

Ismail Kadare.

*L'Ombre*. Jusuf Vrioni, tr.

Paris. Fayard. 1994. 259 pages. 120 FRF. ISBN 2-213-02756-0.

After his emigration to France in October 1990, Ismail Kadare stated that he would return to his native land once democracy was restored. He has nonetheless chosen to remain in Paris and there seems to be little chance that he will return to Albania at all, for the time being at least. His choice is understandable not only in view of the creative stimulus most writers enjoy in the French capital, but also in view of the exceptionally aggressive climate presently reigning in intellectual circles in Tirana.

Kadare has spent recent years in Paris working on a general revision and republication of his collected works. Two thick volumes have already appeared in French, *Oeuvres 1-2*, Paris 1993-1994, and in Albanian, *Vepra 1-2*, Paris 1993-1994, and more are on the way. They constitute a substantial revisal of many of his works. Some tales are seeing the light of day again after many years of politically-motivated oblivion.

'The Shadow,' now published in an edition of its own, is one of these works. The novel was written in 1984-1986 and was deposited in a French bank for safe-keeping during the final years of the dictatorship. Like a number of Kadare's earlier works, 'The Shadow' focuses on the fate of the intellectual in an age of political turmoil. An Albanian movie director is invited to Paris within the framework of a cultural exchange agreement, and journeys not merely from one European city to another, but from one cosmos to another, from death to life. Travelling abroad was an extremely rare privilege, a schizophrenic experience under the Hoxha dictatorship. Ismail Kadare himself was one of the very few creative individuals allowed to leave the country during the long decades of unbridled terror. In a sense, therefore, 'The Shadow' must be interpreted as a work of autobiography. The fictive director uses his modest freedom to the full in days of intensive professional activity and in nights of emotionally charged intimacy until he is forced return to the silence and cold of the Stalinist East, only to resurface once again in the *ville lumière*.

Despite the introduction of democracy, the two realities, the Albanian and the Western, are still light years apart from one another. At this stage in his career, Ismail Kadare would now seem to stand before a choice. Is he to be a Parisian writer with notable success in France or will he prefer to retain his Albanian identity, the Balkan roots which originally inspired his creative genius? The unreserved acclamation Kadare once enjoyed in Albania has dissipated somewhat in recent years. One of the reasons for this has been his conspicuous absence from the book market. Since the fall of the dictatorship, Kadare has continued to publish in France but has made very few of his works available in the Balkans. His Parisian editor, Fayard, has recently taken to publishing separate editions, in French and Albanian, but very few copies of the Albanian-language versions ever reach Albania, not to mention Kosovo behind the 'cevacici curtain'. For the handful of copies which do get to the Balkans, the French sales price is a barrier in itself, successfully inhibiting any further contact between the author and his prospective though impoverished readers... who are still interested in what Ismail Kadare has to say.

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