

## Chapter – IV

### The Palace of Realities

The ethnic unrest in Kosovo deepened Kadare's involvement with questions of ethnicity. In 1975 he had written a study of Albanian epic song traditions in the *Autobiography of the People in Verse* (1971), developing material that he would use in *Winter of Great Solitude and The Palace of Dreams. Doruntine*, written in late 1979, foreshadows his interest in the question of Kosovar-Albanian identity. *The Marriage Procession Turned to Ice* was written in 1981 and with its clear references to the Kosovo crisis was banned before publication. The other work from this year, *The File on H.*, also has strong associations with northern Albania and Kosovo, where the traditions of epic poetry had remained strong. *The File on H.* was published in two editions of the literary journal *Netitori* in 1982, but was prohibited from publication in book form until the late 1980s. *The File on H.*, one of Kadare's best-loved novels, re-enacts the visit of two Irish-American anthropologists to the north of Albania in the 1930s in search of the descendants of Homer to record their epic songs. They are treated with awe and suspicion as foreigners and for attempting to imprison the free poetry of

the land in their tape-recorders. However, the opposite in fact occurs as the Americans themselves are psychologically affected, and one of them begins unconsciously to mimic the behaviour of the traditional rhapsodists by the end of the novel. The power of the Albanian song it seems is such that it pares away gradually the ephemera of modern life, retaining only the essentials, such as happened in the final chapters of the revised version of *Winter of Great Solitude*. Modern gadgetry like the tape-recorder is no match for the eternal verities of the epic.

It is in 1981 that Kadare lobbed his most incendiary piece of writing, *The Palace of Dreams*. Quoting the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, that “those who sleep are alone, those awake are with others”, Kadare uses the collective sleep of the people of the Empire in *The Palace of Dreams* as a satire on and metaphor for existence under the dictatorship (Margaronis, “Palace” 31). Like the other great political novels of the twentieth century, Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon*, or Orwell’s *1984*, it is “world literature”, transcending local and national boundaries to speak directly to an international audience. At one level it is, like *1984*, a satire on totalitarianism. Like Orwell’s Ministry of Truth, the Palace is a powerful state institution in control of the mass unconsciousness of the Empire. At another level it is an analysis of the ways in which power functions within dictatorial regimes. However,

Kadare's novel is more than a satire on the types of control typical of the communist dictatorships. Alongside the political satire runs a second, intricately coded theme of ethnic identity at a time of change in power-relationships in the Empire. In passages reminiscent of the terror evoked in Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Castle*, Kadare creates a modern parable, haunted by the theme of Albanian ethnic identity in the form of ancient bardic songs. This novel represents tensions between ethno-national and imperial identity for an individual and a dynasty whose fate is bound up in both national and supranational politics. Kadare's protagonist, Mark-Alem, is a complex figure, the object of both pity and scorn, who embraces spiritual death before recognizing his Albanian identity. Mark-Alem is Kadare's most powerful expression of the inauthenticity of an existence bereft of ethnic identity. He is a particularly Albanian version of the Central European "man without qualities" (Musil 20), a figure of contempt as an individual even as power and prestige are thrust upon him. Along with *The Palace of Dreams*, *The Shadow* (1985) forms the central part of this chapter. Kadare's political vision at the end of regime is the main focus of this chapter.

*The Palace of Dreams* is set in the "United Ottoman States" ("U.O.S."), an imagined Ottoman Empire late in the last century. The Palace is a vast state organization dedicated to the interpretation of the

dreams of the subjects throughout the length and breadth of the Empire. All dreams are recorded, scrutinized for signs of impending social and political unrest, interpreted and classified. On the basis of the interpretations, policy is formulated by the Sultan and his ministers, and the administration of the Empire is carried out. The most significant dreams are classified as Master-Dreams and carry great weight in the decision-making processes. However, there are also indications that dreams are planted for political purposes, to destabilize the regime or to denounce powerful political players. At the beginning of the novel, Kadare's protagonist, Mark-Alem Quprili, has just commenced working at the Palace of Dreams, first in the selection department and later providing interpretations of potential Master-Dreams. The plot depends on the tension between Mark-Alem's function as an officer of the Sultan, and his position as the youngest son of the Quprilis, an Albanian Ottoman dynasty at a time of political unrest. Warned by his uncle, the Vizier, of the politically sensitive nature of his work at the Palace, Mark-Alem nevertheless fails to identify a crucial Master-Dream, planted by the family's enemies, which will ultimately bring about the downfall of his family. At the same time he discovers in himself a sympathy with the ethnic nationalism of his rebellious uncle, Kurt, and a longing to reclaim his Albanian roots, after listening to a version of the

family's epic sung by foreign bards in contravention of the wishes of the Sultan. His uncle, whose Austrian connections also imply an element of foreign interference at a time when the Slavs and the Habsburgs are competing for influence over the Balkan Peninsula, brings about the denouement of the story through his acts. The Vizier is toppled and the family disgraced, but strangely all is not lost, as Mark-Alem finds himself promoted to more and more powerful positions in the Palace. The novel ends with Mark- Alem torn between his sense of Albanian ethnicity and his blossoming career as a high-ranking functionary of the Sultan's Empire.

The setting is in late nineteenth-century Istanbul. The description of the mosque, the bank, and the clock-tower in the opening pages is strikingly reminiscent of the area around Scanderbeg Square in central Tirana. Various powerful dynasties are jockeying for influence around the Sultan in Istanbul, and in distant provinces peoples are becoming restive. While at one level the historical allegory can be read as a blatant reference to Tirana politics with its Sultan, its clan loyalties and power plays among the factions, at another level the novel is an allegory of South-Eastern Europe caught in the conflict between ethnicity and imperialism. A key to Kadare's vision lies in the recognition that these structures of power and oppression replicate themselves from the minor

and local level of the regional Party to that of the regime and beyond to the level of the nation, the (Balkan) regional and the Soviet bloc. Power is wielded through the politics of inducement, intrusion, and terror, and ethnic identity exists as the repressed substratum of the individual and the social imaginary.

The historical allegory scarcely disguises the political satire; the evocation of Albianity is controversial in the context of Hoxha's particular form of communist nationalism, and the characterization of the protagonist penetrates to the heart of Kadare's existential critique of the dictatorship. Moreover, the writer refers obliquely to Albanian and Balkan history and culture and to relatively little-known Albanian and Bosnian epic traditions in order to represent the conflicts between ethnicity and political power.

Albanians played important roles in the Ottoman ruling classes from the sixteenth century onwards. Kadare makes use of a prominent Albanian clan, the Koprulus. The Larousse entry cited by Kadare in the novel identifies Mehmed (Meth) Pasha Koprulu (1575-1661), Grand Vizier under Sultan Mehmed I who came from a village in Albania to found a dynasty of grand viziers, prime-ministers, admirals and generals, ministers and high-ranking officials in the Ottoman Empire. This Albanian family was notable too for its activity in the defence and

the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, providing generations of leaders in the Ottoman expansion north-westwards and quelling national rebellions in the Balkans, northern Africa, and elsewhere. The historical importance of the family, however, ends in the early eighteenth century.

Mark-Alem is the pampered and protected scion of a ruling caste family of Albanian origins. For generations the Quprili family have served the Sultan as viziers, government officials and bureaucrats of the Empire. The name Quprili, which Mark-Alem inherits through his mother's line, is a translation of the Albanian word *Ura*, meaning "bridge". In the Quprili family chronicle the root word is transliterated in various forms as *qyprija*, or *kurpija*. Despite pressure from the Sultan to use the more acceptable Ottoman transliteration, *Kdprilii*, the family has retained the traditional Albanian spelling, *Quprili*. Only in the Larousse encyclopedia entry have they compromised by allowing the Turkish form to be used. The name itself refers back to the family's original association with "a bridge with three arches in central Albania, constructed in the days when the Albanians were still Christians and built with a man walled up in its foundations" (*Palace 14*). After the bridge was finished, one of the builders and founding ancestor of the family adopted after his first name, *Gjon*, the name of *Ura* (bridge) "together with the stigma of murder attached to it" (*Palace 14*).

The novel begins on Mark-Alem's first day of work at *Tabir Sarrail* or Palace of Dreams. The Palace was originally the *Yildis Sarrail*, dedicated to producing astrological interpretations and counselling the Sultan, but it has been modernized in recent times, and the collection and interpretation of the dreams of the empire reorganized along scientific lines. All dreams are recorded and scrutinized for signs of impending social and political unrest:

The idea behind the Sovereign's creation of the *Tabir* is that Allah looses a forewarning dream on the world as casually as He unleashes a flash of lightning or draws a rainbow or suddenly sends a comet close to us, drawn from the mysterious depths of the Universe. He dispatches a signal to the earth without bothering about where it will land; He is too far away to be concerned with such details. [. . .] the interpretation of that dream, fallen like a stray spark into the brain of one out of millions of sleepers, may help to save the country or its Sovereign from disaster; may help to avert war or plague or to create new ideas. [...]

All that is murky and harmful, or that will become so in a few years or centuries, makes its first appearance in men's dreams. Every passion or wicked thought, every affliction

or crime, every rebellion or catastrophe necessarily casts its shadow long before it manifests itself in real life.

*(Palace 24-25)*

The hierarchy of the Palace of Dreams extends from the Copying rooms and Archives below, to the offices of Selection and Interpretation above. Mark-Alem is soon promoted from his first position where he selects dreams for further attention, to providing interpretations of potential Master-Dreams, the most significant of the thousands of dreams which flow in each week from throughout the Empire. “The road to the heights in the Tabir Sarrail passes through Interpretation” (*Palace 78*), Mark-Alem is told shortly after his promotion, and later his uncle confirms that “whoever controls the Palace of Dreams controls the keys of the State” (*Palace 124*). A fairy-tale lends popular appeal to the institution of totalitarian control. “There was a time-honoured legend about some poor wretch who lived in a forgotten byway and whose dream saved the State from a terrible calamity” (*Palace 45*). As a reward he is offered one of the Sultan’s nieces in marriage. However, the reality is different: the dreamer of the “Master-Dream” is subjected to interrogation, torture, and death in the state’s relentless pursuit of control.

Mark-Alem's powerful family is responsible for his placement. However, from the beginning he is unsure of himself. The administration and the functions of the organization are opaque. The process of selection and assignment of duties is mysterious, as is the rationale for his accelerated promotions. Mark-Alem's family is powerful, but their relations with the Palace and with the Sultan himself have been strained, even adversarial in the past. In the first weeks of his employment, Mark-Alem's uncle, the Vizier, warns him that the bureaucracy of the Tabir is corrupt and that dreams are planted by those in power in order to damage their enemies. The Quprili family has been the object of such attacks:

“Some people”, the Vizier went on, “think it's the world of anxieties and dreams - your world, in short - that governs this one. I myself think it's from this world that everything is governed. I think it's this world that chooses the dreams and anxieties and imaginings that ought to be brought to the surface, as a bucket draws water from a well. Do you see what I mean? It's this world that selects what it wants from the abyss. [. . .] They say the Master-Dream is sometimes a complete fabrication”, he whispered. “Has that ever occurred to you?” Mark-Alem

went cold with fright. A fabrication? The Master-Dream?  
He could never have imagined a human mind daring to  
think such a thing, let alone say it in so many words.  
(*Palace* 127)

Shortly after commencing at the *Tabir*, Mark-Alem's attention is  
taken by the dream of a local fruit-seller:

A piece of waste land by a bridge, the sort of vacant lot  
where people throw rubbish. Among all the trash and dust  
and bits of broken washbasin, a curious musical  
instrument playing all by itself, except for a bull that  
seems to be maddened by the sound and is standing by the  
bridge and bellowing . . . (*Palace* 51)

In fear of making a wrong move after initially considering it  
unworthy of further analysis, Mark-Alem classifies the dream at the last  
minute as of possible interest, to be passed on to the selection and  
interpretation hierarchy. Later, after he has been promoted to  
Interpretation, Mark-Alem comes across this dream again and is still  
puzzled by it, despite his uncle's warning:

Wasn't the bridge connected with his family's own name?  
. . . Perhaps this was some sinister omen?... He re-read the  
text and began to breathe more freely again: the bull

wasn't really attacking the bridge at all. It was just rushing around the piece of wasteground. It's a dream without any meaning, he thought. (*Palace* 98)

Ironically, he recognizes that the dream could be of significance, if the bull were attacking the bridge-but it is not. In his literal-mindedness he misses the clue-or does not want to face what it might mean. The *lahuta*, the single-stringed instrument of the Albanians, provides an unmistakable clue. With its *lahuta*, the bridge, and the raging bull, this dream turns out to be of great importance, signifying to the powers-that-be in the Palace of Dreams a threat from the Quprilis.

Mark-Alem's responses to his family, his career, and his place of employment have been marked from the beginning by timidity, anxiety and awe, fear and intimidation. His obtuseness comes about from his desire not to know, which has its roots in his family history. For centuries the family has experienced glory and misfortune. From his earliest childhood he remembers the crises and tragedies of the family as individual members were catapulted into favour and the highest offices or fell to disgrace, imprisonment, and execution, and his mother's main aim since his father's death has been to protect her only son from this destiny.

Kadare's *The Palace of Dreams* is a masterpiece of parody. With the powerful imagery and surreal logic, the novel can be interpreted in manifold ways-politically or otherwise. In the novel, Mark-Alem does not learn the central lesson that his uncle is trying to teach him, namely that he must be on guard against any dream which specifically points towards the Quprilis, because it will most probably have been planted in a political manoeuvre to unseat the family. This dream, whether planted by enemies of the family or dreamt by a provincial from the western-Albanian-provinces of the Empire, alerts the Sultan to a threat from the Quprilis. Mark-Alem fails to recognize the significance of the three-arched bridge and to intercept the dream before it brings his family into danger.

It is not only the symbol of the *lahuta* and the three-arched bridge that links this particular dream to the Quprili family. The Quprilis are a family of assimilated Ottomans, for whom power and prestige long ago took priority over ethnicity. Themes of ethnicity are present but dormant in the historical associations with the bridge, with Christianity, conversion, and assimilation into the Turkish Empire. The main symbol of Quprili power and identity is an epic poem in which the legendary deeds of the family have been preserved since the time of the Turkish occupation of the Balkans. For centuries the Quprilis have celebrated

their power and influence in the Empire by inviting Bosnian bards to visit the capital and recite a heroic song glorifying the deeds of this Muslim family in the Serb language, accompanied on the single-stringed Serb *gusla*. This private annual celebration had been a source of contention between the Quprilis and the Sultan. It was said that the Sultan was jealous of their cultural eminence when he himself could command nothing more profound than the eulogies of court poets. Like the spelling of the name “Quprili” the epic represents a provocation. It indicates the degree of Quprili power, prestige, and pedigree as a prominent Muslim family in the context of the interest groups and political factions around the Sultan. Mark-Alem’s memories of this ritual go back to his earliest childhood when he was frightened by its bloody images and lugubrious tone:

At first he’d imagined the *epos*, as they called it, as a long thin animal, midway between a hydra and a snake, which lived far away in some snowy mountains, and which, like a beast of fable, carried within its body the fate of the family. (*Palace* 65)

But even as a child he was puzzled by the epic:

He couldn’t quite see how it was that the Quprilis lived and lorded it in the imperial capital, while people recited

an epic about them in a faraway province called Bosnia in the middle of the Balkans. And he had even more difficulty in understanding why it was sung in Bosnia and not in Albania, where the Quprilis originally came from? And above all was it sung not in, Albanian, but in Serbian?

*(Palace 65)*

These questions lead to the heart of *The Palace of Dreams* to the complex ethnic, religious, cultural, and political implications of the Quprili epic. For it turns out that there is an Albanian version of the epic. The family knows of its existence, but chooses to ignore it. In that version, stemming from their own ethnic homeland, their role is not celebrated.

At a family dinner Mark-Alem's uncle Kurt announces that he has invited rhapsodists from Albania to attend the family celebrations and recite the Albanian version of the epic. Kurt is very different from his serious, career-minded siblings:

He had fair hair, and with his light-coloured eyes, reddish moustache and half-German, half-Albanian name, Kurt, he was regarded as the wild rose of the Quprili tribe. Unlike his brothers he had never stuck to any important job. [. . .]

He was a confirmed bachelor, went riding with the  
Austrian consul's son [. . .] (*Palace* 57)

According to Kurt, the Austrian ambassador considers the Bosnian epic to be on a par with the great German epic, the *Nibelungenlied*, and the Albanian version to be even superior. The Quprilis, he says, are the only great family left in Europe who are the subject of an epic, but “you scarcely deign to notice it” (*Palace* 65). Kurt's brothers are surprised and concerned at the invitation and its likely consequences. And they are nonplussed as to why Kurt has invited the Albanian rhapsodists, when their song, unlike that of the Bosnians, does not feature the Quprili family. In response, Kurt pretends to be merely curious, echoing Mark-Alem's question:

For days I've been pondering the question –we've all  
asked so often: Why have the Slavs composed an epic in  
our honour, while our compatriots the Albanians don't  
mention us in *their* epic? (*Palace* 66)

The tensions between the uncles in various official posts in the Empire and the dilettante intellectual, Kurt, with his Germanic name and Austrian connections, manifest themselves in the following discussion. While Mark-Alem is typically confused about the epic and his family's importance and involvement with it, his uncles are not. Kurt may be

naive or disingenuous, but for his brother, the issue is clear. The Austrians are using Kurt and the Quprili epic to involve themselves in affairs of the State. The novel draws on late nineteenth-century Ottoman history in presenting Austria and Russia as the two neighbouring powers interested in undermining Ottoman unity by appealing to national groups at the fringes and the centre of the Empire. However, there is more to the theme of national and ethnic identity than merely an allegory of changing power blocs in the Empire.

What follows is a long discussion of the Turkish occupation of Albania, the family's role in the Empire, and the ambivalence of the Albanians towards the Quprilis. For the assimilated Ottoman members of the family, the Turks brought with them not slavery, but the freedom to share in the Empire:

“I remember what a Jew said to me one day: When the Turks rushed at you brandishing spears and sabers you Albanians thought they'd come to conquer you, but in fact they were bringing you a whole Empire as a present.”

*(Palace 67)*

The Ottoman Turks brought to the Albanians the wide open spaces that they lacked in their tiny, mountainous country. Without the Ottoman conquest, the Quprilis, for example, would have remained

holed up in their mountain surroundings. Hence, for these imperial Ottomans, Albanian independence would represent a backward step:

“One day they’ll win real independence, but then they’ll lose all those other possibilities,” continued the cousin.

“They’ll lose the vast space in which *they* could fly like the wind, and be shut up in their own small territory. Their wings will be clipped, and they’ll flap clumsily from one mountain to another until they’re exhausted. Then they’ll ask themselves, “What did we gain by it?” (*Palace* 68)

The metaphor of the eagle underpins the argument with an image of ethnicity: Albanians, *shqiptare* or “sons of eagles”, are caged animals in the modern world unless they can break out of their tiny land. This discussion explains the ambiguous position of the Quprilis vis-a-vis their erstwhile countrymen. This family has used the structures of the Empire to move out of and beyond their tiny country. The Albanians resent the Quprilis for having preferred Ottoman assimilation over ethnic identity. While they have refused to yield to the Ottoman expectation of complete assimilation their adoption at some stage in the past of the Turkish, rather than Albanian root is indicative of their status. The question arises whether it is possible to be both Albanian and free in this sense of being able to unfold one’s potentialities in the wider world.

In their ethnic provincialism the Albanians fail to see what the Quprilis have achieved for Albania, namely the opening up of opportunities and spaces for the people, cramped in their tiny mountainous land.

For these members of an Ottoman Albanian family the Empire is a means of advancement, self-fulfilment, and widening of options and opportunities. At the same time, their proximity to the centre of power involves them in the responsibility for the political acts of the Empire, such as the oppression of individuals and of peoples, including their own. One of the cousins points out that their integration into the Empire brought violence and bloodshed, and Kurt concurs: “Sharing power means sharing crimes” (*Palace* 68). Implicit in this discussion has been the question of the balance in the family between Ottoman political and Albanian ethnic identity. This issue becomes explicit when one of the brothers makes a slip of the tongue:

“Anyhow, it’s the Turks who helped us to reach our true stature”, said the cousin. “And we just cursed them for it”.

“Not us — them!” said the governor.

“Sorry — yes . . . Them. The Albanians back home in Albania”.

A tense silence followed [. . .] (*Palace* 68)

The point here is the self-identification of the cousin. He unconsciously identifies himself as an Albanian with the Albanians in

Albania. The governor, the most senior of the brothers, is at pains to avoid any false or dangerous identifications. He corrects his brother in order to distinguish the Quprilis as “we”, the cosmopolitan Ottoman Quprilis in the capital, not “them”, the Albanians “back home”. Any dynastic identification with the Albanians at this tense point in history must be kept well under control. They are an Ottoman family of ethnic Albanian descent. The distinction of the political from the ethnic is of utmost importance in this point.

For the Albanians in Albania, ethnic identity is not compatible with the role in the Empire to which they are subjected; for the Quprilis, Albanian identity can include an imperial dimension which enables them to exist at the centre of political power. The family shares this sense of ethnic identity and until this point, have not questioned it. Their Albanian identity is not inimical to the Empire. They are after all, a family of converts to Ottoman Islam who have benefited greatly from the Empire. Some identify more strongly with it than others. Any overt allegiance to Albania, understood as something more than a point of historical origin and now a group of remote provinces of the Empire, is- or was -unthinkable. Now, however, Kurt has used the family epic to raise the question of ethnic as opposed to imperial identity. Realizing the danger of this line of thinking, his brothers warn him that such thoughts

must not be allowed outside the walls of the family home. The family must present themselves publicly as Ottoman Muslims for whom Albanianness represents a secondary identity. The Bosnian epic, around which this discussion revolves, both symbolizes the family's Ottoman power and preserves the memory of its Albanian origins.

We never discover whether Kurt is a bored rich playboy flirting with adventure and manipulated by the Austrians (whose involvement in Balkan politics in Montenegro and Bosnia would lead to the outbreak of the the First World War), or whether his contacts with them signal something more dangerous for his family, namely that he has become a renegade, an ethnic nationalist, hoping to liberate his homeland with the help of the Austrians. He certainly appears to have an agenda :

“Anyhow”, said Kurt, “for the moment they don't say anything about us”.

“One day they'll understand us”, said the governor.

“We ought to listen to them too”.

“But you just said they don't say anything”.

“Then we should listen to their silence”, said Kurt. [. . .] “we are in the Slav epic”.

“Isn't that enough? [. . .] You said yourself that we're the only family in Europe and perhaps in the world that's celebrated in a

national epic. Don't you think that's sufficient? Do you want us to be celebrated by *two* nations?"

"You ask if that isn't enough for me", said Kurt. "My answer is no!" (*Palace 69-70*)

The Albanian epic, unlike that of the Bosnians, does not celebrate the heroic deeds of the Quprilis. Kurt's advice to his brothers to listen to the silence of the Albanian epic on the subject of their family is indicative of his changing attitudes. He interprets it as a critical silence. For all its Ottoman prestige, the family has lost its links with the spirit of the Albanian homeland. In this discussion Kurt reveals to the others how uneasily their Albanianness sits with their Ottoman identity: on the one hand they are powerful members of an Empire which oppresses other national and ethnic groups, and on the other hand they themselves are members of one of these oppressed groups. The story of the origins of the family, of the three-arched bridge with its sacrificial victim from before the Turkish occupation, when the Albanians were still Christians, symbolizes this problematic double identity. Ironically, it is Mark-Alem, the pallid and characterless employee of the Palace of Dreams, who would respond powerfully to the call of Albanian ethnicity in the music of the *lahuta*.

The two epics introduce questions relating to the ethnic identities of Albanians, Bosnians, and Serbs in parts of Albania and the former Yugoslavia, in particular Kosovo. The Albanians are predominantly Muslim, having converted to Islam from Christianity in the past. They speak a non-Slav language and trace their cultural roots back to ancient times. The Bosnians are Muslim Slavs whose language is extremely close to Serbian and whose religious identity was forged during the period of the Ottoman occupation. The Serbs who are Orthodox Christian Slavs, and the key aspects of whose identity were born of the opposition to Ottoman rule in the Balkans and in particular in Kosovo, also play a role in the ethnic configuration of the novel. All three groups composed epic songs using similar themes over the period of the Ottoman occupation.

Until the point where the Albanian version of the epic is introduced, the discussion revolves around factions and political power in relation to the Ottoman Sultan, rather than around questions of ethnic identity. With the theme of the Albanian versus the Bosnian epic, however, the matter becomes more complex. In order to understand the significance of the Albanian epic, we must delve further into the history of the heroic songs of Albania and Bosnia.

In the early 1970s, while revising *Winter of Great Solitude* to include the epic motifs of the ending, Kadare researched the songs of his homeland and wrote his first long analysis and vindication of the ancient Albanian origins of these works of the national consciousness, *Autobiography of the People in Verse*. In this work he drew on the researches of the Austrian anthropologist, Maximilian Lambertz (1882-1963), as well as the works of the earlier poet and nationalist, Italian-Albanian poet, Jeronim de Rada (1814-1903). Shortly after *The Palace of Dreams* appeared, Kadare drew on this material for the foreword to a collection of Albanian ballads and short epic poems translated into French under the auspices of the Albanian Academy of the Sciences. In this short piece in particular he refers to the material worked into the fiction of *The Palace of Dreams*. The Albanian epics were born under the “cold sun” of the Albanian mountains, he writes. Their origins lie in Illyrian antiquity, but they were suppressed in “the long night of the Turko-Islamic occupation and by the fierce chauvinist passions of neighbouring lands” (Pipa, *Contemporary* 130). He bases his argument on the similarity of theme with earlier Greek legends, in particular those of Orestes, Circe, and Odysseus, and refers to an Illyro-Albano-Greek tradition not shared by South Slav mythology. Kadare compares the Albanian folk poems in importance with the *Nibelungenlied*, the

*Chanson de Roland*, and *Le Cid* in a long passage which is used almost verbatim in the novel. This material allows us to explicate the crucial differences between the two epics as represented in the novel. The most important of these is the Orestes theme. Kurt translates parts of the Albanian epic for the son of the Austrian consul who notes the similarity with the story of Orestes:

“This is the knight, Zuk, treacherously blinded by his mother and her lover, who wanders over snowy mountains on his blinded steed”. “Blinded by his mother! My God!” exclaimed the Austrian. “But it’s like the *Oresteia! Das ist die Orestiaden!*” (*Palace* 165-166)

Another motif which helps us to identify this material more closely is the figure of “Cuperli” or “Cypri” in the original epics. Lambertz links the figure of “Cuperli” or “Cypri”, a vizier in the Ottoman government to the historical Kopriilii family, the model for Kadare’s Quprilis. Cuperli is treated as a figure of contempt in the Albanian epic. He is the dupe to whom a rebellious daughter is married off, when she rejects the pashas or viziers chosen by her father, and has eyes only for her Albanian hero. For the Albanian bards the Quprilis are not the stuff of heroic legend, but on the contrary play minor comic roles as Ottoman

sycophants and dupes. When the Albanian rhapsodists arrive for the recitation, they do indeed appear to hold the Quprili family in contempt:

Their bright eyes seemed to express not so much scorn as complete rejection of anything that might be offered them.

The footmen had served them raki [. . .] but the Albanians merely touched them with their lips. (*Palace* 163)

The theme of human sacrifice, live interment, or life-in-death, also occurs in the epic. The Albanians sing a version of the “Ballad of the Three-Arched Bridge”, also hitherto known only to the Quprilis in its Bosnian form, although it deals with the origins of their family fortune (*Palace* 164). The motif of the buried warrior, taunted by his live enemy to come out to battle, occurs in the Mujo and Halil cycle and is evoked in the epic which Kurt struggles to translate for his audience. The material used then, for the Albanian epic in the novel is based on this body of songs from central and northern Albania, in particular the “Mujo and Halil” cycle, where the story of Zuk and other motifs such as the figure of Cuperli, and live interment are to be found.

These epics are linked to the Battle of Kosovo, the main foundation myth for the national and ethnic identities of the Albanians, Bosnians, and Serbs. Mark-Alem “had often heard his family speak of the tragic battle” (*Palace* 130), of 1389 “against all the Balkans”

(*Palace* 129). The Battle of Kosovo, in which Prince Lazar died, was commemorated by the Serbs in particular at the end of the medieval Serbian kingdom, after which the Ottoman period of subjection began. However, this battle was a Balkan event in which a coalition of Serbs, Bosnians, Albanians, and others opposed the invading Ottomans. The Bosnian, Albanian, and other Slav versions of these events were to be coloured over time by differing religious, cultural, and ethnic interests and by the extraordinary complications of Balkan history.

Sung in the Serb language, and glorifying the deeds of the Albanian Muslim Quprili family, the Quprili epic is identified with those Albanians and Slavs (Bosnians) who converted to Islam in the wake of the Ottoman conquest of the western Balkans after the Battles of Savra (near Berat in modern Albania 1385) and Kosovo Polje (1389) and some of whom founded powerful dynasties within the Ottoman Empire. Hence the Bosnian Slav epic identifies the family primarily as Ottoman and Muslim, and only secondarily as Albanian in a cultural context where this latter ethnic identification has little importance, since the significant identifications are between Turk and Christian. In this version of the epic, the religion and culture of western Balkan converts to Islam is the point of convergence. For the Bosnian Serbs, Muslims like the Albanians the epic is a celebration of the origins of their

Ottoman identity. The socio-religious culture of Ottoman civilisation overrides ethnicity as the primary identifying factor.

The Albanian epic, with its omission of the Quprilis, other than as minor figures of ridicule, and its celebration of both religion and ethnicity, with the latter moving strongly upward in the hierarchy of core values, has developed differently from the Bosnian version in line with the differences between Albanian and Bosnian Islam. Where the Bosnians were primarily Muslims, Albanian Islam was much less deeply rooted, and ethnic identifications had begun to displace religious identifications, particularly in the northern Albanian cycles of Mujo and Halil on which Kadare bases his fiction. The Albanian epic, that is, in which the Quprilis do not appear, has a primarily ethnic (Albanian Muslim) focus, whereas the Bosnian Slav version, in which the family does figure, is primarily Ottoman Muslim in focus. The Bosnian song is about Muslims versus Christians, whereas the Albanian version is primarily about Albanians versus Turks and Slavs. The one is determined by religious differences where the other expresses ethnic identity in the process of consolidation.

The theme of the two epics thus raises complex ethnic and political questions. For Kadare, following Lambertz, the song of the Albanian rhapsodists belongs to a prior, authentic tradition, against which the

Bosnian Slav version is an adoption and retelling by a different people who arrived later on the Balkan peninsula. Likewise Kurt, the Albanian nationalist, identifies the Albanian version of the epic as the authentic one. It is Islamic and Albanian, but hearkens back to a pre-Islamic, pre-Christian tradition. The Bosnian version, on the other hand, has been overlaid by Slav language and customs as well as Ottoman Islamic elements. There is thus a three-way conflict between Kurt, the Quprili family, and the Sultan: Kurt represents an Albanian ethnic nationalism which is Islamic, but is also strongly aware of its pre-Islamic roots; his brothers and the Vizier represent the family's political compromise with the Ottoman Empire as Ottoman Muslims and the Sultan represents the Empire, a long-standing force of occupation of the Balkans with a foreign religion and culture, an imperial capital far from the Albanian periphery, and an interest in maintaining religious and cultural order throughout the Balkans -not merely in Albania. The Quprilis with their Bosnian Slav epic appear to have betrayed Albania on several fronts: they have risen to prominence as heroes of the Ottoman occupation of the Balkans, fighting where necessary against Albanian secessionists as well as against Serbs and others, and they have adopted an epic in the Serb, as opposed to the Albanian, language at this time of national

awakening. The latter, Albanian version is dangerous for the family of Ottoman converts.

Having established the significance of the epics, this argument takes a step further by linking this material to the fictional and historical context, namely the era of resurgence of the Balkan nations at the end of the nineteenth century. At the end of the novel hear that “the war against Russia was just over. Greece had left the Empire, and the rest of the Balkans was in turmoil” (*Palace* 201). The war against the Russians can only be the Russo-Turkish war of mid 1877, formally ending with the Treaty of San Stefano, signed in January 1878. As a result of the agreement of the Congress of Berlin in 1878, the Ottoman Empire retained power over Albania, Macedonia and the eastern part of Thrace including the capital, Istanbul. Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro had been declared independent, and it was far from inconceivable that the Ottomans would lose control over the remaining Balkan possessions. Mark-Alem’s first file of dreams for sorting is dated 19 October. On the day in which he reviews the fateful dream of the *lahuta* and the bridge, he reads another dream dated 18 December-presumably of the year 1877. The fictive period of the novel thus begins in the winter of 1877/78 and ends in the spring of 1878. Kadare has located the novel at the end of the “*Tanzimat*” or “reorganization” period of the Ottoman

Empire (1839-70) dominated by the Westernizing and modernizing Turkish Ottoman grand vizier Ali Pasha (Mehmed Emin). However, the description of the “U.O.S.” (United Ottoman States) in the novel implies a much more profound level of political reorganization than what actually occurred during this period. By this time a powerful Albanian national movement had taken shape partly in response to the Ottoman failure to protect the interests of this large Muslim nation after the Treaty of San Stefano, in which Albanian-inhabited territory was assigned to Serbia, Montenegro, and the Bulgarian provinces (Vickers & James, *Albania* 270). The uniqueness of the Albanian situation lay in the fact that a large part of the Albanian elite (as represented by the Quprili family in the novel) was integrated into Ottoman state and military structures. This was not the case among the Serbs or Bulgarians, and it hampered the attempts of Albanian nationalists to forge a state identity around which Albanian cultural identity could crystallize.

The Albanian uprising followed the pattern of Herderian nationalism, basing itself on language and folk-culture and led by intellectuals who collected, selected, and moulded this material in line with national aspirations. During this period Albanian epic and heroic songs were used to propagate the idea that what bound the Albanians together was common blood, language, customs, and common

aspirations, which led Albanians to love their country and countrymen, even if they belonged to other religions. This latter point is important, since it indicates a shift towards a primary ethnic identification in terms of Albanianness understood as a link with Albania through “blood”, language, and culture, and away from primary allegiances in terms of religion and/or Ottoman identity. The glorification of Scanderbeg as the national hero of the Albania epitomizes this shift from religion to ethnicity. The Muslim Albanians ignored the fact that Scanderbeg was a Christian fighting against the Ottomans. What mattered was that he was an ethnic Albanian who had fought for the liberation of the country. He was made a symbol of unification and became a national hero.

For the Albanians experiencing a national awakening on the western perimeter of Kadare’s crumbling Empire, this powerful family with its Bosnian epic is scarcely a subject for national glorification. Ethnic and quasi-national identity is, or has become, the central issue. For Albanians, the Quprilis are turncoats whose feats are likely to be seen as betrayal of the national cause, rather than as the embodiment of Albanian heroic values. Dealing with a novel set at the time of growth of Albanian nationalism in the wake of the other Balkan nationalist movements, when the new nations were seeking their ancient pedigrees in language, myth, and folk poetry. The imagery of burial alive which

appears at important points in the novel, in the foundation myth of the Quprili family and again in the Albanian ballad described at the climax of the political intrigue, suggests that the issue here is the revival of Albanian identity in the 1870s after a long period of suppression and repression by a powerful occupying force.

The friction between the Sultan and the Quprili family over the Bosnian epic revolves around questions of factional power and politics in the capital. Kurt's brothers warn that any sign of interest in the Albanian epic could be interpreted by the Sultan as a political manoeuvre in the context of the unrest in Albania and with the Austrians sitting in the western wing of the Empire. They are concerned that the family's Albanian origins might be used against it in this period of imperial instability. The Albanian epic in fact, however, introduces a deeper level of threat and danger to the family. It signals a turn within the family towards ethnic rather than political identifications, with their ethnic homeland rather than with their political masters. And it introduces a new factor into the power-politics of the Empire, one of which the brothers are only dimly aware, namely the issue of ethnic nationalism, ultimately of separatism. The Bosnian epic, representing the converted people of the Balkans who had identified primarily with their Ottoman masters, is displaced in favour of the Albanian epic, in

which “blood” and the ethnic homeland are given primacy over dynastic and Ottoman identity.

The Austrians have an interest in Kurt’s new-found ethnicity. Kurt’s alliance with the Austrian ambassador is seen by the Sultan to indicate a destabilizing and subversive activity on the western periphery of the Empire, against which he, the Sultan moves eastwards towards rapprochement with Russia in order to secure his regions against Habsburg intervention. This reflects the alliances and strategic positionings that were occurring in the east and west of the Ottoman Empire in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In this period of political tension, the Quprili family’s interest in the Albanian version of the epic signals a shift in balance. This non-Slav version is politically loaded towards the Habsburg on the western border of the Empire, who support the non-Slav peoples of the U.O.S., whereas the Russians support the Slav people and favour the Bosnian (i.e. Slav) version of the epic:

This is not just a matter of poetry and song, [...] In fact it’s an exceedingly complex business, to do with settlements and transfers of population in the Balkans, and the relations between Slav peoples and non-Slav peoples, like the Albanians. In short, it directly concerns the whole map

of the Balkans. [...] Austria supports the non-Slav peoples, whereas the Slavs” “little father”, the Tsar, is always on at our Sultan about the “way the people of his race are treated. [...] This epic deals precisely with the relations between the peoples of the Balkans. (*Palace* 180)

It is indicative of the political state of the Empire that the Sultan is moved to seek Russian support against the threat of the Habsburg at a time when Panslavism was becoming a powerful force (Vickers & James, *Albania* 300). For the Ottomans, religion remained paramount above ethnicity and language. Among the Orthodox people of the Balkans, religion remained a strong linking factor, especially in opposition to the Ottomans. For the Albanians who were predominantly Muslim by the end of the eighteenth century, as for the other Balkan ethnic groups, ethnicity, “blood”, and native language were moving to the fore in determining group identity by the late nineteenth century. However, for the Albanian (and Bosnian) Muslims, religion remained a strong link to the Ottomans which was absent in the Christian ethnic and national movements. The Quprilis are caught among these changing political, national, and ethnic signifiers in the late Ottoman Empire. In the context of dismemberment of the Empire and creation of ethnic nation states, the Quprili family would be acceptable in neither camp:

neither that of the Turkish majority, nor that of the newly liberated Albanians.

Surprisingly perhaps, given his passivity and lack of character, Mark-Alem is strongly aware of his Albanian heritage. On the morning of his first day of work he goes into the library and peruses the family history stretching back to the building of the three-arched bridge in central Albania. Early in the novel an opposition is established between the life of the bureaucrat imprisoned in gloomy rooms along endless dimly lit corridors behind the high walls of the *Tabir Sarrail* and the world of snow, rain, and springtime blossoms which is associated with the Albania on whose soil Mark-Alem has never set foot, but whose name promises escape, freedom and fulfilment.

His longing for freedom is evoked throughout the novel and is set in contrast to the environment of the *Tabir Sarrail*. Later it is explicitly related to Mark-Alem's sense of ethnic identity, to the *lahuta* in his breast. Hence when Kurt introduces the topic of the Albanian epic and evokes the romanticism of the lost homeland, he finds an avid, if naive, audience in his nephew. Mark-Alem is eager to hear the hitherto unknown Albanian version of the epic, in the hope that it will arouse the sense of solemnity and profundity which he misses in the familiar Serb version. He is initially disappointed that the instrument, the *lahuta*, is a

simple single-stringed instrument no different from the *Serbgusla*, not the weighty, majestic, and imposing instrument he had imagined as necessary to accompany the solemn subject matter. The music begins as a long lament redolent of death and eternity. But then a transformation occurs:

Mark-Alem couldn't take his eyes off the slender, solitary string stretched across the sounding box. It was the string that secreted the lament; the box amplified it to terrifying proportions. Suddenly it was revealed to Mark-Alem that this hollow cage was the breast containing the soul of the nation to which he belonged. It was from there that arose the vibrant age-old lament. He'd already heard fragments of it; only today would he be permitted to hear the whole. He now felt the hollow of the *lahuta* inside his own breast. [...] Mark-Alem suddenly felt an almost irresistible desire to discard "Alem", the Asian half of his first name, and appear with a new one, one used by the people of his native land: Gjon, Gjergj or Gjorg. Mark-Gjon, Mark-Gjergj Ura, Mark-Gjorg Ura, he repeated as if trying to get used to his new half-name, every time he heard the word

“*Ura*”, the only one of the rhapsodist’s words he could understand. (*Palace* 163-164)

At this point Mark-Alem undergoes an epiphanic experience, finding in the music of the *lahuta* the powerful expression of a hitherto unarticulated desire for freedom felt as ethnic belonging. Just as at the beginning the name in the ancient chronicle arouses his sense of kinship, he now feels the pull of his origins in the story and its music. This is highly ironic, of course, since the *gusla* and the *lahuta* are basically the same instrument with different names -the latter sharing its etymological root with the word *lute*, and the former having a Slavic derivation. The Slav epic which he has known since childhood as played on the *gusla* has not had this effect on him. At the height of the recital of the Albanian rhapsodists, the Sultan strikes. Troops arrive to disperse the guests. Kurt is arrested, later to be executed, the Albanian rhapsodists are assassinated, the Vizier is publicly humiliated, and a punitive expedition is sent to Albania. The older brothers’ dinner-table fears are realized. At the same time as his past, undefined sense of ethnic Albanian identity and solidarity is given a focus, Mark-Alem sees his family ruined and himself put in danger. His private fantasy of freedom, ethnicity, and self-determination is enacted before him as a scenario of humiliation, political intrigue, and murder. Moreover, he is also

involved by association. The morning after the catastrophe, he returns to work to find that rumours are flying about the state of emergency, about the power-contest between the Quprilis and the Sultan, and about possible ramifications for the Palace and its staff. He waits for some dreadful fate to befall him, and discovers that the dream which he had twice held in his hands, and had been tempted to discard, was indeed the Master-Dream which alerted the Sultan to Kurt's activities. With its three-arched bridge, the *lahuta* playing in isolation, the raging bull, and the desolate plot of land it pointed to the Quprilis, indicating their Albanian ethnic identity, suggesting their potential involvement in subversive political activity in far-off homelands, and identifying them as a dangerous force close to the seat of power. The presence of the Albanian rhapsodists was seen to have validated this interpretation of the dream, and the Sultan acted, as Mark-Alem witnessed the previous night, to forestall any dangerous political developments. Mark-Alem hears that a group of officials is being sent to the Balkans to eliminate the Albanian epic, which is regarded as the cause of the trouble.

At the *Tabir Sarrail* in the days following the blow against the Quprilis, gossip and anxiety are rife, but little happens. It is rumoured that the Sultan has sent back the Master-Dream, rejecting it, or rejecting the interpretation of it. Mark-Alem fears that he will be punished, but

then, some days later, further political ructions occur as soldiers are seen swarming through the courtyards of the Palace. Watching from a window above, Mark-Alem thinks of the family carriages with the letter “Q” on their doors rushing back and forward across the city, and it is whispered throughout the halls of the Palace that the Quprilis have retaliated. Just how this has occurred is not clear:

Some confrontation, some secret and terrible exchange of blows has taken place in the darkest depths of the State. We’ve felt only the surface repercussions, as you do in an earthquake with a very deep hypocentre. So, as I was saying, during the night a terrible clash took place between the two rival groups, the two forces that counterbalance one another within the State. [. . .] even we, who’re at the very source of the mystery, are still in the dark. (*Palace* 187)

It is implied that the Quprilis have powerful mining interests in distant provinces and that they have used these to strike back at the Sultan. But the nature of the conflict is never clarified.

The original Albanian title of the novel, “The Official” or “Employee of the Palace of Dreams”, places emphasis on the figure of Mark-Alem rather than on the Palace. Mark-Alem’s influential uncles

brought about his appointment in the first place, but their role after that is not clear, and it is implied that Mark-Alem's presence in the Palace is desired by the powers that be for some sinister purpose "You suit us" (*Palace* 49). His rapid rise through the hierarchy is never explained.

Being related to the Quprilis through his mother, Mark-Alem does not share their name. He has been a naive, passive, and timid participant both in his family's political affairs and at work in the Palace of Dreams. Soon after the Vizier is toppled, Mark-Alem is unexpectedly promoted. And with his promotion a certain change comes about: he becomes important, taciturn, and unapproachable, identifying "more and more with the sort of people he'd always liked least: the senior civil servants" (*Palace* 190).

In the meantime Kurt is summarily executed. Mark-Alem still expects the fall-out from the coup against his family to affect him, but again he is promoted, this time to the position of First Assistant Director of the Palace of Dreams. In his new position he returns to the Archives and reads through the Master-Dreams of the past months, from those dreamt on the eve of the Battle of Kosovo to the fateful Master-Dream that had led his uncle to the grave and raised him, Mark-Alem, to be a director of the *Tabir*. The city greengrocer who had the dream has been interrogated and, like his predecessor, whom Mark-Alem had seen

carried out in a coffin earlier that year, disappears shortly afterward. With that, the coup seems over. Mark-Alem “never succeeded in clearing up the mystery of that night, with the attack on the Quprilis followed by their counter-attack” (*Palace* 197). Nor is his position ever clarified for the reader. It is unclear whether his promotion to the position of Acting Director General of the *Tabir Sarrail* is the result of his family’s powerful counter-attack against the Sultan, or whether more insidious forces are at work. For while the family was instrumental in placing Mark-Alem in the Palace of Dreams to begin with, the Vizier makes it clear that the upper echelons of the Palace are powerfully against the Quprilis. But on the other hand, important changes have taken place in the leadership of the Palace, with Mark-Alem himself set to take over full control from his ailing Director General in the wake of the coup and the counter-attack. Mark-Alem now belongs among the most powerful of officials, responsible for the sleep and dreams of the whole Empire.

Mark-Alem is not a rebel like Kurt. Characterless and insipid, he is slow on the uptake but surprisingly accessible to the conditions of power once he finds himself in charge. After some months in his job he begins to prefer the environment of the Palace to the dreary and mundane world outside. By the end of the novel he has accustomed himself to the

gestures of the powerful without having shown any comparable increase in understanding the way power has worked to further his interests. He is truly an employee of the Palace of Dreams, an apparatchik who has acceded to power. Like figures from Kadare's own environment, such as his friend and nemesis Dritero Agolli, Mark-Alem will be the perfect tool of those who wield power because he is the instrument of his own humiliation. For if Mark-Alem represents the resurrection of the Quprili family fortunes in the Ottoman state, he does so under a very different mantle to his forebears. The political power represented in the figure of the Vizier has been dashed and will take time to reassert itself. The ethnic nationalism represented by Kurt has been dealt a body blow. Mark-Alem is deeply traumatized by the events surrounding Kurt's execution and his own involvement in the affair. He sees the result of political positioning, he recognizes his own role in the power-struggles, and most importantly he learns how dangerous his ethnic longings can be. By the end of the novel Mark-Alem will have internalized the structure of his own humiliation in repressing his desire for self-identity and projecting the frustration of his desires into an image of death and transfiguration.

For centuries power has changed hands as a result of intrigues, machinations, coups, and palace revolts among factions of the ruling

class around the court of the Sultan, but no structural change has taken place. In this closed bureaucratic State-structure power is exercised from above, and the individual, such as Mark-Alem, born into a ruling caste must internalize the rules of appropriation of power -including its gestures and conditions. In order to do so, he must become “characterless”, a “man without qualities” (Musil, *The Man* 10), since he must be ready to follow the dictates of power regardless of personality and personal allegiances. In the works of Kafka, in particularly *The Trial* and *The Castle*, we see the middle-man, the individual who is sandwiched between the holders of power and those without power; in Orwell’s *1984*, likewise, we see in Winston Smith the middle-man as intellectual and member of the lower state apparatus, whose attempt to maintain a personality is at odds with his position in the power-structure of the state. Mark-Alem is born into the ruling caste of the Quprilis. He is a born “man without qualities” who discovers in himself a “quality”- his sense of Albanian ethnic identity. As a consequence he is faced with the existential choice in this closed society, either to become a rebel like Kurt, or to accede to the structures of power which infiltrate his innermost being, and to submit the sense of identity expressed in his dream of ethnicity to the demands of the state. Even given his privileged position he has little choice, and Kadare demonstrates in him the

deformation of human character which takes place as a result of the suppression of individual dreams and longings in the service of total social control.

In the meantime spring has come around. Mark-Alem, now twenty-eight, arrives home one evening to find his uncles discussing his betrothal. Life has resumed its course. Returning to the family chronicle with which the novel began, Mark-Alem thinks back to the image of the falling snow in his ethnic homeland, which has been the touchstone for his desire for freedom and personal integrity:

As for Albania [...] it grew more and more distant and dim, like some far cold constellation, and he wondered if he really knew anything about what went on there. He sat there uncertainly, his pen growing heavy in his hand, until finally it rested on the paper and instead of writing “Albania” wrote: *There*. He gazed at the expression that had substituted itself for the name of his homeland, and suddenly felt oppressed by what he immediately thought of as “Quprilian sadness”. It was a term unknown to any other language in the world, though it ought to be incorporated in them all. (*Palace* 201)

Mark-Alem has learned his lesson: Albania, the romantic homeland has become the undefined “there”. Suppression of identity leads to “Quprilian sadness”, the sense of loss felt by this dynasty which has traded ethnic identity for political power. “Quprilian sadness” is represented in this novel as having recurred throughout the history of the family’s collaboration with the Ottoman Empire. It is linked with the theme of betrayal of Albania symbolized in the blood on the bridge, the immurement of the sacrificial victim, and in the family’s name-change first to the Albanian *Ura* and then to the Ottoman-Albanian *Quprili*:

*It must have been snowing there. . . Then he stopped writing, [...] he thought of the distant ancestor called Gjon who on a winter’s day several centuries before had built a bridge and at the same time edified his name. The patronymic bore within it, like a secret message, the destiny of the Quprilis for generation after generation. And so that the bridge might endure, a man was sacrificed in its building, walled up in its foundations. And although so much time had gone by since, the traces of his blood had come down to the present generation. So that the Quprilis might endure . . . (Palace 201-202)*

The destiny of the Quprilis is symbolized in the bridge. They are identified in terms of their split identity: as Albanian, originally Christian, on the eastern fringe of Europe, the creators of the three-arched bridge symbolizing the land of Albania itself on the one hand, and as Ottoman, converted Muslims, at the centre of the Empire, having betrayed their ethnic origins in this environment where ethnicity is either dangerous (“Albania”) or repressed (“there”). The immured man symbolizes the repression of ethnic identity in this family who created a bridge to pass through central Albania and thereby opened up their land to the Empire -and the Empire to themselves. (The bull of the Master-Dream is, of course, the opposite of immurement. It is the earthy, animal roar of primal identification).

After all that has happened, Mark-Alem reflects nostalgically on his desire to throw off the “Islamic half-shield” of Ottoman identity superimposed over the original language, religion, and culture of the Albanians, and resume his ethnic identity, understood as his original, “native” identity after all these centuries. But in the end, of course, he does not. Mark-Alem still toys with the idea of reclaiming his life and becoming a hero, but deep down he has known all along that he could never become another Kurt. It is hard to imagine him following his heart and turning his back on the Quprili traditions of power and prestige. The

romantic nostalgia of his dreams is in direct proportion to the unlikelihood of his ever realizing them. The novel ends with a powerful evocation of the coming of spring.

Mark-Alem retains the Islamic shield of his double-barrelled name and suppresses the siren-call of his ethnic homeland, “the *lahuta*. in his breast” (*Palace* 164), to become another colourless, faceless official of the Empire. He has remained in the service of the Sultan: fear, power and prestige have overridden ethnic identity and the desire for freedom which it expresses:

But despite these thoughts he didn't take his face away from the window. I'll order the sculptor right away to carve a branch of flowering almond on my tombstone, he thought. He wiped the mist off the window with his hand, but what he saw outside was still no clearer: everything was distorted and iridescent. Then he realized his eyes were full of tears. (*Palace* 203)

His tears on the last page manifest the famous “Quprilian sadness”, the melancholy arising from repression of desire, the killing of this life-force explicitly associated in the novel with ethnic identity. In his vision of a tombstone of flowering almond we can see the vicarious romanticism of a successful young man who has never lived, and is now

about to be consigned to a life of constriction and routine. Mark-Alem's nostalgia for a life of heroic action is safely circumscribed by the window of his Director's carriage. His life-choice has been made for him in the power-structures of the Sultan, his family and the Palace of Dreams. Kadare's hero has a position of power at the centre of the Empire yet he remains a victim of structures beyond his control. This is perhaps the most devastating aspect of Kadare's satire: his hero is part of the innermost circle of the Empire. He holds a post of supreme importance, but like Kafka's heroes, the most damning images of rootless individuality and uncomprehending existence in modernity, he is completely alienated. Moreover, this powerful bureaucrat is the instrument of his own repression. In his Director's carriage, Mark-Alem imagines one last time what he most desires: death, martyrdom, and spiritual life in his ethnic Albanian homeland. Spring can only be captured for ever in cold bronze and the blooming almond trees promise more in the relief of death than they do in the new life around him. The final image of springtime is undercut by these associations with death. Mark-Alem's life as an official of the Palace of Dreams has taken place in an environment of winter and spiritual death and he realizes that the wind of winter can return at any time.

Meanwhile, ironically, all Albania has fallen “prey to insomnia” (*Palace* 191): it is 1878 and the “National Awakening” is well under way as the Albanians translate their dreams of national autonomy into reality.

Mark-Alem does not succumb to the pull of his Albanian origins to become a champion of ethnic identity and national separatism like his uncle Kurt. Nevertheless the struggle between ethnicity and empire is powerfully evoked in the novel as a contest imbibed by each generation from history, environment, and family tradition and internalized as the desire for an identity drawing on a powerful repository of stories and music, myths and images and promising an identity which is more than the individual. The blood of that first sacrificial victim to the bridge, which was to enable the Quprilis to leave their mountainous homeland, reappears in the myth for each generation, a reminder of the origins and the sacrifice which they made in becoming Ottoman Albanians. Mark-Alem’s Albania of the imagination is born of his family’s history, memories, and stories. It taps a deeper and wider sense of being, a timeless, oceanic collectivity, which is a measure of the shallowness and narrowness of his life-world. Its most powerful image in this work, even if tinged with irony, is that of the Albanian rhapsodists’ age-old lament. This is a very different version of Albanianness from that which the

regime manipulated and instrumentalized in the service of communist state patriotism.

In Mark-Alem's imagination Albania represents escape from the grim world of the Palace of Dreams. This dream of ethnic liberation and self-fulfilment is captured, submitted to interrogation, killed before his eyes, and held up as a trophy to the politics of dictatorial, centralized power. With the assassination of the rhapsodists we would, perhaps, expect Mark-Alem to be thoroughly disabused of this dream of ethnic self-identification. But, strangely, it lives on, resurfacing at the end as a desire for death and self-sacrifice and manifesting all of the negativity and morbidity (*thanatos*) of the Quprili epic. In its appeal to an imagined community-based on the ethnic identification of family, tradition, culture, and homeland-Mark-Alem's dream links him to something which is missing from his life-world: a sense of community, no matter how romantic in inspiration, morbid in expression, or impossible in reality. For Mark-Alem ethnic identity is imbued with the spirit of freedom. But that spirit is deformed over the course of the novel into a dream of death, an expression of *thanatos*. Finally we are left with an image of the polarization of instrumentalized power and romanticized ethnicity. The assimilated bureaucrat, Mark-Alem, has internalized the structure of instrumentalized power alongside its opposite, the romantic

dream of imagined community. Mark-Alem betrays himself by internalizing the polarized structure of control and romanticism. In him the Empire has found its ideal subject.

In Kadare's hands the Palace becomes an allegory of the ways in which Central and Eastern European communist dictatorships functioned during the post-war era: the murky power-structures, the instrumentalization of myth and legend in the service of ideology, the creation of a ruling class or Nomenclature, the bureaucratization of human relationships and the insecurity, anxiety, and fear which this gives rise to, the ostentatious display of order and stability in a situation in which power-structures no longer have a rational base, where change occurs as the result of seismic eruptions among factions, where civil society as a binding and mediating force is absent, and where the individual is a cipher in the algebra of power.

While his literary forebears are Orwell and Kafka, and his fictional institution of the Palace of Dreams owes something of its conception to the Ministry of Truth and the Castle, Kadare's surreal image of dictatorial control is far from derivative. In linking contemporary Eastern European literature with the tradition of the European political novel, Kadare deepens the understanding of the mechanisms of psychological intimidation of *1984*, and introduces the theme of ethnic

identity into the Eastern European political novel. In the context of the Eastern European novel, the stylistic link with Kafka makes a politically loaded statement of creative- aesthetic association, just as the echoes of Orwell imply an identification with the Western European anti-Stalinist political novel. Where Western European political writers such as Orwell revealed the oppositions between individual desire and dictatorship, Kadare goes beyond this in identifying ethnic identity at the individual as well as the group level as the primary threat to dictatorships at the end of the twentieth century.

The issue of Kosovo cannot be separated from the evocation of ethnic identity in *The Palace of Dreams*. The time of writing and the inclusion of historical motifs (in references to the Battle of Kosovo and in Mark-Alem's tour through the dream archives in which the Empire's dreams of Kosovo are stored) explicitly relate to Kosovo and its history. A folder in the Archives of the Palace is dedicated to the dreams of the first Battle of Kosovo and holds the seven hundred or so dreams "dreamed on the eve of the fateful day" (*Palace 160*), including the Master-Dream prophesying the bloody ending to the battle, in which the whole Balkan army is wiped out. Even now, after five centuries, the Archive assistant tells Mark-Alem, the Balkan people often dream of the battle. The dilemma of the Quprilis, caught between nascent Albanian

nationalism and their traditional role as functionaries of the Empire, has relevance to those ethnic Albanians from Kosovo who had also identified with the ideology of Yugoslav communism with its centre in Belgrade. For the Albanian rhapsodists, the Quprili family have sold out not only to the Ottomans but also to the Slavs in identifying with a Balkan Slav culture. They have thus betrayed the primacy and authenticity of Albanian language and culture. The references to Kosovo and the 1389 Battle of Kosovo in the novel indicate Kadare's awareness of the simmering issue of ethnic identity within the Yugoslav state and of the potential tensions that would arise. Yugoslavia openly espouse a politics of ethnicity (whether Slav or national) over the cosmopolitanism of communist dogma. In the context of the hostilities after 1988 Kadare referred to his repeated attempts over previous decades to present Albanian as an Illyrian-Balkan culture pre-dating Slav influence, and reiterated his fears of Serb expansionism. *The Palace of Dreams* integrates the ethnic question into the political novel of socialist Eastern Europe. At the same time Kadare provides a critical framework for this dream of the captive mind. For while ethnicity can express itself as a liberating component of identity, in the figures of Kurt and the Albanian rhapsodists it turns into a fundamentalist version of Utopia.

Unsurprisingly, *The Palace of Dreams* created an uproar in Tirana in the wake of its publication in late 1981. Kadare wrote the final chapters in the early winter months of that year, and so could defend himself from charges that the Sultan's jealousy and the toppling of the powerful Quprili family in the novel alluded to the Shehu affair. But of course every one realized that it mattered little that he imagined these events before they happened. His vision was precise, audacious, and compelling. The book was proscribed immediately after publication, at the beginning of 1982, for including allusions against the communist regime. Twenty thousand copies had been printed, almost all of which were bought by libraries, and hence would have disappeared when the novel was banned. Some copies would have made their way into private hands to be circulated among the avid readers that Hoxha had, ironically, created with the literacy programme that was central to the regime's break with past traditions.

"I prayed to God that this work would not fall into their hands, in particular into his hands" writes Kadare (*Kadare, Albanian Spring* 189). Kadare had published the opening sections in 1979 in a collection of short pieces entitled *Emblem of that Time*. However, these two early chapters scarcely enable the reader to guess what would come. As the novel was withdrawn censure rained down on Kadare from all sides. He

cites the comment of a political prisoner of the time: “With a book like this, either the author should be here with us, or the regime no longer has any bite” (Kadare, *Albanian Spring* 189). Not only did the opening pages of the novel locate it unmistakably in Scanderbeg Square, central Tirana, but the satire of the workings of the *Tabir Sarrail* were an open allusion to the Ministry of the Interior with its basement Archives, its machinations, and above all the idea of the Master-Dream, the ubiquitous plot against the state, the product of the class enemy, and bourgeois revisionists. And the conflict between the Quprilis and the Sultan mirrors the politics of the centre, between various clans and cliques, most recently the Shehus, and the dictator.

There was a general understanding that self-criticisms were demanded of the writers by the Party and were carried out in ritual fashion behind the closed doors of the Union of Writers, although punishments could still be substantial. But over four hundred people attended the plenum planned for Kadare’s humiliation in 1982. Large open plenums such as this were very serious affairs. In the wake of the plenum an urgent meeting of the Union of Writers was called and a delegate of the Central Committee addressed them briefly regarding Kadare’s novel. The matter was closed, the aim of the Party achieved,

and all further discussion of the novel in the media and elsewhere prohibited.

Albania gained its independence in 1913, only to be turned into a monarchy with a minor German prince (Wied) and then thrown into a further decade of uncertainty with the First World War. Failed political development, the catastrophic choices forced on the Albanians by the great powers, and the internal incompetence which compounded the disasters of the year of liberation, leading to the following forty years of domestic mismanagement and foreign intervention, are the subject of this novel, *The Shadow*, one of Kadare's best. Written in 1985, it did not appear until in 1987.

It is in *The Shadow*, however, that Kadare best captures the climate of mysticism of Tirana during Hoxha's final years. The mixture of rumour, suspicion, paranoia, and uncertainty that pervaded the capital at this time was felt elsewhere in the dying years of European communism. In the Soviet Union, too, a bizarre atmosphere of morbidity prevailed as the empire declined into bankruptcy under an ageing and corrupt Nomenclature with Brezhnev at its head. *The Shadow* is a novel about the deformations of life under a dictatorial regime, in particular the deformations of intellectual life and creativity. A deeply introspective work, it brings together the private and personal with the public and

political in imagery which is at once deeply intimate and politically significant. This novel brings one of Kadare's greatest gifts, his ability to show the interrelationships of these two spheres, typically kept so separate in Western European literature, to bear on the milieu closest to himself, namely the creative and artistic Nomenclature.

At the time of writing of *The Shadow*, Kadare did not believe that he would live to see the end of regime. The manuscript was finished in 1986 and hidden in his apartment until 1987 when he smuggled it to France under the title of *The Three K's*. In this work Kadare turned his attention to his own divided consciousness under the dictatorship. The narrator is a privileged but untalented member of the artistic Nomenclature who secretly loathes the Party and who lives for his trips to France. His friend, a gifted writer, held at a certain distance by the Party as a result of the brilliance and the independence of his work, plays an important role as a narrative alter ego. Both reflect aspects of Kadare's existence. The narrator's trips to France are imagined as temporary flights to life from the grim underworld of death that Kadare had associated with communism at least since finishing *Winter of Great Solitude*. The ancient ballad of Constantine and Doruntine is refunctioned into the modern setting of Tirana and France in the final year of the dictator's death, and the evocation of the demented fantasies

of the supreme leader, whom Kadare had observed so closely for the duration of his life, gives this otherwise complex and difficult work of introspection a powerful political impetus.

Several aspects of the narration render *The Shadow* difficult, particularly for those unfamiliar with Kadare's life and context. The environment of the halls of power in Tirana during the dictator's last years is murky and opaque. The narrative interest is divided between the two nameless protagonists and narrative alter egos, the screenplay-narrator and his friend the disgraced writer. These two figures can be seen to characterize the Albanian bureaucrat and the creative writer respectively, but both are also alter egos of the writer. In the novel, these two figures was referred to as the *narrator* and the *writer* for the sake of clarity. The *narrator's* one of the completed film screenplay is an adaptation of an earlier novel by the *writer*. *The Shadow* marks a clear development in Kadare's writing, demonstrating the writer's extraordinary literary inventiveness, and introducing aspects of the late style that would be carried through into works of the post-communist era.

The predication of the novel's appearance on the death of the author brings the contemporary political situation into the ambit of the novel, inviting the reader to consider the specificities of dictatorship,

intimidation, and physical peril in order to comprehend its bizarre plot. The novel is read in terms of this retrospective contextualizing which functions as a metafictional device, obliging to read *The Shadow* as a posthumous work, the final testament of a writer whose death occurs at the behest of the dictator. The time-setting of the novel is the *narrator's* present in around 1984. Rumours abound of the blindness, senility, and imminent death of the Supreme Guide, the unnamed dictator, around whose body the various factions are gathering, led by his hawkish wife. The metafiction of the author's death consigns the fiction to history, bringing about closure and implying a perspective on the ending which would otherwise be lacking, namely as the final reckoning of the author, Kadare, with the dictatorship of Enver Hoxha. It presages one of Kadare's main themes of the late 1980s, the conflict between the writer and the dictator as an endgame of power and imagination in the post-war history of Eastern European socialism.

Kadare's *narrator* is a self-confessed failed screenwriter employed in the Foreign Affairs department of the State Film Studios in Tirana. He travels frequently to France in order to finalize cultural exchange agreements between the Albanian and French governments regarding the showcasing of Albanian films. The *narrator* is well-connected to the Party via an uncle who is a communist stalwart with powerful contacts.

On his trips to the French capital the *narrator* has made contact with various figures in cinema, theatre, and cultural circles, in particular a young actress, Sylvaine Dore, with whom he has an affair. A second figure enters the story as an alter ego of Kadare himself: a writer who befriended the *narrator* while both were studying in Moscow. After their return to Albania their paths diverge as a result of individual talent and political forces. The *writer* has been harassed by the regime and has been limited in his contacts with the West. The one more or less successful work of the scriptwriter - *narrator* is based on a story by the *writer* about his last weeks in Moscow before being repatriated by the Albanian regime in 1960.

The *narrator* is neither a party stalwart nor a dissident. He is a typical member of the Nomenclature, the bureaucratic intelligentsia of the socialist state. He is ordinary in every respect, other than that he benefits from the travel privileges that come with his job as cultural ambassador. He hates the regime, but does not dare step out of line; he dreams of escape to France, but does not pursue the possibility of seeking exile. He is a scriptwriter, but has never seen his scripts turned into film. A descendant of Kafka's Central European protagonists, he is an Albanian everyman of the bureaucratic-administrative class, caught among a welter of opposing and irrational forces. He typifies the

inauthenticity of everyday life in Albania under the regime, the sense that “life is elsewhere” (Kundera, *Life* 20) and that the reality of the socialist *Attag* (“everyday life”) obstructs human living. The *narrator* is not represented as culpable, but as having so far been incapable of extraordinary behaviour. If the *narrator*'s defining characteristic is his lack of talent and his inability to realize his dreams, his friend the *writer* is defined by his talent to the point that his writing takes precedence over his life. Like Kadare, he has written an autobiographical novel in which his Moscow experiences are imagined in terms of an ancient Albanian literary motif. Kadare brings into *The Shadow* a large amount of material from his 1976 novel *Twilight of the Steppe-Gods*. In order to understand this self-reflexivity in *The Shadow* the reader must return briefly to that earlier autobiographical work, *Twilight of the Steppe-Gods* .

In *Twilight of the Steppe-Gods* Kadare retells his experiences at the Gorki Institute in Moscow leading to his repatriation in late 1960 as a result of the break between the Albania and the Soviet Union. Here he witnessed at first hand the Pasternak affair and learned what it meant to be a writer in a communist regime. However, the young writer from Gjirokastra also experienced Russian civilization and the life of a major Eastern European metropolis and modern capital of a world power.

Forced to abandon his Muscovite girlfriend, a medical student named Lydia Snieguina, and recognizing that the return would result in a dramatic curtailment of his intellectual freedom, Kadare is repatriated to his tiny, Stalinist homeland at the end of *Twilight of the Steppe-Gods*.

During his last days with Lydia, Kadare's autobiographical narrator imagines himself as the dead Constantine, who has given his pledge to see his lover before returning to the grave.

In *Twilight of the Steppe-Gods* the Constantine theme is associated primarily with the pledge or *besa*, the tribal and early feudal statement of personal honour in Albanian culture. In Kadare's mythology this pledge symbolizes the facticity of ethno-national identity and belonging. The novel ends with the young writer's pledge to return to Albania rather than to consider alternatives of exile. The pledge is thus situated at the beginning of Kadare's adult self-consciousness, underwriting his existence as an Albanian intellectual and writer after his return from Moscow in 1960. It gives expression to Kadare's recognition and acceptance of ethnic identity as the primary formative and motive force in his existence as a writer, and it expresses a Herderian sense of the relationship of language and culture.

In *The Shadow* the figure of the *writer*, based on Kadare, and the identification with the legendary Constantine is taken a step further. In

*The Shadow* the complex narrative structure of reduplication can be illustrated in which the current text recursively reiterates material from the earlier text, *Twilight of the Steppe-Gods*, which in turn is based on Kadare's life. In each of these reduplications the figure of Constantine gains in symbolic importance.

In their first rendezvous over dinner, the Frenchwoman Sylvaine and the *narrator* of *The Shadow* discuss his screenplay, which is based on the *writer's* story of his return to Albania:

“I especially liked the passage where the main character—that’s you -leaves the Russian girl at the gate of the Institute and the sense of being dead. [...] But that story didn’t happen to you, did it? I think you said that it was about someone else, one of your friends at the Dostoyevsky Institute, if I’m not mistaken”. “-The Gorki Institute”. “-Yes, that’s it”. “-In fact that story isn’t his either. It’s at least a thousand years old”. “That’s true”, Sylvaine agreed. “That comes out clearly in the script. . . . The story of the dead brother who rises from his grave in order to bring his married sister back home from a distant land. It’s an old legend, isn’t it?” (*The Shadow* 44)

The Constantine story is identified as an ancient legend which somehow has a life of its own, reappearing down the centuries to affect the lives of the *writer* and the *narrator*. "Perhaps it's about a ... how would you say it ... an infectious story. In hearing it, one has the impression of experiencing it oneself... I had the impression that a part of his story had happened to me" (*The Shadow* 44).

The infectious history which taints those who come into contact with it is the history of Albania:

It was only natural that we others, young Albanians still studying in foreign countries, should feel a certain affinity with the Constantine of the legend. Our country cut itself off more and more from the rest of the world and we felt excluded from that other life. We returned, one after another, as if to the grave. (*The Shadow* 45)

The story of Constantine gathers up the later stories into itself, becoming the trope of an Albanian experience which links the three figures as one: "The only difference was that a piece of contemporary life was tied up in the macabre story of Constantine, the separation of my friend from his companion, a student of medicine in Moscow . . . Later, perhaps, in another cafe in another country, the story will be retold, except that this time we will all be there on the back of

Constantine's horse, the Muscovite, Lydia Snieguina, the Parisienne Sylvaine Dore" (*The Shadow* 46).

The epidemic from which Albania must save itself through the repatriation of its foreign students and the establishment of closed borders is the revisionism of the Khrushchev years. It is both war and plague: an aggressive enemy from outside and an insidious disease within the host body. Kadare's ambiguity is deliberate: the Albanian government fears those influences from outside, which, once carried within its borders, will continue to develop and spread from body to body. The object of fear, that is, originates from inside as well as from outside. The forces which killed Constantine and his brothers are the same: pestilence and war, a motif of destruction which occurs throughout Kadare's work. The image of infection is thus an expression of fear of sameness. The closure of borders is a preventive measure aiming to stop the spread of something originating from outside. However once present in the protected community, it will spread. The conditions exist within the closed community as well as outside for the spread of the disease and of the dissatisfaction with Stalinism, of which the disease is a metaphor. The ambiguity of the metaphor lies in the implication that the politics of Albanian closure is based on the recognition of sameness. The external differences between nations are

belied by the sameness of human beings in relation to questions of identity and sexual attraction. The predominant metaphor for this mixture of desire and fear, here as elsewhere in the literature of ethno-national identity, is sexual desire versus the fear of sexually transmitted disease. This sense of the dual nature of belonging-the pledge of belonging versus the drive towards otherness -is ubiquitous in Kadare's work and it represents something much deeper in Albanian national consciousness than the political divide of the post-war era between the regime and its opponents.

For the *narrator* the story of Constantine is about the pledge to return to the realm of death. Yet there is a further motif in the *writer's* retelling of the story. He refers to a second version in which the incestuous attraction between brother and sister underlies the motivation of departure and return. In this version the driving force of the story is neither the pledge nor the achievement of the impossible, but the incest motif and the social ramifications of exogamy and endogamy. Doruntine is sent away at Constantine's behest as a means of averting the possibility of the incestuous relationship. He is the youngest of nine brothers and the fate of the family seems unthreatened by the departure of the sister. However, when the brothers are suddenly wiped out by war

and pestilence, only the female side of the clan remains: the ageing mother at home and Doruntine far away in Bohemia.

Doruntine's marriage to a Slav nobleman, the destruction of the male side of the clan, and the redemption of Doruntine by Constantine are powerfully evoked. In the pre-feudal environment of this legend, issues of exogamy and endogamy were central to the identity and survival of the clan (Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary* 12-25). On the one hand, the sister, Doruntine, must be sent away in a symbolic statement of the necessity of marrying out in order to avoid inbreeding; on the other hand, her loss is felt as a weakening of the family. Against the maintenance of language, customs, and ethnic identity, exogamy is both threatening and necessary. It introduces the foreign, the other, the unknown, and the potentially dangerous into the group, and it leads to the weakening and dissipation of the group through marrying out, strengthening potential rivals and enemies. The maintenance of ethnic identity and the fear of deracination, dispersion, and loss of cultural coherence belongs anthropologically to the feudal past for most of Western Europe, but remains a powerful theme of ethno-national consciousness in parts of Central and Eastern Europe and in particular in the Balkan lands. In its Albanian form it reflects the mentality of a clan-based culture, in which the problematic opposition of self and other is

expressed in terms of marriage and incest taboos which determine the make-up of the group and its relationships to the outside world. This early legend of incest, to which Kadare elsewhere refers as the Albanian equivalent of the Oedipus story, gives expression to fears of internal as well as external forces which could undermine the social structure of the early Albanians .

The figure of Doruntine represents both the necessity of exogamy, of preserving the clan through the marrying out of daughters and sisters, and the fear of loss of identity and assimilation to the “other”. Constantine’s pledge to redeem his sister is the compromise on which the resolution of the conflict between the demands of the exogamous and the endogamous is based. The departure of Doruntine to marriage and of the nine sons to war represents the primacy of the exogamous and the turn outwards to the world; the return of Doruntine and the death of the sons represents the ascendancy of the counter-principle of endogamy and turning inwards. The relationship of Constantine and Doruntine thus consists of the two opposed movements of separation and redemption, giving expression to the ambivalence in the relationship of brother and sister, man and lover, self and other in this legend. The promise of the redemption of the sister at the point of social crisis is the price for the move outward to the world.

The Frenchwoman Sylvaine Dore in *The Shadow* embodies everything that the Albanian men in the novel imagine a sophisticated Parisian woman to be, but her name is a reminder of her origins. For she is both the lover and the long-lost sister, now a European, fully assimilated to her French identity, and with no memory of her earlier existence, which is preserved in her name only. As lover and sister she represents desire and fear. She is both the late twentieth-century European and the desired and feared incestuous object, symbol of Albanian isolation; the modern European individual and the image of a pre-feudal ethno-racial identity which has been preserved as a cultural value through the centuries of foreign and imperial domination of the Balkan peninsula. If the *narrator*, and the *writer*, as Constantine, are bound by their pledge to return to the country of their ethnic origins, Sylvaine Dore, the Doruntine of this novel, is the figure of the sister who has assimilated a European identity so thoroughly that she has forgotten her legendary roots in the home country, and hence is an image of cultural loss. She represents an extreme version of Mark Alem's alienation in *The Palace of Dreams*.

In the story of Constantine and Doruntine Kadare finds the cultural archetype of his nation's complex identifications of the endogamous and the exogamous, the lawful and the unlawful, of the identity-giving

factors of self and other. The theme of the pledge to overcome death encapsulates the sense of fragility of Albanian identity, caught between the demands of self and other, of the opposition of similarity and difference which, in the nation's history, was so fraught with loss and destruction. The exogamous movement outwards towards the other represents loss (death of the brothers, abandonment of the sister), the endogamous movement inwards to the self represents closure (incest between brother and sister).

*The Shadow* is to recapitulate the leitmotiv from Kadare's life and works and to show the extent of these identifications in the contemporary Albanians' encounter with Europe. Albianess rests on a deeply felt sense of ambivalence towards the world outside. On the one hand, it is the object of intense fantasies of escape, fulfilment, and redemption (expressed in powerful sexual imagery in the novel); on the other hand, the world represents fear of loss of self, deracination, and fragmentation of the bases of group identity for the *narrator* and the *writer*, Kadare's representatives of the contemporary Albanian Nomenclature in this work. Here Kadare links the contemporary problematics of dissidence and existential authenticity under the dictatorship to historical patterns of Albanian culture and individual existence.

The figures of the *writer* and the *narrator* shadow each other throughout the novel. The *writer* is introduced in relation to the screenplay which the *narrator* has given to Sylvaine to read:

I told her that it was a story which a friend had told me when we were studying together in Moscow, he at the Gorki Institute of Literature and I at an academy for cinema. (*The Shadow* 36)

The two had met before leaving Tirana. Both had applied for scholarships to study in Moscow. The *writer* is at first rejected, ostensibly on account of tubercular shadows on his x-rays, a diagnosis which turns out to be mistaken once the checks on his personal record have been completed. The closeness of the two young men is expressed in an image of physical identity as they search their x-rays unsuccessfully for the signs of difference which have resulted in the rejection of the *writer*:

We looked there for the small spot which had caused the hold-up for him, but the shades of our thoracic cavities on the two x-rays looked so identical that after we had passed the negatives back and forward a few times, we got them mixed up in the end and felt as though we had found

ourselves one hundred years later in front of a common grave, looking for our own bones. (*The Shadow* 62)

While the *narrator* and the *writer* share the same experiences of youth, love, and education in Moscow, their paths diverge after their repatriation. Both realize that their task as creative intellectuals will be difficult in their homeland, where cinema related works are subjected to even greater control than literature.

Hoping that his screenplay with its memories of their youth in Moscow will bring them together again, and wanting to tell his old friend about Sylvaine, the *narrator* is upset at the *writer's* cold and aggressive response:

I felt offended as rarely before, and I waited impatiently for the moment when I could leave and no longer have to put up with that contemptuous look which seemed to be saying: you're a pain in the neck with your Lydia Snieguinas and your Doruntines, your rues Monsieur-le-Prince. I never want to hear their names again. (*The Shadow* 84)

He wants to respond in kind: "You've had a certain success and you think you've reached the top of Olympus, but pride comes before a fall!" (*The Shadow* 85). But he desists. Later he discovers that the *writer*

is about to be placed under sanctions on account of his most recent novel. Kadare draws explicitly on his experiences of reprisal and harassment after the publication of *The Palace of Dreams*. Listening to the official debate about his friend's new novel on the radio, the *narrator* hears the same expressions as he himself had been tempted to use: "The people raise you to the heights of Olympus and the people will bring you down" (*The Shadow* 85). These words echo those used by Ramiz Alia in the formal proceedings against Kadare. The *narrator's* inner complicity with the regime is complete. Not only has he kept his distance from his friend out of fear of the consequences of too close a relationship, but he has replicated the response of the hated regime: "for the first time I felt regret. I felt that I had brought misfortune down upon him by cursing him on that day" (*The Shadow* 85).

The *writer* reappears as a dreamlike figure clutching refugee forms and a copy of the x-rays from their youth, and makes a bizarre final appearance in Paris as a delegate of the Writer's Union on the eve of the dictator's death. The point is reiterated that these two figures are images of each other and that it is only the *writer's* gift which separates them. At the same time they share fundamental elements of identity with their Albanian archetype, Constantine:

In this world most human beings just replay the same story. Only their looks, their hair-dos, and their height are changed, like the wigs that actors swap before returning to the stage to interpret a role which they have played over and over. Sylvaine and I did nothing other than relive that which had happened to my friend from Moscow, on that night when, in the falling snow close to the gates of the Gorki Institute, our faces pale, startled, no doubt, by the headlights of the taxis and the fanfares of socialism, the medieval figure of Constantine appeared. Whatever we did, we could not but respond to his call, we could not repudiate our identification with the knight: the horse, the journey, all the rest had been in place for a long time. (*The Shadow* 227)

Through the fiction of the screenplay he shows how the *narrator* attempts, but fails, to emulate the *writer's* creativity. The points of similarity and difference are clearly demarcated between the two figures. If the main theme of this novel is the perversion of the Albanian life-world and its distorted relationship to the normality of modern life in the French capital as seen through the eyes of the *narrator*, the secondary theme, reflected through the figure of the *writer*, based on

Kadare himself, is the necessary perversion of art in an inauthentic life-world (i.e. the transformation of his novel into the second-rate screenplay).

In the final pages the *narrator* and the *writer* are seen cringing in the rear of their respective taxis-cum-carriages in a nightmarish trip through Paris. Each represents a compromise and a failure of a different kind. The *narrator* has failed to bring together his two realities of Albania and France in order to live an authentic life. Hating the regime and the life it enforces in his home country, he has compromised, survived, and thrived as a bureaucrat. However he cannot escape the Albanianness which takes him back home each time, and he does not seek refuge in France. While the *narrator* is a weak character-a typical Kadarean protagonist -his return to his homeland is not motivated by his privileged position, nor is it determined by factors such as family responsibility or the inertia of habit and routine. Underlying his debilitating and inauthentic existence between Albania and France is a deeper truth for Kadare, namely of his Albanianness. Like Mark-Alem in *The Palace of Dreams*, he is deeply and unchangeably Albanian. Yet authentic existence is rendered inaccessible to him by the pseudo-Albanian reality of the dictatorship. The two sides of his existence, Albania and France, reality and imagination, exist in a false existential

opposition. He, the everyday Albanian “new man”, is unable to draw on his ethno-national identity and as a result his life swings between two poles of inauthenticity.

If the *narrator* lacks creativity, the *writer* represents the embattled realm of the imagination in the dictatorship. We see him through the eyes of his erstwhile friend and ungifted colleague as withdrawn, arrogant, and hostile. He is not represented as the dissident-cum-hero. His unpopularity with the regime is due to works such as the novel on which the *narrator's* screenplay is based (*Twilight of the Steppe-Gods*) and a recent novel which has led to formal arraignment (*The Palace of Dreams*). In both of these works he challenges the regime's image of Albania rather than the ideology of socialism. Against the *narrator*, whose text is defined by confusion of the inner and the outer worlds, the *writer* is revealed as a figure who has not mixed the worlds of imagination and reality, France and Albania. In the final image he stays faithful to Albania, both turning his back on the inauthenticity of life under the dictatorship and remaining impervious to the seductions of Paris. For the Albanian intellectual, the encounter with Paris can lead into only one of two directions: either to a betrayal of his past and exile to the West, or to a renewed and cognizant embrace of the Albanian prison as the true place of his existential identity. In this final image, the

*writer* is blinded. Blindness in Kadare's works is a symbol of living in the past and of refusal to live in the present. The blind rhapsodists and old women of Kadare's world live in the past; the hodja in *Chronicle in Stone* blinds himself rather than witness the arrival of communism. The image is ambivalent. He has renounced the Western environment in order to remain an Albanian. However, this choice also involves a compromise. He is torn between the demands of the dictatorship and those of his Albanian identity symbolized in the figure of Constantine, the eternal Albanian. In the figure of the *writer* Kadare clearly reprises aspects of his own development since the 1970s.

The *narrator* lives in a double world, slipping from one level of consciousness to another. On the boulevards of Paris he is suddenly transported by the sight of black limousines to the guns and barbed wire of Albania's borders:

On the quays I could make out a long way off some bodies lying on the asphalt. Some twisted bits of barbed wire stretched alongside them and pools of blood stained the street. There was no difficulty in guessing that it was a shred of time straight from Albania, from the pebbly shore of Lake Pogradec. From the coast of Saranda too. (*The Shadow* 186-187)

Transported to Lake Pogradec or the beach of Saranda he relives the experiences of border barbarism which were essential to the maintenance of terror in Albania. The deep structures of Albanian experience impinge on modern consciousness, shaping it and rendering the unfamiliar familiar:

It wasn't just the inversion of light and dark, as on an x-ray. [...] It was worse. [...] There was, as I had disclosed several days before, a sort of fundamental defect. The loom of time was damaged and its fabric flawed. Rolled into a ball, as if twisted by paralysis or polio, some days began in the evening and finished at dawn. [...] Even worse was the way time flowed. I was convinced that it was moving backwards, like a crab. [...] At one moment I wondered whether I was still of this world and whether the words were continuing to flow from my mouth absurdly and uselessly, like the beard of a dead man. (*The Shadow* 206-207)

In these images we can identify the origins of the *narrator's* traumatized consciousness. The Albanian history of repression and oppression is imagined not as a progression over time but as an eternal presence in parallel worlds. In his drunken and nightmarish sorties

through the city, the *narrator* experiences France as a dream world in which past and present, East and West, are superimposed in a phantasmagoria of images of the forces of history, culture, and politics which determine his life.

The *narrator* imagines himself warming slowly to life on entering France, and on returning to Albania he feels his body temperature drop and his vital energies diminish. Kadare used this powerful image to describe his own feelings of emergence and descent on leaving and re-entering Albania. As he enters Michel Piccoli's Parisian apartment he feels the last of the clumps of earth and pieces of gravel dropping from his hair and shoulders. Yet even this powerful metaphor of the relationship of life and death fails as the *narrator* loses his ability to correlate the two spheres of his existence. He finds himself incapable of reconciling the two worlds, and remains caught in a half-way world between reality and imagination, mapping the horrors of Albania onto Paris, just as he and his friends had projected their imaginings of Paris onto their Albanian reality.

Throughout the text sexual attraction symbolizes the connection between Albania and the West. The *narrator's* friends back home expect lurid descriptions of his exploits in Paris with sexy French women. In France he is overcome by performance anxiety, failing to reach orgasm

with his classy Parisian lover, Madame V. and, until the end, with Sylvaine. Consummation of the sexual act becomes a persistent image of the problematical relationship between Albania and the West. Finally, dogged by impotence and terror, the *narrator* warms to life to the point where he can experience sex with Sylvaine as an excruciating act of transmission and connection. As the sperm separates itself from his gelid body, becoming warm in the process and lodging in her womb, the *narrator* experiences the agony of the escape from death to life:

The fall was terrifying; I felt nature putting up a final resistance to consanguinity. I felt the cruel whip of desire, I felt sin and the fear of punishment. [...] thought I could hear the baying of hounds heading towards me. I would have returned her caresses, but all I could do was use my arms to protect my face from the ravening animals. It lasted a long time. Time seemed suspended. Finally I felt an inhuman pain run down my spine just as my sperm finally separated itself from me and, still frozen, carrying its terror with it, like blocks of ice floating in the darkness where the edges of the worlds break away from each other, it penetrated to the depths of her womb. (*The Shadow* 251-252).

He has achieved sexual union with Doruntine, thereby breaking both the incest taboo and the pledge to return. In a state of apocalyptic trepidation he expects to be dragged down again into the Albanian nether world:

My suffering was enough to destroy me! [...] I had sinned with my sister [...] I asked myself again whether we weren't perhaps the same being separated by chance, whose two halves were seeking to rejoin each other. The taxi slid through the dark; my eyes half-closed, I waited for the fall. What I had done seemed to me more and more abominable. It wasn't just incest. Incest was just the first taboo which I had broken, the surface manifestation of a deeper evil. I had broken another, much more important pact. I had come here under certain conditions. I was a dead body which had to keep the form granted to it. My nationality wanted it thus. My frontiers and my destiny also. (*The Shadow* 254)

But the power of those forces that tortured him in the night and that appear to him without warning in the daylight of Paris seems to have been broken. As the lift takes him up to his hotel room on the way to the airport in the final paragraphs, he experiences a sense of ecstatic

redemption. The transmission of the message of Albanianness, symbolized in the sexual act with Sylvaine, leads to a fantasy of personal and national redemption:

The elevator ascended, devouring the floors, the first, the second, amidst the din of breaking chains, of gates and grills being torn off their hinges, of baying dogs, of hammer blows driving nails into the cross. Barbs flayed my skin, leaving me bleeding but not turning me back. And then I realized that the unbelievable had happened: I had broken through the border and had survived. Now it was no longer the elevator which lifted me up, but an ancient hymn, and after me thousands and thousands of others rose up on it as well, all the noble and solemn generations of Albanians leaving behind the iciness of death amidst bells and alleluias: "Albania is risen, amen!"

*(The Shadow 258)*

In these final paragraphs Kadare's prose is at its most ambiguous. The world of psychotic self-fulfilment that flashes through the narrative, intruding dream onto reality, appears to have triumphed in an insanity born of the *narrator* inability to integrate the inner and the outer worlds. In this ending, liberation of the West is revealed as the fantasy of a

dying man. If this redemption can be seen as release from the dictatorship, then the ending is positive; if, however, as seems more likely, the redemption is the psychosis of a figure who is incapable of bringing together imagination and reality, the Paris of his dreams with the death-in-life in Albania, the ending is as gloomy as that of Kadare's model, Kafka's *The Trial*. It confirms Albanian existence as schizoid, operating between two mutually exclusive spheres of imagination and reality, death and life, which remain incapable of resolution and which must lead, sooner or later, to tragedy. Where the authorial figure of the *writer* has achieved connection and clarity through his identification with Constantine in his novel, the *narrator* does not seem to. His experience is marked by confusion, inauthenticity, and madness as he fails to reconcile the oppositions of East and West, past and present, Albania and France. He remains a victim of the dictatorship, a figure whose experience of everyday life as the gloomy, subterranean inauthenticity in his native land is incapable of preparing him for the experience of everyday life in a contemporary Western environment. Kadare's novel is thus a testament to contemporary Albanian reality which disallows life as normality. Like so many heroes of earlier Central and Eastern European literature, Kadare's *narrator* is a victim not of

political oppression, but of the dislocation of imagination and reality in the dictatorship. This is the tragedy of everyday life under the regime.

The critique of the inauthenticity of life under the regime, rather than of the regime itself, is the key to *The Shadow*. Along it, he sets up the legend as a mythical and timeless standard of Albanian being against which the deformations of the present can be judged. Constantine's achievement of the impossible, of making the transition from death to life and back again, symbolizes both the necessity and the impossibility of overcoming Albanian identity in order to live. This is an extremely negative assessment from a writer whose fame rests partly on his powerful evocations of his nation's identity. However, it can read it in the context of both the continuum of Kadare's work and the metafiction of the author's death. Kadare's representation of communist Albania since his repatriation from Moscow has been uniformly negative. In *The City without Signs*, *The General of the Dead Army* and *Winter of Great Solitude* the communist present is grey and wintry, characterized by the rain and fog that the dictator hated. For Kadare the Albania of the dictatorship is inauthentic, and the art born of the dictatorship is damaged by its provenance. In returning to his native country, rather than going into exile, he chose a life in which his art would of necessity be compromised:

Naturally, like every work of art born amidst violence, this one suffered from all of the deficiencies, mutilations, and distortions which were the result of this monstrous era. [...]

We are clearly dealing here with a body of work that is seriously deformed. It was the pressure of the tyranny which caused this damage. (Kadare, *Albanian Spring* 200)

In the context of the imminent death of the dictator and the battle for supremacy of the various factions in the Party, Kadare wrote a novel whose reading depends on the outcome of history. Should he, the author, be killed in the struggles for power and reprisal, the archetypal fate of Constantine will have been reconfirmed with his interment. Kadare's death will signify the failure of resolution of the Albanian life-in-death and Albanian history will continue its gloomy subterranean existence. Should he survive the regime however, the novel will await a different outcome. After the short period of office of Hoxha's successor, Ramiz Alia, this is what happened with the revolution of 1990/91, in which the negative paradigm was finally broken and a period of change commenced. The publication of the novel in 1994 marked Kadare's dissolution of the metafiction, releasing the novel from its grave-existence in the bank-vault into the life-world of Albania after the dictatorship.

On the night of 11 April 1985 Enver Hoxha died, aged 76. Ramiz Alia was elected by the Central Committee to succeed Hoxha as First Secretary although Nexhmije, Kadare's Lady Macbeth of Tirana, kept a steely grasp on the reins of power. The death was announced the next morning. At the funeral on 15 April, Alia signalled to Albania and the world that Hoxha's political line would continue with no deviations. No changes in domestic or foreign policy should be expected.

On 25 October 1990, during the time of dark forces when the Sigurimi and other groups were battling for power as the regime teetered on the verge of collapse, Kadare left his homeland for the safety of France. After an initial hope for a peaceful transition to democracy and political openness, he recognized that compromised figures and factions from the regime were staying in power by changing their political colours. The democratic reforms in Albania had not gone far enough and political power remained in the hands of the Tirana ruling class:

I had told myself that the day the totalitarian state agreed to live with a genuine literature would be the first real sign of reform, of the regime's attempt to humanize itself.

Through my work, I've held this dream up to the Albanian people and to thousands of readers around the world. Now I understood that, although there is something authentic in

the dream, the illusion was no more than an illusion. To make it a reality there had to be some new impulse, a new dimension. That impulse would be my *absence*. (Kadare, *Albanian Spring* 58-59)

In *Albanian Spring*, Kadare refers to *The Palace of Dreams* as the novel which launched the most ferocious attack on the dictatorship. In recognizing ethnicity to be both a deeply embedded and politically instrumentalized aspect of Albanian identity, *The Palace of Dreams* is as much an assault on Hoxha's state nationalism as it is a satire on totalitarian aspirations to complete control, or a veiled attack on Ottoman, Soviet or Serb imperialism. In this novel, Istanbul, Moscow, Belgrade and Tirana are all seats of totalitarian power in conflict with the ethnic self-determination of people. After *The Palace of Dreams* there was no going back. In this work, more than any other, Kadare marshals the forces of literary satire and of ethnic identification to attack the regime. Here too, moreover, he deepens his implicit critique of the regime's Albanianism. In contrast to the official national celebrations of the regime, Mark-Alem's ethnicity is deeply felt and personal. In compromising his sense of ethnic identity, Mark-Alem stems the wellsprings of his being and embarks on a life of inauthenticity as an official of the Ottoman Empire.

The focus on the inauthenticity of life under the regime provides the key to Kadare's work from *The Palace of Dreams* onward. Kadare continually seeks to peel back the layers in order to find an authentic core to Albanian existence. He finds this, in *The Shadow* as throughout his works of the 1970s and 1980s, in the Christian Albania of the Byzantine Middle Ages, in the period immediately preceding the Ottoman invasions. At this time the core cultural documents of the Albanians, the epics descended from the ancient culture of the Homeric songs, reached their highest level of development. Throughout his work Kadare has suggested the existence of an alternative Albania to that of the regime, intimating that the historical roots of his nation can give birth to different versions of Albanian identity from those of the Albanian Party of Labour. In the figure of Constantine in *The Shadow* and elsewhere Kadare finds an authenticity of existence which is Albanian and which can be pitted against Hoxha's "new man" and the inauthenticity of life under the regime. It is a symbol of the profound ambivalences in Albanian culture towards the self and the other, the nation and the world, which for Kadare determine Albanian identity. In this diagnosis the dictatorship is a symptom rather than a cause.

Drawing on the emotional and spiritual foresight of the artist, Kadare sensed that nothing would be the same again. And, in

anticipation of new directions, he set about creating the intellectual and spiritual environment for a new and more profound reattachment of Albania to its European heritage. The broadening of the European Union, in particular the foreshadowed inclusion of countries from the former socialist Eastern Europe, would strengthen the writer's resolve to work towards the restitution of Albania's European cultural heritage during the 1990s.

The early 1990s were a period of transition in which Kadare experienced bitterness and hostility from both inside and outside Albania:

Much has been said about courage under dictatorship; the matter is one about which people have not been chary with their advice. Moralizing has been popular in the cafes of Paris and Vienna, and is no doubt a comfort. [...] Others, one's compatriots, also lecture you. But they do it too late, when the dictatorship begins to soften, and they forget that they were the people who once filled the public halls to sing its glory. To beat one's breast after the fact, when the dictatorship has lost its teeth, playing at dissidence to show one's courage, to pride oneself on having been the first to express criticism, to have gone furthest in

denouncing this or that, to accuse one another, to throw mud at one another, to beat oneself, etc. is all a tiny sample of the post-dictatorial uproar in a number of East European countries. In all that cacophony, it often happens that the real opponents of dictatorship, those who for long years had been mining its foundations, are thrust aside and forgotten. (Kadare, *Albanian Spring* 173)

His period of adjustment was short. As a writer he had always occupied a second phase, determined by the rhythms of European literature, not the short term of a life. Unlike many of his colleagues in Eastern Europe, he continued to write. *Invitation to the Writer's Studio* accompanied *Albanian Spring* and was followed by *The Weight of the Cross* in a line of works explaining to his compatriots and the world his activities as a writer and as an eminent figure of Albanian culture and society. In 1993 he completed the second part of *The Pyramid* begun in 1988, achieving in the figure of the young Pharaoh a subtle portrait of the dictator as modernizer and tyrant, whose monument is built solely with the purpose of depleting the energies and imaginations of his people and thereby keeping them under control. Although Kadare began work on this novel in 1988, the same year as the regime undertook to construct the huge pyramid-shaped museum to Enver Hoxha and his

works, he wrote several poems in the 1960s foreshadowing this theme, and the symbolism of the ancient Middle Eastern despotism occurs frequently throughout his oeuvre. In 1993, too, he began the artistic revision of his works for the comprehensive dual language, Albanian and French. He maintained his residence in Paris, moving back and forth between Albania and France during the 1990s and into the new millennium. *Spiritus* (1995) began a series of post-communist novels including *Spring Flowers*, *Spring Frost* (2000), *The Life, Game and Death of Lul Mazrek* (2002), *The Successor* (2003), and *Accident* (2008) in which episodes from the history of the regime are evoked in bizarre and surreal environments reminiscent of *The Shadow*. In 1996 the French government recognized Kadare's services by making him a member of the highly prestigious *Academic Francaise*.