

Ismail Kadare  
The monster  
[*Përbindëshi*].  
Tiranë. Lidhja e Shkrimtarëve. 1991. 184 pages

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[*Le monstre*].  
Jusuf Vrioni, transl.  
Paris. Fayard. 1991. 218 pages

Ismail Kadare, the scion of a small nation in which reality has often been difficult to stomach, has shown a long-standing predilection for impregnating his own reality with haunting legendry. The novel *Kush e solli Doruntinën?*, Tiranë 1980 (Engl. transl. *Doruntine*, New York 1988) transposes the Albanian legend of little Constantine and his sister Doruntine into a mediaeval whodunnit. *Ura me tri harqe*, Tiranë 1978 (The three-arched bridge), of which an English translation will soon be on the market, focuses on the much grimmer Balkan tale of immurement.

*Përbindëshi* (The monster) is Kadare's most recent flirt with legendry and, at the same time, one of his earliest prose works. The Albanian original of the novel was first published in 1965 in volume 12 of the official Tiranë literary journal *Nëntori* (November), shortly after his initial success with the novel *Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur*, Tiranë 1963 (Engl. transl. *The general of the dead army*, New York 1990). *The monster* was soon however to fall victim to Stalinist censorship, as the writer tells us: "An article vilifying *The monster* sufficed to exclude this tale from Albanian literature... it was savagely flogged, forbidden and buried so deeply that it would take me over a quarter of a century to exhume it."

The monster in question is none other than the Trojan horse before the gates of sacred Ilium, though here it is a monster in a time warp. The fall of ancient Troy takes place both in the future and in the past of its characters. At times they remain unaltered while Troy transforms itself before their very eyes, changing form to become a modern city with cafés, an airport etc. At other times, it is the city which stays put while the characters change, traversing different phases to metamorphose into figures of our time. This distortion of time, without the Joycean stream of consciousness, was quite enough to unnerve Stalinist censors who were petrified at the very thought of possible political allusions, and the novel was conveniently forgotten. Who could blame the authorities for suspecting that the tale of the insidious conquest of Troy might, in the final analysis, be more about Albania than anything else?

*The monster* was, needless to say, an unusual publication for the Albanian literature of socialist realism of the sixties. Now, after republication of the novel in Prizren 1990 and Tiranë 1991 in an amended version which purges it of some of the infelicities of style which mark Kadare's early works, the assiduous Jusuf Vrioni has come out with another impeccable French translation, giving the international public access to what in many respects remains one of Ismail Kadare's most curious books.

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