the image of Laocoon... (*The Monster* 218)

As Laocoon, his face gashed by monstrous fangs, he stands there, mouth open wide to tell of the terrible events, but he cannot speak. Laocoon would become a European icon of the representation of suffering in art as he is strangled by sea serpents sent by the gods. The ancient sculpture, subject of debate in Western aesthetics since Johann Joachim Winckelmann and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (Nisbet, *German* 25) regarding the relationship of art to truth and of aesthetic expression to human suffering, continues to say the unsayable to masses of Western tourists incapable of understanding the obvious:

He is to be found in the museum, in the Louvre in London and in Madrid, surrounded by innumerable tourists and passers-by. [...] The people point out to each other the

gashes to his face left by the monsters. He wants to open his mouth to tell the facts of how they happened, but the marble of which he is made prevents him. (*The Monster* 218)

Victim of a vicious regime, flailing and uttering cries of terror and pain, the writer is rendered at once visible and inaudible. He becomes the aesthetic image of the problem, as the mouth which cannot speak and the body which cannot move as it is punished by the serpents of the gods. Unable to enunciate what has happened to him, he must rely on himself as the image of the regime, the material which exposes itself in order to expose the evils of its political environment, Laocoon is the intellectual in an oppressive arid physically threatening regime, whose body is hostage to his art. He is at once cut off from the world and the object of the world's attention. Laocoon is the image of the writer in Stalinist Eastern Europe. Object of the world's gaze, yet unable to articulate his situation, he can do no more than show himself, in the hope that the aesthetic sphere can generate understanding where the political sphere has failed.

Only the writer and intellectual, Gent, is able to make something constructive of the abandoned van. Kadare thus begins to tell the story of the education of the writer. In the changing image of the Horse he

finds the material of his political self-education, seeing its effect on himself and his loved one, observing the ways in which it skews public and private communication. Gent's notes represent an extended, quasi-fictional musing on the workings of fear in the dictatorship. The strange, surreal texture mirrors the workings of the creative writer's mind, enabling Kadare to articulate the process of becoming for a writer in an environment in which political terror infiltrates the consciousness of individuals and the public sphere alike:

The event (the fall of Troy) is situated both in the future and the past of the characters. Sometimes they remain immutable while Troy transforms itself beneath their eyes, changing form to become a modern city with cafes and an airport, etc. At other times it is the city which freezes, however, while the characters change, passing through different eras until they turn into characters from our time.

(Kadare, *Dialogue me* 100)

The transformation of the Horse of Troy into an allegory of political terror over history allows Kadare to explore aspects of consciousness and culture in the dictatorial state. The Horse moves ominously through time and space, materializing and disappearing in response to the fears, dreams, and nightmares of the protagonists, past

and present. It comes to represent not the threat from outside but the fears from within, its transformations following the contours of the characters. The threat from outside generates a new dynamic of power and intimidation inside the polity. Factions become increasingly powerful in the new situation. Dissent and dissension are ruthlessly persecuted until the threat on the horizon appears mysteriously within the walls. Spies and infiltrators are blamed for opening the gates, but in fact the monster was always on the inside. *The Monster* marks a new awareness in the writer of the dynamics of the monopoly of power. If Kadare uses the Trojan Horse as a metaphor of (Soviet) revisionism, he does so in such a way as to explore the workings of political threat and terror rather than to advocate the anti-Soviet policies of the regime. It is not the external, but rather the internal enemy which is identified in the ubiquitous image of the Trojan Horse. In the environment of Albanian ideological purism and isolationism Kadare focuses on the metaphor of the Horse itself, the primal image of political power and moral guilt. Kadare reveals not the danger from outside, but the workings of the siege mentality and the ways in which fear can be manipulated:

I had more or less accomplished that slope in 1965 when, with the image of the Trojan Horse, I placed the accent on state terror and the distress it causes rather than on the idea

of betrayal from within, the main obsession of the communists. I imagined the Horse on the horizon of our lives as a form of pressure applied relentlessly over years ... (Kadare, *Dialogue me* 101)

Brilliant imaginative riffs give the novel its power: the surreal transformations of the Horse, the doubling of identities of those within the Horse with those on the outside, and the historical digressions—the story of Menelaus and Helena back at home in Sparta after the war, and the fate of Thremroh, the Trojan Homer, in exile, and the depiction of life inside the Horse as everyday life in the dictatorship, a dreary succession of ordinary days of waiting fuelled by lurid fantasies of rape, pillage, and destruction. The idyllic love story, too, has a personal element, reflecting the role of Kadare’s wife Helena in his creative life. Helena had written to the writer in Moscow, introducing herself as a school-student and admirer of his work, and subtly reproaching him for his absence. As a novel, however, *The Monster* is, perhaps, less than the sum of its parts.

Idyllic, unchanging communist Albania turns out to be built on political terror. Kadare writes that he was disappointed with the reception of the novel, which was prohibited from publication. However even in the still relatively free context of the early 1960s, before the

crackdown of the cultural revolution, it is remarkable that it was published at all in 1965 even shortened, in a literary journal such as *Nentori* with limited exposure. The text of *The Monster* published in French in 1991 is a translation of the edition published in Albanian in Tirana in 1990 shortly before the fall of the regime. Powerful protective forces were clearly still at work. The dictator knew that he had a writer of outstanding promise within his grasp and Kadare's period of grace was not yet exhausted.

The cool reception of *The General of the Dead Army* and the prohibition of *The Monster* came as a shock to the successful young writer whose ambitions had been fired by the dictator's intervention on his behalf in 1961. The poem "Laocoon" (1967) gives expression to Kadare's sense of having fallen from favour. The high priest of Apollo is shunned by Priam and the dominant court faction after advising the king not to allow the Wooden Horse inside the gates of Troy. The dissenting priest tells the truth about his city and its factions, and the king's decision to ignore him will have fatal consequences for the greater community. This conflict represents the beginning of the struggle over the voice of Albania that began in the early 1960s, which would occupy the dictator and the writer for the following decades, and

it took on personal qualities unique in the history of the European socialist dictatorships.

*The General* and *The Monster* were products of the prosperity of the 1950s and the thaw of the early 1960s. The situation changed dramatically in the mid 1960s. In the new environment of frost, artists, writers, and intellectuals were in danger if they stepped out of line. The situation of intellectuals in Albania at this time was comparable to the Soviet Union of the late 1930s, with many persecuted, imprisoned, sent to labour camps, tortured, shot, or otherwise killed during interrogation. Until 1968 writes Kadare, he treated the machinery of political control and intimidation with contempt. Indeed, part of his success lay in not taking the regime seriously:

At that time I didn't fear anything. Enchanted by literature and my writer's office, I found the world around me dull. The dictatorship, the Party, its leader, their speeches, the toadying, the threats, the outcries: I didn't take any of them seriously, not did I consider them anything other than vulgar rubbish. (Kadare, *Albanian Spring* 98)

Stalin had been dead for fifteen years and the likes of the Soviet terror would not occur in Albania. His first experiences of the cold wind of political frost were about to take place. Kadare realized that he

too could fall further when he was sent along with other writers to the country to learn about life alongside the peasants and workers:

In the countries of the East, there are two sorts of fear: the one, terrible, incurable; the other banal, temporary. The latter form takes hold of you under clear circumstances and for definite reasons and it can let go of you in just the same way. The former, on the other hand, the incurable form, could not be more specific. It crept its way in through mysterious pathways, one of which was the cult of the dictator. In the subterranean passages of conscience, that adoration began to ferment, gradually turning into fear. Then the opposite process occurred: the fear transformed itself into adoration and thus by turns each engendered the other. (Kadare, *Dialogue me* 132)

Kadare was sent away from Tirana to the country to dip his hands in the mud. In fact, he writes, he continued to work as cultural correspondent for the review *Drita* during this period in the southern town of Berat from 1966 to 1968. He alludes to the model of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, but the experience seems to have been more comparable to the East German programme of the “Bitterfeld Way” of learning from and working side-by-side with the proletariat,

than to Chinese re-education through ruthless physical humiliation and degradation (Guppy, "Poet of Freedom" 201). Kadare was not subjected to the abuse that characterized the treatment of the Chinese intellectuals and party officials. The punishment was minor, but the point was clear. Along with the official prohibition of *The Monster*, it was an unaccustomed snub for the young author. The banishment from his beloved Tirana constituted a warning not to overstep the boundaries. The experience of Berat and the frost of the late 1960s opened Kadare's eyes to the personal effects of the terror he had imagined in *The Monster*. In 1968 he experienced for the first time a self-criticism, and witnessed the humiliation of his friend, the naturalist writer Dhimiter Xhuvani. In 1969 two dramatists were imprisoned for eight years each for incurring Hoxha's displeasure with a play which won a national prize. Kadare realized in 1967 that he would have to toe the line, and he became a member of the Union of Writers, and thence a professional full-time writer drawing a state salary, in 1969. These were ceremonial roles, which he was not at liberty to refuse without serious consequences, and they were necessary for his continued existence in Tirana. By the second half of the decade the contradictions of Kadare's existence had come out into the open. The works of these years hold the key to Kadare's development as the conflict between modernization,

tradition, ethno-national identity, and socialism become more pronounced under the force of the dictator's gaze. Success and compromise had become irreconcilable with literary imagination and existential authenticity.

On 7 February 1967 Enver Hoxha urged his people to hurl the remnants of the past into the flames of the revolution. Complaints had often been made that Kadare ignored the workers and the factories, preferring to confine his focus to the Tirana intelligentsia and to subjectivist, formalistic experimentation. In his novel, *The Wedding* (1967), he sends his writers out to the country, a crew from the New Albania Film Studio shoots a documentary on backward customs and religious superstitions, and the newly constructed textile mill is named after Mao Tse-tung.

The experience of political frost in Berat was the main motive for the reworking of the 1961 story, "Strange Wedding," into the novel, *The Drum-Skin*, which was serialized in *Nentori* in 1967 and appeared in book-form in the following year, renamed *The Wedding*. This work was partly written in Berat where Kadare was sent to work with the people and engage with everyday socio-political reality as cultural correspondent for the review *Drita*. It was substantially rewritten and shortened for republication in 1981 in Fayard Publications.

It is sadly ironic that the fear which Kadare had portrayed so audaciously in *The Monster* manifests itself as a motive force in the writer's reworking of "Strange Wedding," marking the end of Kadare's contented period under the dictatorship. In *The Wedding* we can see the effect of political constraint on a writer who was well-disposed to modernization, but for whom the duress of the socialist regime generates tension and resentment. The Albanian cultural revolution appears to have achieved its aim. Despite Kadare's acquiescence in the demand that he produce an Albanian form of socialist realism, however, a powerful tension nevertheless survives in this story between the old and the new. The rediscovery of the old is surcharged with resentment at the failure of the new. The work does not represent a complete capitulation to the demands of the regime.

With reference to both the legend of Rozafat and to Andric's *Bridge over the Drina* Kadare takes the classic Balkan theme of the disruption of traditional identities through modernization, in this case transport and communication. A socialist construction crew turns at a station without a name where there was once a religious shrine, destroyed presumably as a result of official atheism and the new cultural revolutionary policies, in order to extend the railway line. But one morning they discover that their work has been sabotaged. An official

report traces the damage back to the drunken antics of guests at a wedding celebration which has just taken place (hence the early title, *The Drum-Skin*, referring to the traditional goatskin drum beaten at the wedding ceremony). Katrina, a liberated village girl, is marrying her sweetheart, the socialist hero, Xhavid, against her father's wishes. She has been betrothed to another since the childhood. But, after that she has been liberated by socialist education and work. It turns out that it is the father together with the jilted betrothed villager and the go-between who damage the railway tracks as an act of revenge. The case arouses national interest in the newspapers and a writer and a newspaper reporter arrive to cover the story. The reporter, sent from Tirana to cover the facts, completes his piece as demanded by his editor.

“I must write something about the builders, about the work which is going here. That is what we planned at the Editorial Board.” “Isn't it the same thing,” interrupted the writer, “Aren't these the builders, the heroes of labour, fitters, plumbers, carpenters? Here you have them all, sitting at tables, dancing, drinking”. (*The Wedding* 14)

The pair disagree over the change in writing. For the cynical reporter the essence remains the same while the form changes, whereas for the writer “it is precisely the essence that changes while the form

remains more or less the same” (*The Wedding* 12). This discussion appears to give support to the writer’s belief in the possibility of the new man of socialism. However, all is not quite what it seems, for the writer’s deeper probing of the essence of Albanian life reveals a human texture which the reporter ignores. “We wait for things to ‘crystallize,’” continued the writer, we keep a certain distance from events. That is why there is more mould than living things in our books” (*The Wedding* 14). Their interchange raises the issue of the role of literature in socialism as the writer justifies the new line of the cultural revolution:

“The writer’s face must be scorched by the breath of time just like that of a stoker feeding coal to the furnace at the metallurgic plant.” “That’s right! But you have accustomed your readers to bad habits, too” the newspaperman remarked. “For instance, if you were to include these remarks we are making at this wedding party in your novels, I can imagine some reader biting his lips. I am sure these things would look to him like “reportage” rather than “a novel” because by reading bad books he is used to separating real life from books.” (*The Wedding* 15-16)

Kadare uses stock motifs calculated to please the powers that be: the village girl liberated by socialist education and work from an arranged marriage and life of servitude; the heroic factory workers, one of whom becomes a martyr in an industrial accident; the drunken, Westernized, lay about son of a powerful minister who discovers socialism and becomes a hero of labour on the provincial factory floor; the degraded and corrupted dervishes, the foolish and intellectually sloppy Tirana intellectual from the Folklore Institute; the hard-nosed but well-meaning newspaper reporter who sees everything in black-and-white ideological terms. However even in this most conciliatory novel of socialist realism, Kadare's evocation of the depth, complexity and tragedy of Albanian traditional life contrasts with the superficiality of his positive heroes and heroines.

The reporter returns to Tirana, satisfied that he has covered the facts and hence the truth. Noting to himself that the bride's family is not present and that only her father turns up alone, the writer remains to find out what the truth of the matter is. In Katrina's father, the simple mountaineer, the writer recognizes a depth of character absent in the ideal figures of modernity. "His long and weather-beaten face looked like a wood carving which had stood out in the sun for a long time and had been worked on by the wind and rain" (*The Wedding* 21). The old

man, father of the bride, cannot forget the events of his own ill-starred wedding. “All this wedding party seemed more like a funeral to him and his thoughts turned to his own distant wedding nearly half a century ago [...] it was rumoured that a sorcerer had cast a spell on their way” (*The Wedding* 25-26). At his wedding an argument broke out between his older brother and a drunken guest, leaving the brother dead and the new bridegroom obliged to kill in turn in accordance with the law of the Kanun:

“He has had his dramas too,” observed the writer. “You know me, I’m not a sentimentalist; but all the same his situation touches a cord in me. It is hard for a man of the mountains to break with the Kanun. Sometimes, to tell the truth, it’s difficult to tell where the mountains finish and the Kanun begins.” (*The Wedding* 69)

Nor, however, is the situation of the young woman oversimplified. At the intervention of her Party comrades, her father allowed her to work on the railway, but only on the condition that she return to be married to her betrothed. Katrina’s inner monologue reveals the problems of women in traditional rural Albania. Her anger at the go-between, rather than at her father or her betrothed, is intensified in the image of the snake:

He wants to deprive me of the beautiful highways, cities, the sea, the trains and my companion. In compensation for all these he wants to give me a half-lit nook and the solitude of subjugation to a forty-year-old man I have never seen. He wants to deprive me of -my bobbed hair, clean underwear, wall bulletins, books and songs, and in their place to give me a black kettle, a lash rope to haul firewood, filth, and beatings. He wants to snatch away socialism from me. [...] hear the hiss of the serpent. It looks for a crack through which it can strike. He approaches then sneaks away again. I used to be frightened by his shadow, by the lump on his neck, by his carbine.

*(The Wedding 178-79)*

The other privileged themes of socialist realism-of labour, the positive hero and the creation of the classless society-are treated perfunctorily. The representation of the degraded dervishes drinking alcohol and enticing young girls for sex at the holy shrine does the writer little credit, regardless of whether it arose from his dislike of religion or from the need to appease the regime's new strictures against religion:

The writer puffed on his cigarette. “There is no end to outrages like these committed in churches and monasteries!” he ruminated to himself. “At times I feel like getting up here and telling my whole story to arouse the indignation of all these workers who would certainly set fire to the monastery.” (*The Wedding* 64)

Using imagery suggesting the symbolic identification of Enver Hoxha with the mountainous backbone of the country, the writer speaks of the changes taking place throughout the land:

“Albania is being shaken up” said the writer. “The mountains are squaring their shoulders. You know what that means? The mountains want to shake off the Canon, old prejudices and superstitions from their backs. This requires a gigantic effort. The Canon is tough and nearly as old as the mountains. At times one can’t tell where the mountain ends and the Canon begins. ... Nevertheless the impossible is happening. Imagine what colossal force the revolution has wakened.” (*The Wedding* 57)

In the important speech which laid down the lines of the new cultural policy, “Literature and the Arts Should Serve to Temper People with Class Consciousness for the Construction of Socialism,” Enver

Hoxha made reference to the ancient Albanian legend of Rozafat. The modern workers of Albania, he announced, “have laid down their lives while working to build the dams just as in our beautiful legends about the building of bridges and castles” (Hoxha, “Literature”). Kadare uses his alter ego, the writer, to build the leader’s reference to the Rozafat legend into his story:

“A little while ago one of the old men sitting at the small table said that this new town demands a sacrifice.” [...] “It demands that life in this new town should begin with death.” “Why?” “Because it is a legend. It respects no projects and plan and technical laws. It respects only obscurity which has given birth to it”. As he spoke he realised that he was steadily plunging into the past. [...] he saw thousands of young wives taking the road uphill or along river banks where walls to surround castles and bridges to span rivers were being built; and all those young wives were carrying in their hands the dinners for their husbands who were building these walls and these bridges. Which one of them is Rozafat who will be buried alive in the foundations of the Shkodra castle? (*The Wedding* 170)

Rozafat becomes for Kadare a trope of the sacrifice and suffering of individuals for the progress of the society. It is an early version of the tragedy of modernization. He would use it as the centerpiece for his later historical novel, *The Three-Arched Bridge* (1978). The old man represents the continuities of tragic consciousness between past and present which the leader alluded to in his speech, but which socialism must break if it is to succeed. The point of socialist realism, in the positive figures of the novel, such as Katrina and Xhavid, is precisely to break this link between past and present. The old man pays no heed to the ubiquitous Party slogans. The comedy of socialism does not register in his tragic consciousness:

The foundations of castles and bridges stretch far and wide through the edifices of centuries. Today, in our time, they extend far and wide in the buildings of the worksites. They lie sheathed in scaffolding, blocks of concrete, under cranes, motor pumps, and deep down there the legend is breathing its last. It demands nourishment. It is famished. After hundreds of years, its call is almost inaudible, yet every one of us occasionally hears its echo as we hear the rain while we sleep. Why does one lose one's balance when walking over the narrow board across an open

foundation? Because of the call of the legend. “Come down!” it cries. Its voice is faint, even inaudible.

Nevertheless, you feel its pull, and at the danger you hurry to regain your balance and not tumble into the pit below.

*(The Wedding 170-71)*

In the construction projects of socialism he sees the reiteration of the sacrifice of Rozafat - but in a way very different from that envisaged by the leader whose passing reference was to a heroic positivity. The powerful chthonic pull of legend belongs to Enver Hoxha’s past, not to the present. He had established the Institute of Folklore in 1960 and placed folklore specialists throughout the towns precisely in order to consign this material to the past, rendering it a dead, fossilized museum culture, not a part of the fabric of modern life. Kadare sees things differently even in this most socialist realist of his works. In the representation of the wedding dances the author replays the tragic history of Albania and reinforces the theme of Albanian traditional life:

It occurred to him [the writer] that these movements of feet and hands are the most ancient alphabet the people have created and interpreted. This living circle has gathered into a white skein all the long threads of boredom and their sudden breaks, all the fathomless grief and gleams of

unrestrained gaiety. From what depths of a nation's soul does all this turmoil spring and to what depths does it return? . . . "What is the use of the books I have read if I am not able to read these dances properly?" S.K. thought to himself. (*The Wedding* 165)

In the Rozafat legend and in the wedding ceremony the positive and the negative aspects of social progress are rendered irrelevant by the force of ethnic identity. This episode is comparable to the ending of *The General* and to Marc-Alem's discovery of his ethnicity in *The Palace of Dreams*. Albanian ethnicity is represented as a chthonic force of the collective imaginary against the ethos of socialism evoked in Katrina and Xhavid. The earlier discussion of the nature of historical change is brought to mind as the old man sinks back into the past, and as the wedding guests participate in the ancient language of dance. No further conclusions are drawn. The question remains open, however, whether a political system that does not come to terms with this deep-lying force in its attempts to move forward beyond primitive social practices is likely to succeed.

At daybreak the wedding guests repair the damaged rails and the novel ends with an image of victorious socialist modernity as the train arrives and leaves again with only six minutes' delay. Nevertheless, the

references to the Rozafat legend and the powerful sense of ethnicity in the wedding celebrations cannot be denied, even in this most questionable of Kadare's works. *The Wedding* is the only work which Kadare subsequently rejected as compromised by its deference to socialist-realist criteria.

The official critique of the original title was astute. *The Wedding* did indeed foreground the call of traditional ethnicity against socialist modernization. In this work the opposition between past and present, tradition and modernization, *ethnos* and *ethos* emerges. The earlier preoccupation with nepotism and corruption in the Party are rendered secondary as the writer begins to engage at a deeper level with the failings of socialism, namely the destructive potential of political unfreedom. Conflict continues to be expressed between the recognition of the possibilities of communist modernization, of education and the enfranchisement of women on the one hand and the romantic attachment to tradition and traditional cultural values. In *The Wedding* it is the dogmatism, the enforced comradeship and the denial of human nature which come across as unpalatable, not modernization itself which is positively represented in the form of emancipation of women and the liberation from the brutalities of traditional life and the Kanun. The focus is not on the corruption and ideological manipulation of the

system as in *The City without Signs* there is little of the sense of terror of *The Monster* or the grey oppressiveness of *The General of the Dead Army*. However, these early works were written during the thaw *The Wedding* was a product of the frost of the late 1960s.

In the works discussed in this chapter the foundations of Kadare's writing life were laid. In *The City without Signs* we read of post-war youth, liberation from traditional roles, and the blights of careerism, corruption, and the weakness of the Party to ideological manipulation. In *The General of the Dead Army* Kadare recognized the co-existence of two Albanias, the modernizing communist present and the traumatized, silenced past, and suggests the necessity of coming to terms with the past in order for the nation to move beyond the culture of death. *The Monster* uses the language of European surrealism to explore the effects of the isolation of Albania, coming to the classic Central European recognition of the inseparability of politics and the private sphere, as the vocabularies of fear and the foreign merge in the imagination of contemporary Albanians. In *The City* Kadare attacked careerism, bureaucracy, and the dangers of ideology. In *The General* he found a vehicle for his sense of the betrayal of the past in post-war Albania; and in *The Monster* he deepened his perception of the insidious nature of propaganda and the political rhetoric of terror and xenophobia. These

novels are all critical, but do not mark the complete rejection of the program of modernization, although they are powerfully alert to the sinister potentialities of the regime. In *The Wedding*, a product of the new frost and his weakest work, Kadare offers his most propitiatory contribution to the debate about modernity versus tradition. He refers to it as the most schematic of his works, and the least deserving of praise. However, even this work, which represents so strongly the achievements of modernization, improvements in the role of women and in education, the development of civic consciousness, and the progress of the nation, are suffused with a sense of ambivalence. Ancient Balkan themes hover in the background as the offended spirits of the past make their presence felt in an act of sabotage. As in *The General*, the marriage celebration in *The Wedding* becomes an image of traditional Albanian life and of an eternal Albania against which the Albania of communist modernization seems to be an empty and soulless affair.

In these works Kadare reveals himself to be a young writer of imagination and audacity, fresh from Moscow, well disposed towards the modernization of his country but increasingly aware of the negative aspects of communist progress. In all four works there emerges the image of an “other” Albania different from that of the regime. The young writer becomes aware of aspects that he cannot integrate into a

positive, let alone a socialist, realism. The relationships between ideology and power, the rejection of the Albanian past as the “new Albania” and the “new man” are created, and the potential of the regime itself to become the inner monster - these themes cohere during the 1970s into a set of literary ideas which not only express opposition to the regime and its vision of the new Albania, but also penetrate to the heart of the dictatorial system, finding in the writer himself the nemesis of and counter-ego to the dictator.