

Ismail Kadare.

Spiritus - roman me kaos, zbulesë dhe çmërs.

Elbasan. Onufri. 1996. 259 pp.

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Spiritus - roman avec chaos, révélation, vestiges. Jusuf Vrioni, tr.

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It has been almost a decade since Ismail Kadare left his homeland to settle in Paris and these last years have been decisive in enabling him to reach full maturity as a creative and entertaining writer. The writer was recently elected to a seat in the venerable Académie Française in recognition of his achievements. Kadare's latest novel, *Spiritus*, published simultaneously in Albanian and French, is an imaginative and solidly constructed work of fiction offering both the many traditional techniques which readers have come to enjoy and expect, and a few novel aspects in evolution.

The plot, which crystalizes slowly out of a progression from 'chaos' to 'revelation' and 'traces,' enlivens the sombre and sobering realities of recent Albanian history (i.e. the Hoxha dictatorship) with the brilliant hues of legend and fantasy. A group of foreigners, touring post-Communist eastern Europe in search of the fantastic, hears exciting rumours during its stay in Albania about the capture of a spirit from the dead. The spirit, as we subsequently learn, is in actual fact a listening-device, affectionately known to the notorious secret service as a 'hornet,' which murdered actor Shpend Guraziu took to the grave with him. The country's aging Leader (certainly an evocation of the demonic Enver Hoxha) was going blind and, perhaps as compensation, had asked the Chinese comrades for technical assistance in the form of a cargo of bugging equipment. On its arrival, a horde of secret agents, personified by Arian Vogli, gears into action to install the hornets and listen in on everything from clandestine baptisms to otherworldly seances and worldly sex, "Let's place a hornet in the apartment of the engineer Gjikondi, yes, right under his bed. It seems that, when having sex, his wife divulges secrets of great importance..."

Kadare takes up many of the elements which characterized his novels in the past: Albania as seen through the eyes of the innocent foreigner, the bumbling secret agent doting nefariously over his equipment as if it were his offspring, and the realms of Albanian and Balkan legendry. Even old Kadarean characters such as writer Skënder Bermema re-emerge.

Idiosyncratic is Kadare's art in perceiving and coming to terms with Albania's tragic history. Now that he has left behind him the gnawing fears and surrealist horrors of the dictatorship, his readers might have expected a panoramic settlement of accounts with the Stalinist past, a cold and realistic description of the indescribable à la Solzhenitsyn. Kadare, however, has taken the opposite direction. The couched allegories which hovered ubiquitously in his earlier writings have not evaporated but rather condensed into a firm dichotomy of reality. In *L'ombre* (see WLT 69:4, p. 842-843), written secretly in 1984-1986, an Albanian movie director has the schizophrenic experience of commuting between death and life, i.e. between communist Albania and the glamorous West. In *Shkaba / L'aigle* (see WLT 70:4, p. 1008), written in 1995, the young protagonist literally tumbles from life on the surface into a parallel existence in a mysterious underworld, an analogy for sudden arrest and internment in Albania. Reality and legendry have intertwined in the works of Kadare from the very start and form the very essence of many of his masterpieces: *Prilli i thyer / Broken April* (see WLT 65:2, p. 343-344), *Dosja H / Le dossier H* (see WLT 65:3, p. 529-530), *Kush e solli Doruntinën? / Doruntine* (see WLT 61:2, p. 332), and *Ura me tri harqe / The three-arched bridge* (see WLT ...). In *Spiritus*, the world of the living and the world of the dead, i.e.

existence as we perceive it vs. haunting legendry, mingle anew to entice the reader once again into the fantastic world that is Kadare's.

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