



A CRITICAL STUDY OF ISMAIL KADARE,
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
THE INTERPLAY OF
TRADITION AND MODERNITY
IN SELECTED NOVELS

BY
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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

One of the most distinguished Albanian writers, Ismail Kadare survived as a writer in Albania under the strict socialist regime. He now lives and writes in Paris. This study offers a critical view of tradition and modernity in two of his novels, *The General of the Dead Army* and *Doruntine*. It tries to see what features of these novels make them representative Albanian narratives and to what extent they reconcile tradition and modernity.

The study endeavours to provide an assessment of the characters and themes in Ismail Kadare's novels, with a special reference to the treatment of characters. It offers a discussion of resistance and survival as central themes in Kadare's novels with special references to *The General of the Dead Army*. The study sees the relationship between folklore and literature particularly in *Doruntine* and *The General of the Dead Army*.

Kadare's novels can be differentiated from their subjects and the ways of realizing them. The study considers the author's use of fantasy, imagination, dramatic and tragic elements, and other means of expression. It has also a treatment of the main concepts in *Doruntine* in the light of Islamic concepts.

ملخص البحث

يعد إسماعيل قدرى واحداً من أبرز الكتاب الألبان الذي كان ناشطاً في الكتابة أثناء إقامته في ألبانيا تحت نظام الحكم الاشتراكي الصارم، لكنه يعيش الآن ويكتب في باريس. تعرض هذه الدراسة نظرة نقدية نحو التراث والحداثة في اثنتين من رواياته وهما (قائد الجيش الميت) و(دورنتين). تحاول الدراسة أن تبين الخصائص في هاتين الروايتين مما يجعلهما تمثلان الروح الألبانية وإلى أي مدى تحاولان التوفيق بين التراث والمعاصرة. كما تحاول الدراسة أن تقدم تقويماً للشخصيات والموضوعات في روايتي إسماعيل قدرى مع إشارة إلى معالجة تلك الشخصيات. هذا إلى جانب دراسة المقاومة والبقاء كموضوعين في روايات إسماعيل قدرى، وبشكل خاص في رواية (قائد الجيش الميت). وتعرض الدراسة إلى العلاقة بين التراث الشعبي والأدب وبخاصة في هاتين الروايتين. من الممكن التفريق بين روايات قدرى وبين موضوعاته وطرق معالجتها وتحقيقها. وترى الدراسة نجاحاً بارزاً في تناول صور الوهم والخيال والعناصر الدرامية والمأساوية، إلى جانب وسائل تعبير غيرها. هذا إلى جانب تناول المظاهر الرئيسة في (دورنتين) في ضوء المفهومات الإسلامية.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Sciences in Literary Studies.

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DECLARATION

I hereby state that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by proper citations giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended.

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A Critical Study of Ismail Kadare, with Special References
to ..
the Interplay of Tradition and Modernity in Selected Novels

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This study attempts to give a short view of the role of tradition in literature as a part of life. It also aims to discuss the elements of tradition and modernity in Kadare's novels, the interest that Kadare has with folklore and how it is realized. The study intends to show the way of realizing the characters and the art of the writer. The study takes as its corpus two of Kadare's novels, *The General of the Dead Army* (1963) and *Doruntine* (1980), and aims to see through these novels the characteristics of Kadare's creativity in general.

As a beginning, the study attempts to show the role of tradition in literature as a part of life and reality. It also aims to discuss one of the selected novels in the light of Islamic belief.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the thesis is to give a critical view of the works of Ismail Kadare based on two of his novels. This writer moves freely between tradition and experiment, the past and the present, belief and scepticism, fantasy and imagination, the war and the freedom struggle in Albania. The study includes an outline history of Albanian literature, in order to provide a better understanding of Kadare's contribution to it.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To give the characteristics of Kadare's novels in order to see them not only in the context of Albanian novels but also in the context of the modern novel in general.
2. To investigate the extent to which the author's works are affected by the modernist movement in literature.
3. To consider one of the selected texts (*Doruntine*) in the light of Islamic belief.

4. To see how strong the relationship is between reality and tradition in the two selected novels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Views about the Albanian novel in general and about Ismail Kadare's novels.

Albanian literature has had a long way in its creation. 16th-17th centuries Albanian literature concentrated on biblical themes and translations of texts that were used for praying, like *Meshari* written by Gjon Buzuku in 1555. In this period emerged a group of Muslims who created the literature of "bejtexhinjve" or short poems. But we can speak of real Albanian literature only in the 19th century, in the period of the Albanian Renaissance when we find the flowering of romantic literature. This kind of literature gave us a magnificent key to understand the Albanian mind. But it was not to continue for long. In 1944, the new socialist system was introduced in Albania and this brought its own kind of literature highlighting the socialist ideology. During this period the writers were persuaded to write within the socialist boundaries.

Many of them tried to write in their own styles and to create true works of art by ignoring the state-enforced ideology, which resulted in their losing their licence and sometimes even suffering physical ill-treatment. Some of them managed to cross the Albanian borders after being declared as *persona non grata*. To name a few, Ernest Koliqi, Faik Konica, Martin Camaj, and Arshi Pipa belonged to this group. There were also very talented writers who did create enduring works within the limits set by the regime. Names which are worth mentioning here will be Petro Marko, Dritero Agolli, Xhevahir Spahiu, Jakov Xoxa, and Ismail Kadare.

A talented writer of poetry and prose, an artist with an inventive spirit, Ismail Kadare is one of the most distinguished Albanian writers. He has played an important role in the process of the profound development and rejuvenation which Albanian literature of the socialist era has undergone. The strengthening of its realism and active emotional stands towards life, the enrichment of this literature with new ideas and means of artistic expression, the deepening of its thought and militant spirit are all closely linked with the contribution of Ismail Kadare and all the other writers of socialist realism, who brought new artistic experience

to their task. Born on the soil of the socialist realism, concerned with the major problems of our time and nurtured by the "lofty" ideals of communism, Ismail Kadare has exerted an influence in enhancing the social role of Albanian literature in the contemporary ideological struggle. Kadare studied at the Faculty of History and Philology of the University of Tirane and subsequently at the Gorky Institute of World Literature in Moscow until 1960, when relations between Albania and the Soviet Union became tense. He began his literary career in the 1950s as a poet with verse collections such as *Enderrimet* ('Dreams'; Tirane, 1957) and *Shekulli im* ('My Century'; Tirane, 1961), which gave proof not only of his youthful inspiration but also of talent and poetic originality. However, Kadare's international reputation up to the present rests entirely upon his prose, in particular his historical novels and short stories. His first prose work is *Gjenerali i ushtrise se vdekur* (Tirane, 1963; trans. as *The General of the Dead Army*). In the 1970s he turned to historical fiction, e.g., *Keshtjella* ('The Castle'; Tirane, 1970) takes us back to the fifteenth century, the age of the Albanian national hero Scanderbeg.

Novelist, poet and journalist, Ismail Kadare fled communist Albania in the early 1990s and took refuge in Paris so that he could write in complete freedom. Published in both French and Albanian by Éditions Fayard and long banned in Albania, his books are magnificent epics which plunge into the very heart of a tragic Albanian identity, torn between East and West. A writer worthy of a Nobel prize, Kadare has accumulated honours in France - he has been a member of the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques since 1996, and was recently made an Officier de la Légion d'honneur.

At the basis of Ismail Kadare's first novel, *The General of the Dead Army* (1963), is the idea of the heroic stand and the indomitable freedom-loving spirit of the Albanian people. The novel reflects this spirit of heroism, which the Albanian people manifested with new brilliance during the Anti-Fascist National Liberation War, as a characteristic of Albanians, as an enduring trait formed during their history, filled with struggles and ceaseless efforts to defend their freedom, existence and identity. In order to proclaim the vitality of the Albanian people and their right to live free the author proceeds from the latest war, but does not limit himself to that alone. *The General of the Dead Army* deals with the immediate postwar

years as seen through the eyes of an Italian general in the company of a priest on a mission to Albania to exhume and repatriate the remains of his fallen soldiers. Its theme expresses symbolically the idea that Albania's many foreign invaders have left only their bones in Albania, while the Albanian people remain. This novel reflects the Albanian people's historical optimism about the future. With this work Ismail Kadare blazed a new trail in seeking to present traditions, events and moral values of the past in the light of the ideological struggle of our times.

The other novel selected for special study in this thesis, *Doruntine*, is based on a folk tale. Doruntine is the only sister of nine brothers who marry her to a man living in a faraway country. Their mother is against the marriage, because she thinks it will prevent her from seeing her daughter. Constantine, the youngest brother, pledges himself to bring her back at her request. Soon after that the 9 brothers die in battle. Deprived of her sons and yearning to see her daughter, the mother complains of Constantine's failure to honour his "besa". Constantine rises from his grave and he rides to the faraway place to bring his sister back. To her mother's question who brought her home, she answers it was

Constantine. The mother exclaims in horror that her brother is dead. The news terrifies Doruntine and both mother and daughter die. Kadare has turned the ballad into a story elaborating on the mystery of the resurrected dead man.

Arshi Pipa, an Albanian critic, in his attempt to discuss the Albanian novel, tries to give a view of its creation from the beginning until recently. He discusses its form and the interactions that exist between classic and modern novels. Arshi Pipa tries to compare different kinds of Albanian novels and in making this comparison his aim is to explore and introduce the Albanian novel. This critic explores the factors that enriched the Albanian novel and concentrates on its originality and style. He considers the novel as "the artistic encyclopedia of human being". He asserts: "The Albanian novel explores life in a general and specific way and it takes the subjects from the old epic, and that is the reason of calling it the later son of the Albanian epic". (*Panorama of Contemporary Albanian Literature*, 1969-70, pp.110-17)

In another book, *Albanian Literature: Social Perspectives*, (1978), Arshi Pipa examines aspects of

Albanian literature and its genres, giving examples for each one. He discusses the Albanian novel that finds its best example in Ismail Kadare's work.

Janet I. Byron in *World Literature Today*, Vol.53, no.4, 1979, analyses the 'nationalist' and socialist content which anyone can find in the fictional work of Ismail Kadare, who is assessed by the author as "a remarkable writer" and "good-hearted". Janet I. Byron asserts that "Ismail Kadare has written mostly folkloristic and historical novels whose themes and esthetic character lent themselves to ambiguous ideological interpretations." (614-16)

Another critic, Robert Elsie in *Evolution and Revolution in Modern Albanian Literature* (1991), discusses the artistic endeavour and creative impulses in the Albanian novel. He considers Kadare "the best example of creativity and originality in contemporary Albanian letters". He claims that Kadare's works are "a strict reflection of the vicissitudes of Albanian political life."

Ali Aliu in *Research* (1990) considers Kadare as "the most complete figure of Albanian literature". This critic

observes the birth of this national talent (Ismail Kadare) as "an outcome of an old body, a fluid that knows how to choose the best themes". The richness of Kadare's works, he stresses, must be treasured and regarded spiritually.

Ismail Kadare is an Albanian genius. He was one of the few writers who on the one hand praised the dictatorship and on the other attacked it. The way he combined these different stances makes him a great writer of our time. Ismail Kadare did his utmost to liberate Albanian literature. His unexpected departure from Albania and application for political asylum in France in October 1990 caused a good deal of consternation, but he will no doubt return to his homeland when the time is right. Everyone should realize that the works of Ismail Kadare are an invaluable contribution to Albanian letters and a part of world literature.

However, there is still something that can be done. Kadare's works need a critical analysis in order to find out the use of many artistic elements, the beauty of his style and the level of his writings. A critical study of Ismail Kadare's selected novels will help in a better understanding of his place by readers and, also, it will

give him credit for several aspects of his works which have not received sufficient acclaim. The study also proposes to look at his correlation of tradition and modernity in a society which is just beginning to change and enter the modern age.

METHODOLOGY

Primarily, the study gives a brief view on the role of tradition in literature as a part of life. It then examines the art of the profiles and the specific characteristics of his novels. This study relies only on two novels written by Ismail Kadare. The study discusses the use of tradition in Kadare's novels especially in *Doruntine*. It seeks to examine the artistic expressions in Kadare's novels, with seeing not only fantasy and imagination but also the place of dramatic and tragic elements in his creativity. Special attention is devoted to the themes and literary devices in these texts. Descriptions, metaphors, symbols, imaginative and realistic elements are also examined.

Analysis of the formal content, presentation of reality, narrative methods that are used, the stream of consciousness, and the ideas treated in these novels are

seen as an important base to introduce this writer. This research has benefited from documented studies found to be of great relevance to the subject discussed. Looking into the historical background of the Albanian novel through these two novels, *The General of the Dead Army* and *Doruntine*, gives a better understanding of the discussion.

DATA ANALYSIS

This study is conducted as an essay in criticism, and data are analysed according to the qualitative method. The data relies on an examination of artistic elements in the novels selected in order to gain deeper understanding of the author's intention. Examining the themes and literary devices in the selected novels, the study seeks to determine the extent to which Ismail Kadare managed to preserve his artistic integrity.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The importance of this study is, first, to add to the studies of these two novels which display the Albanian reality, folk and tradition. There are some scholars who

have discussed Kadare's work in general without specifying any of his novels. Only a few of them have analysed several novels but they have glanced at their themes without going deep in their analysis. To give a critical view of these two important novels is necessary for introducing the work of this famous writer.

Secondly, it is to ensure that Kadare's work does not go unnoticed by students of literature as a typical example of prose, so that they are able to do further studies on this writer.

Thirdly, when it comes to discussing prose works of European literature, the critics are more focused on English, Italian, German, French, and Greek literature than on the literature of a small Muslim country in the heart of Europe. There are a few of them who pass brief remarks on this literature, but this is not enough to understand the heart of the Albanian land. It is not enough to feel the "trock" of the horse that goes away with the dead brother to bring his sister back; it is not enough to feel the war and the struggle, the persecution and the disillusion. Thus this modest work brings out new facets of the work of Kadare as a representative writer

of Albanian literature and it helps place Albanian literature where it belongs.

Moreover, the critical significance of these novels may open the eyes not only of the Albanian public but also of the international one and the appreciation of the greatness of these works by scholars will be apparently justified. It is not the first time that Kadare is introduced to the world, but there is some doubt that readers know these two novels as much as they should.

Finally, Albania has come out of the socialist regime and it is the right time for it to be known in the world, not only for its erstwhile regime but also for its own spirit. Literature has been always in the "hands" of socialists and infused with their ideology, so there has been nothing or very little done in the field of criticism and discussion on different genres especially prose fiction without the socialist context. Therefore, it is very useful to undertake studies, reviews and discussions about Albanian literature and selected authors as great contributors to the dignity that it needs.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study is divided into five chapters. The first one is a brief introduction to the study. It also includes a literature review. This chapter also offers a view of the role of tradition in literature, seeing it as a non-separable part of life. It shows the important role of it and the beauty of adopting tradition. Chapter two deals with the characteristics of Kadare's novels, with special reference to the treatment of characters. It also discusses the resistance and surviving as one of the themes in his novels. The following chapter is about the relationship between tradition and modernity in Kadare's novels. It also aims to see the philosophic message that is offered by Kadare's novels. Chapter four has an important role. It aims to see *Doruntine* in the light of Islamic concepts. The last chapter offers a discussion on the art of Kadare, examining the style, language and other artistic features.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the difficulties encountered is in obtaining secondary sources written in English, because materials for this study are mostly available in Albanian and