

The Image of the Labyrinth in the Novel "The Palace of Dreams"

Neli Naço

Faculty of Education and Philology
"Fan S. Noli" University, Korçë, Albania
Email: nelinaco@hotmail.com

Doi:10.5901/ajis.2013.v2n9p255

Abstract

The image of the labyrinth is a very popular image in the world literature. It originates since mythology and it is spread since then in Homer, Ovid, Virgil, Dante, Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, and Blake's works as well as others' works. Modern literature gives us labyrinth – haunted genius in Yeats, Joyce, Kafka and Calvino, among others in, overt manifestations. Among others, the image of the labyrinth becomes a favourite image for Latin-American writers such as Borges or Marques. The image of the labyrinth is of special importance to the contemporary literature since we are allowed a metaphor by literature as regards variety enriched with other connotations, such as fear, anxiety, powerlessness, loneliness, isolation. This paper is focused on the novel "The Palace of Dreams". Oftentimes "The Palace of Dreams" tends to become labyrinthic in some dimensions, presenting the relation between the individual and the autocratic power, the relation between Kafkian isolated individual and the large building which expresses the dominance of reign and power. The relation between the individual diminished to a servant and the building magnified to a palace is labyrinthic, since oftentimes dominance of the power of the labyrinth towards the individual does not only lie in his real dimensions, but also on the virtually outspoken magnitude upon the individual. The Palace exercises power on the psyche, which makes the building own the individual's powers.

Keywords: Labyrinth, image, palace, power, dream.

1. Introduction

The image of the labyrinth is a much popular image in the world literature. It originates since mythology and it is spread since in Homer, Ovid, Virgil, Dante, Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Blake's works as well as other ones, while "modern literature gives us labyrinth – haunted genius in Yeats, Joyce, Kafka and Calvino, among others in, overt manifestations." (Bloom Harold 2007, Volume introduction, page xv). Among others, the image of the labyrinth becomes a favourite image for Latin-American writers such as Borges or Marques.

Let us remember that one of the most important and loving works to Marques is "The General in his Labyrinth." Latin American critique has considered this work a "fictionalization of history", a technique which has been often used by the writers in Latin America. Kadare uses a special way which surrealizes reality and if we could use the same way to characterize it, we could claim that he uses a "historization of fiction", which adds special worth to the work.

The image of the labyrinth is of special importance to contemporary literature since we are able to see (through labyrinth in the literature) a metaphor for the enriched variety with other significances, such as fear, anxiety, powerlessness, loneliness, isolation.

"A place of paradox it fixes symbolically a movement from the exterior to the interior, from form to contemplation, from multiplicity to unit, from space to absence of space, from time to the absence of time. It also represents the opposite movement: from within to without, according to a symbolic progression. In the centre of the labyrinth is the monster, or the god, since monstrosity is sometimes a divine attribute as shown by the metamorphoses in Greek mythology. There could be something else in the centre of the labyrinth: a secret revelation, or an epiphany" (Bloom Harold 1986, page 139).

2. General observations

In western critique the "Palace of Dreams", has been characterized as a labyrinth or labyrinthical. In the work entitled "Kadare in the world languages" we read: "Entirety of devices by which Kadare writes, is miraculously connected with the environment he describes. The result is dark, labyrinthical, full of tricks and evildoings" (Kuçuku Bashkim 2005, page 444).

"The Palace of Dreams" often longs to be labyrinthical in some dimensions. According to Wellek and Warren: "Setting is environment; and environments, especially domestic interiors, may be viewed as metonymic or metaphoric expressions of character... Setting may be the expression of a human will." (Wellek and Warren, 1949, page 229). In the case of the work under study, the setting is set with the strong feeling of anxiety stemming from the fact that the character is aware that he is coming close to this structure. The environment of the character is going to become an inseparable part of him in the pages to follow, an inseparable part of his psyche, accompanying him everywhere.

The artists, the writers, and the philosophers have used the image of the labyrinth to symbolize man's struggle, the unceasing conflict between mind and soul, our fears and hopes as well as the inexplicable paradox of mankind's destiny. Labyrinths are a place of spiritual growth, magical research, and presentations of human struggle where the past, the present, and the future are united within a single unit, an archetype of the inner world.

In the published edition "Literary work 9", the title of the work is different from that of the English edition (it is entitled "The Servant of the Palace of Dreams" and I prefer to consider it more significant as regards the interrelationship between the individual and the power, the interrelationship between the isolated individual - at the start a Kafkaian character - and the big building which expresses the dominance of the reign and power. The interrelationship of the individual diminished to a servant at the sight of the enlarged building into a palace is labyrinthical since often the dominance of the power of the labyrinth upon the individual does not only lie upon its real dimensions, but also in the virtually outspoken largeness upon the individual. The Palace exercises power on the psyche, which enables the building to possess the individual's powers.

3. "Palace of Dreams" as a labyrinth

The Palace of Dreams appears in the sight of Ebu Qerim as a real labyrinth image. No alternative provided, the character is not able to dominate his space all at once. His relationship to the building is certainly like the relationship between man and the real labyrinth. There are long, sombre, unending corridors. There are spaces which the character either knows nothing about or he can hardly dominate, despite the fact that the character has been living in for some time. There are vast spaces which seem void of people and all of a sudden there can be seen flooded corridors, where you can hardly meet the same person a second time.

The image of the labyrinth is present as yet outside the building. The heavy shutters of the buildings, which are all entrance options - there are four of them - they are all the same as regards designing, with heavy bronze handles. This means that psychically speaking the character's choice is difficult. The main characteristic of the labyrinth is illusion. While hoping that the choice is difficult, it becomes easier than someone thinks and vice-versa. In the following setting, (page 181) doors are shown on all sides and Ebu Qerim pushes all of them one by one until he finally makes it to open one door leading to another corridor.

Architecturally speaking, the institutional building is well organized, facilitating as regards its conceptual projecting, providing other secondary facilities, for example, doors with numbers on them, and controllable spaces by the individuals working there or by the visitors. The Palace of Dreams is the opposite; its projecting reminds you directly of the labyrinth. People disappear, noises are heard, but people are not seen.

"The Hallway was long and sombre. There appeared tens of high and unnumbered doors" (Kadare Ismail 1989, page 182), and following: "Terrified, he wanted to close it again; he, even stretched his arm to catch hold of the shuttle which continued to open with a lamentable rattle, but in that very moment, his eyes saw that the room was empty" (Kadare Ismail 1989, page 182). The labyrinthical anxiety is conceived with such surprise that the isolated being meets the unexpected at the moment when the idea sprouts that he can find the solution and exit. Anxiety driving the servant is similar to the labyrinthical anxiety in the moment when he meets the unexpected. The unexpected is not a living being as in the usual cases of dread, but it is a simple confrontation with space.

Labyrinth is the symbol of the building where the psyche is spied, representing a totalitarian system, and in a considerable dimension, its total dispossessing by the character, shows the incapability of the character to dominate it. He wanders inside it but not being able to reach the end of it.

4. The City as a labyrinth

Under the influence of the symbolic structure which is the Palace of Dreams, structured in accordance with the model of the labyrinth, oftentimes even the image of the capital city is structured as such. Ebu Qerim feels a stranger in the city. Streets which he became familiar with after starting work at the palace, seem now unfamiliar to him. The city filled with people seems emptier, spaces vaster, the sense of isolation and anxiety get stronger. The atmosphere in the city is

almost surreal and unbelievable. The appearance of Tabir Saraji on the outside is hermetic and we are presented with the difficulty to enter. "From afar it seemed as if he noticed one of the arms of Tabir Saraji. When he came a bit closer, he understood that he had not been wrong..... the two arms of the building seemed lost in the storm, while its central part was inwardly withdrawn as if it turned its back to something." (Kadare Ismail 1989, page 180) (see also page 268-269).

Carrying the labyrinth deep inside self and outside the walls of the palace reminds you of a well-known parable of Borges entitled: "Two kings and two labyrinths". The idea of having a labyrinth without walls, out of which you can never go out, is found both in Borges and Kadare, except that Borges bypasses the anxiety concept. This is a special feature of the parable. The anxiety is a main ingredient of the continuous situation of the character in Kadare's work. The anxiety situation is part of the labyrinth and despite being on holiday, Ebu Qerim feels that he is inside a structure without walls.

The ambience in town which is related to the labyrinth leads to its alienation and it establishes a second, oniric reality. In a certain moment of wandering in town, Ebu Qerim perceives a dreamlike reality while the world of dreams who he was trying to puzzle out, seems more real.

5. The spiritual world as a labyrinth

Ebu Qerim's spiritual world has become a labyrinth. It is the labyrinth of choosing versus not choosing; it is the labyrinth of doubt as concerns making a certain kind of interpretation, or another. In his daily interpreting he faces difficulties the same to the man who walks inside a labyrinth. He interprets dreams with a certain kind of ease but he can not penetrate into the others. After a time, when he rereads the first ones he has had easily interpreted, they seem hermetic while the others he did not use to understand, seem less hermetic to be interpreted. Speaking about the literary interpretation, Harold Bloom says: "Literary thinking is similar to walking in a labyrinth" (Bloom Harold 2007, Volume introduction, page xvi).

Analogically, we would say that Ebu Qerim's dream interpreting is similar to walking in a labyrinth. The feelings are dominated by loneliness. In view of the variety of thoughts and ways of thinking it leads to, loneliness is considered to be another labyrinth.

Ebu Qerim and his family's choice of starting work in the Palace of Dreams is similar to the choice of the labyrinthical variant. It is the only choice he can make. During the discussion about Ebu Qerim's future work, it is considered to be impossible and it is immediately and categorically refused. At the end, it is seen as the best job possibility Ebu Qerim has ever had.

After a labyrinthical description of the parts in the palace and hallways unknown to him, Ebu Qerim's psyche gets so heavily anxious that he acknowledges that it would do better in a field full of wolves.

"Vico says that we only know what we ourselves have created. If you live in a labyrinth, then you have created it." (Bloom Harold 2007, Volume introduction, page xvi). Ebu Qerim lives in a labyrinth and thus he has created it; he has created the second labyrinth, a psychic labyrinth which seems and appears more complicated than the first one. Construction of a labyrinth is accompanied by the labyrinth as a thought, which makes Tabir Saraji a more and more dispossessing building. Ebu Qerim cannot make it to own his dream interpretation and this will affect his family life, thus allegorically showing the difficulty of dominating a powerful, dictatorial mechanism, even when you are an important part of it.

"During the Middle Ages, mazes safeguarded the inhabitants of cities and burgs from the perils of the outside world. Chartres Cathedral houses one of the most famous labyrinths of the early modern Europe. As its location might suggest, this labyrinth offered more than physical protection. After reaching the maze's centre, the pilgrims finally found the spiritual enlightenment" (Bloom Harold 2007, page 72). Once Ebu Qerim reaches the centre (archive), he feels more spiritually flippant and at the end of the novel presents us a person who has reached the centre. Anxiety becomes secondary and he starts to rediscover the pleasures of life.

Visually and iconogically speaking, the labyrinths which Ebu Qerim faces, are similar to the pictures of the Italian surrealist painter Giorgio de Chirico. There are illusive hallways and spaces Ebu Qerim keeps on becoming familiar with while being promoted, which require months and months to be discovered. They are so complicated that while becoming familiar with them, he himself uses the term "labyrinth" which comes up from the inside. As concerns Jung's psychic analysis the unconsciousness is presented or symbolized by the labyrinthine hallways, mazes or spaces. So, in this context, Ebu Qerim interpreting a dream can be thought of as a character who examines a small labyrinth to interpret it, while Ebu Qerim himself is found within another gigantic labyrinth.

In conclusion, the labyrinth as a concept and a literary topic generates new meanings, and a variety of meanings in the literary work "The Palace of Dreams" and it stands as a metaphor for the totalitarian system, the penetrating power to an individual's secret life, and the difficulty to finally dominate it.

6. The labyrinth or hell?

Are there any discrepancies regarding the widespread estimation regarding the novel "The Palace of Dreams", respectively, 1- the hell of the totalitarian regime and 2- the concept of the labyrinth as an important part of the literary work imagery? I think that we have to do with two different components of the literary work or two "metaphors" of different intensity and force to describe the Palace of Dreams. These "metaphors" represent two very important aspects of the literary work. The second (the labyrinth) has to do with the imagery (imagery) of the literary work, while the first (hell) has to do with the full, simultaneous meaning of the literary work. By meaning, we simultaneously grasp the idea elaborated by the author. Let us refer once more to the literary critique. In his well known essay "The Archetypes of literature" Northrop Frye makes this conceptual distinction: "we are apt to think of narrative as a sequential representation of events in a outside "life," and of meaning as a reflection of some external "idea." And further more "We may call the rhythm of literature the narrative, and the pattern, the simultaneous mental grasp of the verbal structure. We hear or listen to the narrative, but when we grasp a writer's total pattern we "see" what he means" (Frye Northrop 1963, page 508).

Labyrinth in the above essay has been seen directly as a part of the narrative imagery of the work, while not exempting the hell which is closely connected to that which has been called above 'the writer's total pattern'. In other similar works, let's say Franz Kafka's, we can notice this distinction made between the imagery and the total meaning of the work. The imagery is completely different from the total meaning of the work. A similar phenomenon can be noticed in this novel written by Kadare. Hence, many comparisons of the work "Palace of Dreams" by the European critique in relation to Kafka's different works.

References

- Kuçuku Bashkim (2005) Kadare në gjuhët e botës, Onufri.
Bloom Harold (2007) (Ed.), "Labyrinth", Bloom's Literary themes, Chelsea House.
Bloom Harold (1986) (Ed.), Jorge Luis Borges, Modern Critical Views, Chelsea House.
Frye Northrop (1963), "Fables of identity", Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.
Kadare Ismail (1989)"Vepra letrare 9", Tiranë.
Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, (1949) Theory of literature, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York,