



The File on H.

Ismail Kadare , David Bellos (Translator) , Jusuf Vrioni (Translator)

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In the mid 1930s, two young American scholars voyage to the Albanian highlands, the last remaining natural habitat of the oral epic, with one of the world's first tape recorders in hand. Their mission? To discover how Homer could have composed works such as The Iliad and The Odyssey without ever writing them down. Their research puts them at the center of ethnic strife in the Balkans and, mistaken for foreign spies, they are placed under surveillance. Research and intrigue proceed apace, until a Serbian monk plots a violent end to their project.

-- A work of inventive genius, "The File On H." is also a profound and eloquent comment on one of the most intractable conflicts of our time.

-- A funny, satirical tale of two American innocents abroad in search of Homer in modern Albania.

The File on H. Details

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From Reader Review The File on H. for online ebook

Jeffy Joseph says

The first half of the book satirizes the state surveillance machinery. It made me chuckle. Other than the theme of surveillance, a couple of other major themes are also discussed.

Tape recorder, a brand new invention at the time, makes an appearance. The reaction of the different characters are worth mentioning. The people with some knowledge of the device are curious to see it for the first time. Whereas the people who are unaware are scared. They make up superstitions to explain things. That seems to be the general reaction of the public to new technology everywhere. These disillusioned mass is the instigated by an external party with malicious intent. All these seems to me like allusions to various real world situations.

Another thing is the inability of the people to understand the desire of the researchers to pursue their study the origins of the homeric ballads. The general aversion to purely intellectual pursuits forms a persistent background for the story.

Adam says

The plot of this novel, written in 1981, is set sometime during the 1930s.

In a sleepy provincial town near to the foothills of the Accursed Mountains in northern Albania, the Governor's wife is languishing in her bathtub, fantasizing about the two (young, she hopes) Irish scholars who are about to arrive in the town. Maybe, they will provide her with an opportunity for a romantic adventure. Her husband is charged with the job of arranging unobtrusive but close surveillance of the two foreigners. Who knows - they might be spies.

They arrive, but only stay in the town for one night. Their destination is an isolated inn on the road that leads towards the interior of the desolate Accursed Mountains.

The two scholars hope to meet the 'rhapsodes', itinerant performers of timeless unwritten epic poems that pass from one singer to another and from generation to generation. They have brought a tape recorder with them - an object that arouses great curiosity and suspicion amongst all whom they meet. The scholars are of the opinion that the Albanian epic poems might be the descendants - or maybe the predecessors - of those recorded by Homer in ancient times. As they meet and record the rhapsodes, Kadare allows us to eavesdrop, as does the spy sent by the Governor, on their musings about the origins of Homer's verse and the mechanics of transmission of these timeless epics from singer to singer and down the ages. For example, what is remembered and what is forgotten each time the same epic story is repeated from memory? And, what is added? And why?

Kadare's novel was written in Tirana in 1981 when Albania was being ruled by the fiercely repressive regime of Enver Hoxha. It describes a time when the country was under the thumb of another fiercely paranoid dictator, King Zog, and therefore draws obvious parallels with Hoxha's era. Maybe, it's not surprising that Kadare needed to leave Albania to seek asylum in France by the end of the 1980s. Kadare reveals to the reader in his customarily concise way the cold paranoid atmosphere which Albanians had to endure during

Hoxha's 'reign'. In addition to this, the author renders obscure aspects of Homeric scholarship crystal clear to readers like me, who have never ever had reason to think about Homer.

I have read a number of Kadare's novels, and enjoyed all of them, but this is the best of them all ... so far! I was sad to have reached the end of it.

PS Those who are interested in Albania *per se* might like to look at my book, ALBANIA ON MY MIND.

Ciaran Monaghan says

A funny little story about two Harvard scholars searching for singers of the oral epics passed down from Homer's time. In a closed state like Albania, they are thought to be spies and their movements are tracked by the state. Then, as they are focusing on the Albanian origins of the Homeric epics, they also draw the ire of Serb claimants to that crown. And, finally, as they are using an amazing new invention, the tape recorder, to record the singers, they also fall foul of the Luddite fears of the locals. As you can imagine, it doesn't end well.

Wyatt says

In a WAY...this is a serious book. Since it's unthinkable to the state that people would pursue an intellectual endeavor for its own sake, they take to spying on the two American scholars who have come to Albania to look for the living remnants of epic oral poetry.

In contrast to a few of Kadare's other books, I found it less obtuse than *The Palace of Dreams*, and definitely more light-hearted than *Broken April* (which is still remains his best). Parts of the *File On H* thate made me chuckle: the politician's overly-enthusiastic appreciation for the writings of the spy, as if his reports themselves were Homeric, his wife's steamy fantasies of the far-from-steamy American scholars, and the scholars' obsessive chronicling of evidence of the mind's ability to forget.

Everything is done by proxy in this book. The scholars want to access Homer via the living bards and the politician's wife wants to screw the scholars...and these things are accomplished, but only in a figurative sense.

Like the characters in Kadare's novel, I was one of those people looking for something "pure" and rustic in the Balkans and Albania is particular is a place where what you find/accomplish is commonly one step removed from what you had imagined.

Jo says

My first Kadare book!

Lengthy mainly irrelevant anecdote: when I was a student, years ago, we had to study Homer. It wasn't

optional - you could choose which of the big two (Iliad and Odyssey) you'd study in more depth, but you definitely had to read both.

So it was that I'd heard of Milman Parry, who wrote about Homer and the oral tradition in the early 20th century. I even vaguely knew that he'd been out to the Balkans somewhere and made the first ever recordings of the last ever rhapsodes (illiterate poets who knew great long epic poems off by heart). I suppose there are no rhapsodes left now, anyway. But because I was only young then, and relatively unquestioning, I just accepted that as a given thing - Parry says this, he advanced such and such a hypothesis, blah blah.

It didn't occur to me ever to wonder what it would be like for a Harvard academic to pitch up in the Balkans in the 1920s with his strange new recording equipment and start tracking down the last authentic rhapsodes. That would have made a much more interesting read than any of my essays ever did, and that's why I'm not Kadare.

So this is the story of two academics, Irish, but arriving by way of Harvard, who come to Albania (not quite where Parry went, but close) to track down and record the last of the rhapsodes. Albanian bureaucrats are convinced that they are spies, and go to great lengths to put them under effective surveillance. The mayor of the small town nearest to where they are staying is under pressure - will his spies be up to scratch? His wife is bored and just glad to see new faces. The academics themselves are naive and bemused.

If you read it on one level, it's a funny small town comedy/spy story. If you want to get deeper, there are all sort of Homeric parallels - one of the characters even goes blind! Unsubtle.

Written in Albanian, then translated into French, and then I think translated from the French into the English, not directly from the Albanian. Author ultimately went into exile in France, sometime in the 80s - this book was written in 1981, if I recall correctly. Not surprised he chose France - all sorts of 'writing about writing' potentially wanky bits here. But it's not wanky, it's really really good.

Asmaa says

This novel gets more interesting as more details surface. Bill and Max, two Irish scholars, come to Albania to study the declining tradition of oral epic that goes back to Homer and to discover Homer's identity. The little backwater town of N_____ is very suspicious of these visitors, the governor under the instructions of the minister assigning spies to inhabit the attic above their room in order to track their English conversations and whereabouts. All of the undercover espionage escapes the Irishmen's notice as the governor also invites them to various social events at his home.

Many but not everyone see them as a security threat and their tape recorder as a devilish instrument. Daisy the governor's wife develops romantic ideas about unmarried Bill, and the innkeeper Shtjefen persuades the reluctant Albanian highlanders, who stay at his crossroads inn, to sing into machine's microphone.

While the scholarly team records and transcribes the bards' performances, they also address more scientific questions related to oral transmission and to similar phenomena that attempt to explain the diffusion of this poetry, the performers' omissions and additions to the long songs, etc.

Those readers with a knowledge of Albanian history will enjoy the novel even more than one who reads for pleasure a fine storyteller's narrative. Another suggestion is to reread the novel because the story is very good and well-crafted.

Rhys says

A total masterpiece. One of the best novels I have read for ages. I am so glad I have discovered Kadare at last! I had one of his novels on my shelves a few years ago (*Chronicle of Stone*) but never got round to reading it; and I ended up giving it away when I moved house. Recently, however, there was a booksale in my local library and I picked up two Kadare books very cheaply (this one and *Agamemnon's Daughter*)... What a revelation! *The File on H* is funny, ironic, Kafkaesque, absurdist, erotic, and just extremely well written. A delight and I highly recommend it to anyone who loves literature!

Alejandro Orradre says

Fantástica novela, a medio camino entre la ficción, el ensayo y la crónica histórica; Kadaré nos enseña los entresijos de la tradición oral de las leyendas de la Albania de entreguerras, mientras al mismo tiempo se pregunta el porqué de la pervivencia de los mitos entre los humanos (tomando la Iliada de Homero como ejemplo de un supuesto trabajo de dos expertos filólogos) cuando éstos están dotados de una capacidad para el recuerdo exacto muy limitada.

Continúa... <http://lecturafilic.blogspot.com/2016...>

Eadweard says

The premise caught my attention and the book itself was good. I think I found another contemporary author to read, and from an interesting country too, no less.

" "He looked at the map, on which the mountain ranges looked like horses' ribs strewn in disarray on the flagstones of a slaughterhouse. The lettering over them read: "Northern Albania," "Rrafsh," "Kosovo," "Old Serbia."

For more than a thousand years, Albanians and Slavs had been in ceaseless conflict in this area. They had quarreled over everything — over land, over boundaries, over pastures and watering holes — and it would have been entirely unsurprising had they also disputed the ownership of local rainbows.

And as if that were not enough, they also squabbled over the ancient epics, which existed, just to make things completely intractable, in both languages, Albanian and Serbo-Croatian. Each of the two peoples asserted that it had created the epic, leaving the other nation the choice of being considered either a thief or a mere imitator.

"Did it ever occur to you that whether we like it or not, our work on Homer plunges us into this conflict?" Bill said without raising his eyes from the map.

"Do you think so?" "

Adam Dalva says

Clever, fun book - two Irish researchers travel to Albania to do research on oral epics after the invention of the tape recorder. I love the strange mixture of styles here. Kadare mixes Amis-style slapsticky humor from the perspective of the locals with an elevated discourse on Homer and the complicated nature of assembling and re-assembling a spoken poem. The great chapter that reads like an essay on rhapsodes was my favorite, but the work never gets heavy enough to lose sight of its sense of fun. I would have loved for it to be a bit longer, some subplots (most specifically the fascinating interpolated writing from one of the great spies in literature) die out weakly, and the ending is telegraphed, but this was a treat. It doesn't reach the memoirish peaks of *Twilight of the Eastern Gods*, but Kadare proves himself to be a writer of great range.

Farhan Khalid says

The arrival of the foreign scholars...

One cannot rule out the possibility that the two visitors are spies

It was still a soaking winter's day beneath a lead-grey sky with drizzling rain tapping out the slow rhythm of life all around

Something sensational was in the air

N— A place with no name for anything in particular

The state is deeper than the deepest well

Sleep hovered in the air

What they are trying to prove is that the material from which Albanian epic poetry is made is Homeric in origin

Epic poetry really is murderous stuff

Serbs and Albanians: We were born to mutual anger

Forgetting is the constituent part of the laboratory

Death is what guarantees that life goes on

What is the rate of loss by any given measure of time

Oral epic is in the first place an art of the ear

It is no coincidence that Homer is imagined as a man deprived of sight

Blindness is an integral part of the machinery that produces epic poetry

Serbs and Albanians use the epic in exactly the same way – as a weapon

A magic mirror, making the hero of the one the anti-hero of the other

With all emotions – bitterness, joy, victory, defeat – inverted to the very end

Figures of speech and linguistic formulae are also subject to change

Except the rate of change is so slow as to be imperceptible

The lack of distinction between waking and dreaming was actually very much in the spirit of the epic themselves

Space and time obeyed their own fantastical laws in epic poetry:

Action was spread out over hundreds of years

Characters died or were plunged into deep sleep by a spell then woke

Homeric enigma had had to wait until tape-recorders had been invented

The Mysterious Attack...

Now the epic is scattered again just as it was before

The age of the epic really was over in the world

Homeric business was just nonsense

Outdated Fetishism!

You might as well try to put a halter on a ghost – a blind ghost

It wasn't so easy to remove all the consequences of the two foreigners' visit to N–

Death was only a shell encasing something else

Brown says

Up until the ending this was in the running for my favorite Kadare, with a tone that starts out humorous and slowly grows more and more oppressive, and with parallel story threads that resonate with each other quite wonderfully. The final pages of this book, however, take the story in an unexpected direction, and in general the ending feels rushed. Another fifty pages or so, and a better payoff to a few of the major story lines, and I would consider this book one of Kadare's best. Even as it stands it's still good, it just didn't quite reach the heights that I was expecting it to.

Arriving in an Albanian backwater, Bill and Max are scholars from Ireland by way of Harvard, and they're

on a mission to record the epic poetry still sung by traveling bards in the inns and tiny mountain towns of the Albanian countryside. By doing this they hope to decipher how oral epics transform or keep shape over time, which will in turn allow them to extrapolate how Homer himself operated. The Albanian government considers this reason for the scholars' visit to be patently absurd, an obvious cover story for foreign spies. In addition, others see the scholars' visit as an exciting escape from the boredom of a small Albanian town, while others guess that the work of the scholars will somehow play a role in the longstanding ethnic conflict between Albanians and Serbs.

The work the scholars are conducting, combined with the intrigue surrounding their visit, provide interesting themes for Kadare to explore. As they study the travelers who perform the epics the two scholars realize that, even though they are in their twilight, the epics are still changing, with different people telling the same legend in a myriad of different ways, and even the same performer shaping the story differently, perhaps as a subconscious response to what experiences he has undergone. Similarly, the people who are observing Bill and Max create their own stories about what the pair are up to, letting their own beliefs and expectations change the narrative they invent. To some the scholars are spies, and every word they say about Homer is their attempt to pull the wool over the eyes of the locals. To others the scholars are adventurers and potential romantic partners. To yet others the pair are committing blasphemous acts and threatening to rob Albania of one of its greatest assets. All these stories are true, at least to the people coming up with them. The recurring theme of how a story evolves and why is an interesting one, and Kadare gives us a situation where the theme could be explored in great dramatic ways.

(view spoiler)

My quibbling about the ending is really the only significant complaint I had with the book. Otherwise I thought nearly everything was great, highlighting some of Kadare's best qualities as a writer and revealing some skills that I didn't even know he had. For instance, the beginning of this book is genuinely funny, in a way that I hadn't seen Kadare pull off in previous books. The absurd bureaucracy of Albania, presented seriously in *The Palace of Dreams* and *The Pyramid*, here is satirized, especially with regards to the system of informers used to gather information. The book doesn't stay humorous throughout, however, as the scholars' stay in a lonely inn, trying to grasp the evolution of epics as delivered by ritualistic, almost mystic storytellers, and being constantly observed by the state and other parties as well, gradually turns the tone into an oppressive one. Additionally, with Bill going blind and every question in their research answered raising two more in its place, not to mention the distrust the other travelers feel about the recording device, there's underlying tension throughout. Kadare is also a master at depicting the setting of Albania, the ancient inn at the foot of the accursed mountains where the last remaining storytellers cross paths is a unique and evocative place for the bulk of the story to unfold. We don't learn a huge amount about many of the characters, but they are distinct, with individual personalities and motivations. For a book this short the characters are quite well drawn, even though we don't spend quite enough time with them for them to feel like real people. Kadare's writing is excellent here as well. Though not nearly as much of a focus here as it was in *Broken April*, Albanian culture is still touched upon in passing in *The File on H*, and it's yet another aspect of the book I enjoyed.

Really everything about this book I enjoyed, except the ending felt rushed, and generally I thought Kadare could have crafted an ending that gave more of a payoff to the theme of the creation and evolution of a story that permeated the book. I'd say that despite this complaint I'd still heartily recommend *The File on H*, and it's a good place to start if you haven't read any Kadare before.

sh'dynasty says

This is my fourth Kadare novel. It is a comedy spy cultural poetic novel, a conglomerate of things that don't sound like they make sense together but that weave a fantastic string of events together with amazing language and characters. Basically, a classic Kadare. And just like a classic Kadare, underneath it is so much more than those things, it is a statement that makes you think about a mostly unknown part of the world, its inhabitants, and its disappearing culture. It also makes you think of the conflicts and the confusions of the area as well. The Albanian epic, the truth about Homer, the Balkan conflicts -- this is a book that will lead to further research into many, many things. It's a great piece of literature.

As for the story itself, I overlooked the sub-plot of the governor's dramatic wife. I had to in order to enjoy what the book was really about. The Irishmen are a lovely pair, inn workers are great, the townspeople are charming in a townspeople kind of way, but Dull Baxhaja, the Gypsy, steals the show completely. Blessed with a creative flair for writing reports, we really get the taste of comedy from him and the sense of complete absurdity of his assignment. We know that if he would have stayed on, the slight tragedy at the end (which was predictable, in a good way this time, as no one died) could have been avoided. Also, the mystical conclusion is a happy one, the epic lives on!

Bob Newman says

Suspicion keeps everyone in the dark

Two Irish-American scholars of Homeric ballads arrive in remote northern Albania to record local epic songs in the early 1930s. Nobody has ever seen a tape recorder before. The two men speak archaic Albanian learned from books. Local officials are sure they are spies. (But why there ?) Informers are positioned to report every move and word. A local official's wife longs for an affair. Weird monks and treacherous Serbians move in. It's a strange mix of satire and scholarship, farce and fact. Kadare constructed this novel on the basis of an actual American 'expedition' to the Balkans to collect ballads in order to study the process by which such epics were remembered, forgotten, and reshaped. Though the Harvard scholars' efforts ended in a completely different manner, Kadare used this seed to create THE FILE ON H. H in this case is not like Kafka's K or Ian Fleming's M, a nameless individual, but stands for Homer.

In Hoxha's Albania, writing satire on spies and attitudes towards foreigners was doubtless dangerous. Kadare got away with it only because he set the novel in the royalist period of 1928-1939, when Albania was under King Zog. It is an enjoyable book, though not as stunning as some of his others (i.e. "Broken April", "The Three-Arched Bridge", "Chronicle in Stone") The translation, too, may not be as strong as it could have been. As an American with some familiarity with Ireland, I found his Irish-American characters much less believable than his Albanian ones. Their actions and dialogues often don't ring true. But, as another volume in his literary panorama of Albanian history and sentiment, this novel is well worth reading. It contains many flashes of the Kadare genius.

Londi says

A fictional story in 1930s Albania with the aim of deconstructing how oral tradition functions and continues to influence epistemes that drive our everyday discourses.

Richard says

An entertaining, well written, and slyly perceptive Hrabal-esque farce. Not exactly what I was expecting from Kadare but very enjoyable nonetheless.

Roula says

Εχω ακουσει πολλα θετικα σχολια για τον Κανταρε και ηθελα πολυ να δω και η ιδια προς τι ολα αυτα.αυτη λοιπον ηταν η πρωτη μου επαφη και πιστευω οτι το γεγονος οτι τελειωσα το βιβλιο σε λιγοτερο απο 24 ωρες , λεει πολλα. το θεμα του βιβλιου, εξαιρετικα ενδιαφερον: 2 σπουδαστες απο την Ιρλανδια φτανουν στο τελευταιο μερος που εχει απομεινει να συνδεεται με την ενασχοληση με το ειδος του "επους", την Αλβανια.εκει θελουν να ερευνησουν πως ο μεγαλυτερος δημιουργος αυτης της ποιησης , ο Ομηρος, καταφερε να γραψει τα εργα του..τα εγραψε οντως ? ηταν ενας απλος συντακτης? μαζι τους φερνουν και παραξενη -για τα δεδομενα της εποχης και της μικρης πολης που διαμενουν- τεχνολογια(μαγνητοφωνο) και ολα αυτα ενεργοποιουν την καχυποψια των αρχων που θεωρουν οτι ?χουν να κανουν με κατασκοπους...

Ο Κανταρε διαχειριζεται με εξαιρετικη δεξιοτεχνια το λογο , ενω παραλληλα θεωρω οτι εκμεταλλευτηκε στο επακρο αυτη την ακρως ενδιαφερουσα ιδεα βιβλιου.διαβαζοντας το βιβλιο αυτο εμαθα πραγματα που αγνοουσα εντελως και αισθανθηκα σαν να διαβαζα βιβλιο ιστοριας εμπλουτισμενο με ακρως ενδιαφεροντα μυθιστορηματικα στοιχεια.ολα αυτα προσδιδουν στο βιβλιο εναν "αερα" κλασικης λογοτεχνιας.σιγουρα θα επανελθω στο εργο του Κανταρε αμεσα!

John Pappas says

Kadare's tale of two Irish scholars who go to Albania in the 1930s searching for the answers to questions about Homer and the epic poem is at times hilarious, suspenseful and elegiac. At the root of the satire, which manifests in bumbled spying attempts, local politics and gossip court intrigue, is a firm belief in the dignity of humanity - the kind that can be immortalized in art- and questions about the nature and role of art in human affairs. Witty and drenched in irony.

Bastet says

De Kadaré sólo había leído una selección de sus relatos, y ahora, tras terminar *El expediente H.*, he podido constatar que es un portentoso narrador y cuentista. Ya desde el primer capítulo logra con creces meter de cabeza al lector en la historia, invita a continuar leyendo, y el final (que por supuesto no voy a desvelar) es sencillamente magistral.

La llegada de dos extranjeros a la pequeña ciudad albanesa de N. sacude la vida provinciana debido a la novedad de acoger a dos jóvenes irlandeses que resultan ser investigadores homeristas. El subprefecto (arquetipo del funcionario inepto y sumiso) sospecha desde el principio que podrían ser espías, y ordena que los vigilen día y noche. Mientras las fuerzas vivas de N., encabezadas por la mujer del subprefecto, se desviven para que los forasteros se diviertan, ellos se encierran en una posada al pie de las Cumbres Malditas

con un único propósito: desvelar el enigma de Homero (la H. del título alude a él). Para ello, tendrán que grabar con un magnetófono (un invento reciente que era visto como un aparato demoníaco por todo aquel que no estaba familiarizado con él) a todos los lahutare que pernocten en la posada. Los lahutare eran montañeses que cantaban epopeyas basadas en la mitología clásica acompañados del lahuta, un instrumento de una sola cuerda.

Gracias a esta novela he aprendido dos cosas: que la enemistad entre los eslavos y los albaneses es ancestral, y que Homero era ciego.

No puedo dejar de señalar que es el libro peor editado que ha caído en mis manos, y eso que es de Anaya & Mario Muchnik: están mal puestas todas las acotaciones de diálogo, hay muchos fallos de puntuación, no está unificado el uso de mayúsculas y del plural en palabras extranjeras, etc., etc. Me apena, porque esta excelente novela merece una edición a su altura. La traducción, impecable, como no podía ser de otra manera siendo de Ramón Sánchez Lizarralde.

Jose Carlos says

En 1979, durante una estancia de Ismaíl Kadaré en Ankara, el escritor se encontró con Albert Lord, que en los años treinta, con su colega Milman Parry, había recorrido las zonas montañosas de Albania intentando hallar una respuesta a los orígenes de la epopeya, de los cantos de los aedos, y una solución al misterio que el propio Homero encierra dentro de sí; con ello, los dos estudiosos reconocían en Albania el origen, la misma cuna de la tradición oral y de los cantos homéricos, casi como si se tratase de una tierra de leyenda.

Puesto a ello, Kadaré terminó El expediente H. en donde Lord y Parry aparecían bajo los heterónimos de Max Roth y Willy Norton, sendos irlandeses afincados en Nueva York, filólogos y estudiosos al servicio de la comunidad universitaria. La novela apareció por primera vez en un par de entregas en la revista Nentori, en noviembre de 1982, pasando indiferente. Por ello, no apareció publicada en un volumen como tal hasta el año 1990.

Con el tiempo, creo que ha quedado demostrado que es uno de los trabajos más interesantes de Kadaré, precisamente por la manera en la que aúna tradición y superstición, epopeya, ficción y leyenda, en una mezcla narrativa sobradamente interesante que, al contrario que en algunas otras obras de este autor, que podrían resultar algo indigestas al pecar de excesivo localismo para un lector medio europeo, en este caso cumple una labor explicativa y docente (aparte de la meramente ficcional y de entretenimiento) aproximando el mundo homérico y los propios resortes de la génesis, permanencia y extinción de las leyendas, en un proceso que se presenta muy atractivo.

Aunque el suceso de Ankara en 1979 fuera fortuito, una pequeña parte del texto ya se encontraba albergado en una de las micronovelas insertadas en su monumental obra El concierto. De uno de los capítulos que, a modo de cajas chinas, se contienen dentro de otro capítulo, y que se titula Sesión de espiritismo en la ciudad de N., se extrae una pequeña parte de esta novela –lo relacionado con los espías, las escuchas-, así como el grueso del argumento central de Spiritus. En el caso de ambas novelas –El expediente H., y Spiritus- la ciudad que se menciona sólo por la primera letra, N. o B., será la localización, compartiendo el personaje del subprefecto –o jefe de la sigurimi- y algunos de los espías, así como ciertos hilos argumentales.

Después, Spiritus se orientará más hacia el lado de los micrófonos y las escuchas, de la muerte y la declaración de ultratumba, mientras que, en El expediente H., será el retrato del espía y las maneras de escuchar y apostarse, y el proceso invasivo e inquisitivo de la autoridad, lo que se vierta en ella. En esto consiste el gran aliento de El concierto, novela que engendra otras dos novelas más, dos textos que se

cuentan entre los mejores de Ismaíl Kadaré.

Kadaré afronta el asunto del espionaje como una confrontación entre la vista y el oído. Realmente, todo este Expediente H. es una lucha en tensión por ver cuál de los sentidos se impone al otro. La novela es una novela de los sentidos, a los que hay que añadir la cualidad de la voz y de la palabra como aliada del oído. Los espías auditivos, es decir los que escuchan, se imponen a los visuales; el propio Homero era ciego, cualidad esta que parece fundamental a la hora de convertirse en un buen recitador, en un lahutare, como si privarse de la vista fortaleciera la memoria para ser capaces de albergar en ella miles de versos.

Evidentemente, en este asunto de las escuchas y de los informes de los espías, se encuentra todo un rastro de crítica y denuncia al Estado burocrático, al estado convertido en un Gran Policía y que vigila orwellianamente a sus súbditos, al estilo de la Albania comunista de Kadaré, aunque el autor haya establecido la acción del Expediente en el año 1933, en plena monarquía del rey Zog. Eso no importará a la hora de que el Estado ande preocupado por defenderse de sus enemigos, sean reales o imaginarios, mostrándose reacios a los extranjeros, coaligados con las profundas supersticiones y supercherías de la gente, como a la hora de juzgar el reciente invento del magnetófono como algo demoníaco que sólo puede acarrear desgracias.

Y amparado, el sistema, también, en azotar y alimentar los sentimientos nacionalistas, alentando la hostilidad entre albaneses y serbios, por ejemplo, que incluso entran en conflicto a la hora de reclamar la paternidad y autoría de las leyendas y los cantos con lo que, al final, inevitablemente, uno de los dos países será el país plagario del asunto, con todo lo negativo y la carga de descrédito que eso conlleva para la tradición que ha salido perjudicada, la que ha sido, presuntamente, una copia.

En ese tira y afloja continuado entre vista y oído, lenguaje épico o epopéyico contra el lenguaje de los informes oficiales policiales y burocráticos, de la modernización científica frente a la superstición arraigada, de la ciudad de provincias contra la gran capital, también se enfrentan dos corrientes subterráneas: la aburrida vida de la clase acomodada pueblerina (el jefe de correos, el fabricante de jabones, el ginecólogo) con todos sus males fosilizados y su aburrimiento secular (que luego se vería sacudido por el comunismo y convertidos, todos ellos, en desclasados), enfrentada esta forma de existencia al soplo fresco e innovador del suceso extraordinario que representan los extranjeros, portadores de un pedazo de mundo nuevo y alejado que ahora parecen insertar en el mismo seno de la ciudad de N.

Son muchos conflictos los que se rozan entre sí, y quizás, por ello, por la magnitud de la ola turbulenta que los dos estudiosos levantan en la localidad, acabarán pasando a ser materia de un canto épico, de su propio canto épico, siendo ambos investigadores, y su magnetofón, elementos que formarán parte de la misma epopeya que investigan, pronunciados por esos labios de los aedos montañeses de los que están pendientes, y recitados de forma monótona por esas gargantas que encierran el enigma de Homero.

Convertidos los filólogos en asunto metaliterario, en un gran giño final de Kadaré que proclama, así, que la palabra, es decir la literatura, acaba derrotando a la vista y al oído, aunque necesita de ambos sentidos para - esa es su paradoja- existir.

Tal vez ese sea el misterio que encierra Homero y que es necesario desentrañar.
