

Ismail Kadare.

*The file on H*. David Bellos, tr.

London. Harvill Press. 1997. 184 pp. ISBN 1-86046-257-X.

*The file on H* is a delightful tale from Kadare's mature period. It was published in Albanian under the title *Dosja H* in 1990 (see WLT 65.3, p. 529-530) and has since been translated into French (1989), Swedish (1990), Portuguese (1990), Norwegian (1992), Greek (1992) and Spanish (1993).

The story line takes us back to the early 1930s. Kadare's 'fictional' tale is set safely in the pre-war period to avoid any possible accusations from Albania's post-war communist rulers that he was criticizing or making fun of their revolutionary regime (which of course he was). In *The file on H*, two Irish-American scholars venture into the northern Albanian alps, the most isolated region of the Balkans, in search of the last extant cradle of Homeric poetry. The authorities are suspicious of the shifty foreigners and send off an intrepid secret agent in the person of Dull Baxhaja to follow their movements. The local population, for its part, grows exceedingly nervous at the sight of the new-fangled tape-recorders which the innocent scholars have brought with them.

In short, *The file on H* is a tremendous satire on the isolationist and xenophobic regime which held sway in Albania for half a century. Originally written in 1981 and first published when the dictatorship was in its last throes, the novel gives clear proof of Kadare's endeavours as a literary 'dissident' under a regime which was itself the very epitome of the dutiful Dull Baxhaja.

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