



# Images of the Balkans

The Albanian Other in Greek Literary Texts (1990-2010)

The example of Telemachus Kotsias

Ninth Lesson

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# Main Topics under examination

- The image of the ***Albanian Other*** in Greek literary and cinema texts
- Negotiating “***Albanian primitivism***”
- **Rethinking the Hoxha regime**
- A ***continuous search for a contemporary, European identity***
- Comparing Greece with post-communist Albania, under ***cultural, political, social and economic perspectives***



# Telemachus Kotsias

- Born in ***Northern Epirus***
- He devotes the greater part of his fiction to the ***Albanian area***, as well as to the ***interaction of Greece and Albania***
- Kotsias grew up in Argyrokastro during the Hoxha regime, from which he was even ***expelled for political reasons***
- His novels cover an extremely long period of time: 1. ***the communist Albania of Hoxha***  
2. ***the post-communist Albania*** 3. ***the harsh reality for Albanian economic migrants in Greece (after the opening of the borders in the 1990s)***.

# Telemachus Kotsias- Main aspects of his novels

- **Albanian primitivism**: perceived as a **consequence of the totalitarian Hoxha regime**
- Aspects of *Albanian isolationism*
- The desperate attempts of the **Greek community to escape from 'the socialist prison'**
- Images of the **Albanian economic immigrant** to Greece (**racist incidents, Greek superiority complex and the Greek society**)
- **Historical novel, personal experiences** and literature
- Images of communist Albania: **police-ridden world, fear, act of secret services, arrest of innocent citizens for trivial reasons, propaganda, general 'mania for persecution and snitching'**

# Kotsias' characteristic novels

- The collection of short stories "The Midnight Incident"
- The novel "***On the opposite shore***"
- References to Albania's ***backwardness, relations with Greece and Europe, the increasing fear of the authorities, the intense secrecy of the system, the terrible persecutions, and the tireless propaganda of the Party***
- "***The Seven Windows***": a ***historical novel that follows the coming-of-age journey of a group of students in socialist Albania***
- Although the main characters belongs to the Greek minority, there is no lack of Albanian characters

# 'The seven windows'

- The main character (George), although that at first **seems to be attracted** to the ideas espoused by the communist regime, **gradually deconstructs them** and **develops strong tendency to escape**
- The students do not initially realise the seriousness of the situation
- The regime shows its **intentions**
- The novel describes a world in which **everyone's life path is predetermined by the Party**
- The "**categories**" **described in the novel** and the historical truth
- A **suffocating, claustrophobic** world
- The vision of the regime: the **new type of man - 'Homo Socialisticus'**

# Homo Socialisticus

- Defining '**Homo Socialisticus**'
- A new type of man, **ready to sacrifice immediate goals and needs for the good of the society**
- Images of this new type of man in Kotsias' work
- Descriptions of 'a **disciplined individual with complete loss of the personal element.**
- The elements of **ignorance, isolation and disillusionment,**
- Narrating a '**continuous decline**'
- The gradual doubts even **for aspects of human nature**



# 'The seven windows'

"In the afternoon, a general assembly of the whole school. The enemies are back in the spotlight. All categories of enemies.

[...] The political enemies, their descendants, the drifters, the conscious ones, the indifferent, the careless, the uneducated, the immoral, the liberal, the conservative.

And they are hiding everywhere: beyond the borders of the country, among us, in the cities, in the villages, in the construction sites, in the schools.

If the width of the pants exceeds twenty-four inches, therein lies an enemy; if the sideburns fall below the permissible limit, therein lies the enemy; if the hair exceeds four inches, therein lies the enemy.



# 'The seven windows'

"Maybe he was just corrupted and only interested in the carnal side of love. He read the social problems and ideals of the heroes diagonally, just so as not to lose the continuity of the reading. He was bored with them. [...]

These, he thought, were nothing but a false shell to justify the writing of the love scenes.

In the end, he saw himself as immoral, full of faults, unworthy of the revolutionary atmosphere. And guilt plagued him.

Some people in society had established rules, and he didn't keep them, he broke them. He felt perverted. And what would become of him?"

# 'The seven windows'

- **Albanian communism** as a **separating factor from the West**
- Communist regimes **as a separating factor from Greece**
- Identifying Albania through the notions of **primitivism, backwardness and ignorance for the Western civilization**
- The completely different Greek reality
- Greece as a symbol synonymous with **progress, joy, sexual and ideological liberation and carefreeness**

# 'The seven windows'

- An important part of the narrative is also devoted to ***the experience of the Greek minority in the People's Republic of Albania***
- Kotsias gives an ***extremely harsh portrayal*** of the way of life of the Greeks in Hoxha's regime
- ***Constant persecution, destruction of Greek churches and books, arrests and torture for no reason***
- 'The regime's plan **to eliminate the Greek minority**.
- The character's life in the army, the final decision to escape Albania and the horrifying tortures

# 'The seven windows': Images of Greece

"Once more, from the beginning. The young lady is lying naked in front of him. But not here. In some distant sea, on the sandy beach. In Greece, in the endless light. Where there are no revolutionary restrictions, as here. There, in absolute freedom. Carelessness. Joy. Laughter".

# 'The code of honor'

- *Historical novel, post-Hoxha Albania*
- The comparison between Greek and Albanian reality as the main narrative framework
- The **coexistence of the two nations immediately after the opening of the borders**
- The narrative reveals a **fascinating and wild world** and encompasses numerous motifs which in Western thought have been associated with the Balkans
- The story: The novel's central character, Zef, his life in Greece as economic immigrants, his love affair with his boss's daughter, and **his obligation to travel to Albania** to deliver the first money he earns from his job to his father.
- The **traditional obligations** and Zef's travel through the **mysterious Albanian mountains**
- An attempted robbery and a killing. The return to his village, the discovery of truth and the escape to Greece

# Leke Dukagnini and the 'Code'

- '*Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit*' - The law
- Albanian society is presented as operating in all its aspects on a customary law, the "kanun".
- The *origins of 'kanun'* date back to the 15th century
- It is a **customary law** that has been passed down orally from generation to generation
- The 'Kanun' provides solutions for all possible and unlikely cases of dispute, substituting the law
- These solutions, on the one hand **aim to satisfy the two disputing parties** and, on the other hand, are intended to safeguard **the honor and 'besa'** of the parties involved.
- The term '**besa**' and its meaning in Albanian culture



# The code of Honor- main aspects of the novel

- Descriptions of the *contemporary Albanian reality*
- Comparisons with the corresponding Greek reality
- **Modern Albania** perceived as the *evolution of socialist structures*
- *“A state of special conditions”*
- The *seek for a European identity*
- The motif of Balkan, and here in particular Albanian primitivism
- **Bravery, cruelty, besa and savagery**: contradictory images of post-communist Albania

# The code of Honor- Passage for discussion

*“And vigilante justice, its rules, were codified along with all the civil regulations, governing marriages, inheritances, morals, penalties.*

*Even when the regime was imposed, people still kept to the old traditional rules, which is why in those regions courts, lawsuits and civil suits were things almost unknown and moreover reprehensible in the eyes of the people.*

*To seek the help of the state, the foreigner, the conqueror, in order to get justice was proof of cowardice.*

*'Do not avenge yourself through the state' was the old principle'*



# Images of contemporary Albania

- The Albanian socialist regime had forbidden the application of customary law
- The term '**vendetta**' in Albanian and Balkan culture
- Since the fall of the regime, the phenomenon of the revival of a forgotten 'vendetta' has been frequent
- The recurring motifs of **bravery, cruelty, pride, 'besa' and robbery**
- The **beauty of Balkan nature**
- Aspects of traditions
- The notion of **believing in superstitions**
- Authentic and to some extent stereotypical) 'Balkan' images

# Depicting the Albanian society

- The connection with *danger*
- **Robbery** as a literary motif from 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Reproducing or deconstructing the stereotypical constructions regarding the Albanian Other?
- The female body as a '**taboo**' for the young Albanian character, Zef
- The '**open culture**' of the Hellene heroine
- The **contemporary Albanian state** and its **relationship with European culture**
- The **visible need for Europeanisation**
- Aspects of the '**primitive**' Albanian society.
- The ancient code and the notion of honor

# Depicting the Albanian society

*"Vigilantism and common law are prosecuted by modern laws, which no one can enforce in these mountains.*

*Any government that tried to reconcile two different mentalities-or more properly to have the law take over the application of the Code, modified and harmonized with modern standards-failed.*

*They said they would abolish the death penalty. If that were done, then the final end of the Code would come: people, instead of being holed up in their homes, would be safer in prison, and would be fed for free.*

*Or, conversely, then would come its true renaissance, as it would be the only way to get one's blood back"*



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November 2024