

Ismail Kadare

Ikja e shërgut [The Stork's Flight]

Tirana: Onufri. 1999. 97 pp. ISBN 99927-30-50-1

L'envol du migrateur. Trois microromans. Tr. Jusuf Vrioni & Tedi Papavrami

Paris: Fayard. 2001. 177 pp. ISBN 2-213-60351-0

One of the most surprising buildings in Albania is a wooden hunting lodge built in the marshlands of Lezha by Mussolini's foreign minister Count Ciano (1903-1944). Ciano had intended it as a retreat, where the leaders of Fascist Italy could go bird-hunting in their newly-acquired colony. It was used as a hotel complex during the Stalinist dictatorship and survives today with its modestly surrealist Visconti decor as a rather out-of-place building standing in the middle of an otherwise barren landscape. It is to the history of this lodge and the itinerary of a crime committed in it that *Le Chevalier au Faucon* (The falcon knight) is devoted, the first of three tales which make up the volume *L'envol du migrateur* (The stork's flight).

Ismail Kadare was a prominent member of the Albanian Writers' Union during the most oppressive decades of the dictatorship and was subjected to political surveillance by the Party and its omnipotent Leader Enver Hoxha just as much as any other writer was. The second tale in this collection *Histoire de l'Union des Écrivains albanais telle que reflétée dans le miroir d'une femme* (History of the Writers' Union as reflected in a lady's looking-glass) is a belated but nonetheless fascinating requital on the Writers' Union and on the Stalinist regime in general. The protagonist, a young Tirana writer in the late 1960s, is bedazzled by Marguerite, reputed to be a "lady of the night," and is on the point of making contact when a political purge breaks out in the capital. Writers and artists are called to plenary sessions of the Party in order to denounce one another and themselves for their big-city bourgeois proclivities, foreign influence and their alienation from the working class. Many are swiftly despatched to the countryside to learn from the peasants what real life is all about. The author highlights all the workings of the campaign, modeled on the 1973 Purge of the Liberals which wreaked havoc in intellectual circles in Albania in early seventies. Kadare fell victim to one such campaign himself and was sent into internal exile for a brief period of time. His skill comes best to the fore in his rendition of the tense atmosphere of the purge and its impact on Albanian intellectuals of the period.

The final tale, *L'envol du migrateur*, conceived in 1986, focuses on a love affair rumored to have been enjoyed by the aging poet Lasgush Poradeci and on the political implications it had in a town where everyone was spying on everyone. Poradeci (1899-1987), one of the truly great Albanian poets of the twentieth century, lived his final years in seclusion on the banks of Lake Ohrid, from which he had always derived his inspiration. Kadare interprets the said love affair as the only thing the dictator could not take away from the poet, a tiny victory which the destitute old man could take to the grave with him. In this connection, Kadare counters the old Russian saying: "Ruler, be merciful with the poet" with his own "Poet, be merciful with the ruler"

The French-language edition of the book was prepared by two translators: the much-regretted Jusuf Vrioni (1916-2001), whose linguistic skills assisted Kadare in obtaining the deserved renown he now enjoys, at least in the French-speaking world, and the writer's new voice, Tedi Papavrami, who is also a violinist of note.

The Albanian-language publication *Ikja e shtërgut* (The stork's flight) contains only the

one tale, but presents it in two different versions, one from the year 1986 and the revision of 1998, together with an interview with and study of the writer by Bashkim Kuçuku.

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