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Comparative motives of Ismail Kadare's work

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Abstract. Ismail Kadare, the most famous writer of today's Albanian literature, is also one of the most famous writers of contemporary literature in general. Therefore, whenever we mention this genius of Albanian belles-letters, first of all our mind goes to his work, its structure, themes, characters, actions and events, words and messages, and of course, the artistic features. Although it is rare to come across in the works of any other author a literary approach that can be compared to the singularity of this author, the meeting points and messages are evident. The artistic singularity is easily discernible, but the more one delves into his creative gallery, the more inevitable it is to enter into the many realms of the imagination to finally come to the conclusion that the upper realms are possessed only by geniuses, just like the sovereign of Albanian letters. The intertwining of the whole corpus of his works, with the way of narration and action, give interesting mosaics that together build the great monumental picture, which can be designed and realized only by the imagination of a writer of a prominence like him. Another motivation to deepen the gaze appears when comparisons are made with the works and characters of other authors of world literature. Comparable to meeting points in words and messages from genius motifs of different times. Geniuses break times.

Keywords. Ismail Kadare, comparative motives, artistic singularity, world literature

Motives of the work

Ismail Kadare, is the greatest and most productive Albanian writer of all time. He is the most prominent writer, the most representative and the most translated into foreign languages. Today he is world-renowned.

He was born on January 28, 1936 in Gjirokastra. He graduated in Tirana at the Faculty of Philology and later at Gorky Institute in Moscow. He lived in Gjirokastra and Tirana until 1990. After this year he leads a dual life: Paris-Tirana. However, the genius writer makes his life with the paraphrased state, "Yet the body in Paris and the head in Tirana". Therefore, he is the lifelong workman in the new consciousness of all Albanians, of whom he is the architect.

In all Kadare literary works, in the structure of their texts will appear the aesthetics from which different layers can be derived, different plans, comparisons, rankings and different literary groupings, extension of times and places and readings layered with subtexts. All these, which constitute Kadare's entire work, are reminiscent of various artistic structures which can not even be translated as a whole. Therefore, with an observational and comparative focus, the definition will focus on the aesthetics and the special style, on the perfect structure of the author's work, which creates an interesting area to look at, especially on the so-called

skënderbejada (Skanderbeg motifs). This literary area is also reminiscent of the perfectly artistic structure of Dante Alighieri's masterpiece *The Divine Comedy*. This genius author takes his action and characters to three worlds: Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise. And some of the characters in this magnificent trilogy had even appeared as fellow citizens of the living, even where the exiled Dante himself lived.

Ismail Kadare, the supreme writer of today's Albanian literature, similarly creates this great artistic trinity with his characters, but with modern devices and techniques. In a wonderful way and special artistic treatment, always, without mentioning the words hell, paradise, purgatory but by implying them as **Heaven** (Paradise), **Earth** (Purgatory), **Underworld** (Inferno).

When the name of Kadare is mentioned, first of all our mind goes to his literary works and the characters who act there, and it rarely happens that there is an approach, a connection to others like him with his characters. His characters live three worlds at once: Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise. The author himself lives with the characters of the work. He has experienced them in a kind of symbiosis almost indistinguishable, for about 50 years. Thus Purgatory (his earthly life) was an Inferno under the dictatorship in which he lived for half a century. Therefore, he experienced the Inferno every day, in it he placed his characters with whom he coexisted. Meanwhile, he created Paradise himself, with his work hour after hour and day after day as a great demiurge of the Albanian nation. And this is the time that goes on and on. He continued from small spaces in most cases, to create large works with characters of all kinds, with whom he lived astronomical times day and night. And from this small space, galaxies, universes, vast spaces, dimensions of freedom and human consciousness were born.

The author proves this himself especially in the books: "Albanian Spring", "Invitation to the Writer's Studio", "Dialogue with Alain Bosquet" and "The Weight of the Cross". Here we have, in a way, a similar form of life to the worlds of Dante. For the author of this work, Kadare would say: "Our planet is too small to make Dante Alighieri evitable. We cannot evade Dante, just as we cannot evade his conscience. "No other literary work has the human conscience, more precisely, its crucifixion, at its center."¹

After Dante composed his work, the people in the town where he lived, those who had read the book, and saw the exiled poet crossing the narrow medieval alleys, whispered to each other, that the man who has been to *Inferno* and is returned. At the same time, this happened to Kadare many centuries later. After the works were published, banned, punished or secretly read, etc. citizens saw him crossing the streets at midnight and asked: "Is this man still alive? When did he return from the afterlife? "

When making this comparison, when mentioning the great Dante in the context of Kadare and the eternal structure he created, one must also mention another great writer of world literature, Honoré de Balzac, and his *Human Comedy*. He, with this work tried to do what Dante once did, but in the opposite direction. The space where he places his events and characters is mainly Paris and other places within France. Carts that come and go, ladies with furs, secret hotels, rulers in power or the fallen, the world of a century or beyond. Messages that span many centuries. This submission is also emphasized by Kadare in "Dialogue with Alain Bosquet". He, in contrast to Balzac at this point, has completely different spaces: from the Russian steppes to the Arabian deserts, from Bohemia to the Vatican, the Bosphorus to Canakkale, China and the Nordic countries, and so on. And with this he creates two vast "comedies" or "tragedies": Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Balzac's *Human Comedy*. But that does not mean anything, it does

¹ Ismail Kadare, Complete Works, Volume 12, *Dante, the Inevitable*, Tiranë, Onufri, 2009, p. 353

not mean much for art. If Dante operates in indefinite but universal spaces, if Balzac operates within Paris and Kadare in vast spaces, the messages are approximate. The news too. So geniuses call each other.

In addition, we have a third writer whom Kadare refers to from time to time, perhaps not directly, but indirectly. It is Shakespeare, an early tempter for Kadare, because as he says in "Invitation to the Studio", or "Dialogue with Alain Bosquet", he, in adolescence had come in contact with "Macbeth" and Shakespeare had mesmerized the future Albanian genius. But Shakespeare may differ from the first two. Unlike Dante or Balzac, the events of these masterpieces of humanity take place in much narrower spaces, the characters act mainly within the walls of castles. He stands in the times after Dante and before Balzac. Yet this does not prevent it from delivering universal messages that serve the general philosophy of mankind, for all times.

Kadare has returned to Shakespeare's works several times, at certain times and in some ways mainly through highlights or motifs taken from these works to the direct taking with the literary essay "Reading Hamlet" or "Hamlet, the Impossible Prince." Therefore, through the work of the genius, as a whole and through "Hamlet", Kadare shares his thoughts on artistic greatness and universal values: *It is easy to say that Shakespeare's "Hamlet" is a universal work. To even add that it is, perhaps, the most universal work of world literature. It's harder to answer the question of whether this label is a praise or a flaw.*²

Whatever the thematic and literary connection or comparison, the structure of Shakespeare's works is felt throughout Kadare's creativity. Thus the castles, the darkness, the betrayal, the poison, the night of the "Black Tongues", "Lady Macbeth" etc. are like converted messages. So we can say that Kadare is among the three, participates from third parties or is a complement to them, directly or analogously.

These world geniuses can be mentioned to underline an idea: the complete structure of Kadare's work can only be compared to the gigantic structure of these immortal masters. In addition to these geniuses, he addresses another genius of antiquity, Aeschylus, especially with the famous essay *"Aeschylus, the Lost"*. In addition to the complexity addressed in this multidimensional, multi-layered work, of other approaches such as those of expulsions, internments and often tragic fates of geniuses, this serves the author, through noble approaches to glorify the early genetic cultural roots of the Albanian soul and common destiny, whatever it was. Looking at these comparisons, these meeting points, generalizations, but also the differences that emerge anyway, it can be said that in Albanian literature, but also beyond, Kadare is unique.

Those works of Kadare that have intersections of this nature, generally deal with the emergence of the period of the Ottoman Empire and give action in their extension but in the spaces of this empire, represent a multi-layered literary corpus. It is an academic art that must be viewed from different perspectives.

The author, through this literary corpus, manages to illuminate the many ponds left in the darkness of the labyrinths of time, to make shuffles and decompositions of confusions, to make removals and clearings of nebulae that had kept human minds for so long throughout the Albanian land, throughout the peninsula but also beyond. If we see as complete the work of this great writer, in all genres, it can be said that it rarely occurs in literature that a single author contribute to one's own culture, as Ismail Kadare has contributed. He has given almost all of history, in its most essential, most enduring points, the moral and customary codes, ballads,

² Ibid.: p. 403.

legends, psychology, culture of a people, in a time span that spans from antiquity to the present day.

That is why the messages are universal for all times and all peoples, given with a superior art of the last half century and the beginning of this century in which we live. Early in determining the value of Ismail Kadare's written literary work, the term "*The Literary Universe of Kadare*" was defined. And this definition is completely stable, but it can only be added that within this Universe, there are some "cosmoses" and "microcosms", which are as similar as different in the totality of messages conveyed by complete works, in the aesthetic fibers that connect this whole, regardless of the theme and motive that varies from book to book.

It is difficult to separate this whole, but it should still be possible and necessary, especially when the object of study becomes those "cosmoses" or "microcosmoses" of the Kadarean literary universe that we mentioned earlier. Both his fiction and poetry are easily studied on their own, even though they are artistically connected with thousands of threads, not only because it is the product of the same creative laboratory of the writer, but also because it has the same image of the human world. Although somewhere briefly said and somewhere longer and louder emphasized, although expressed at different times and in different ages of the writer, it has a great impact on giving a monumental picture of a certain era or many eras that bleed to complete the history of a nation of its own, from roots to modernity. The fate of the man of this nation, in most cases is gloomy, even the fate of the man in the wider Eurasian space with which the Albanian man has shared great dramas and mutual relations which have left their mark even in modern times and some of these distant echoes reappear today as current problems that transcend the boundaries of literature and interfere with a historical-problematic discussion.

Such problems, some of which are still daily problems in Albanian world, the Balkans and beyond, such as the cultural identity of Albanians, their cultural-historical affiliation in the East-West relationship, civilization and his affiliation in this relation, religious-historical culture and its influence on this issue, sayings and contradictions on this issue, often go beyond the cold and realistic historical-scientific view, and are deformed as a result of various political backgrounds of the so-called nationalist-chauvinist Balkan mold.

Therefore these must be emphasized. Because from an early age, about five decades ago, they appeared in different perspectives in Kadare's literary work. These add to the superior value of this work and the lifelong vision of the author, who even today continues to be active in solving these knots, in various forms and genres, from artistic prose to journalism, essays, etc.

Characters and actions

Kadare's characters that move in all his works, as the eternal tradition of literature, are identifiable characters, by name, but also unidentifiable, nameless characters that operate in a certain geography, in different spaces, narrow times and vast times. All of these spaces have names and actions on earth.

Characters with names that are described in their **underworld** (Kadare's underworld) are: Skanderbeg in "*The Ballad of Exhumation*", Constantine in "*The Ghost Rider*", Pharaoh in "*The Pyramid*", Hurshid Pasha in "*The Traitor's Niche*", etc. Unidentified characters or nameless are hundreds of invading soldiers who are wanted to be found in the Albanian underworld in the "General of the Dead Army", pashas, commanders and army with lost graves and even unburied ones.

While **the heaven** is a space where heroes appear and reappear, comparatively as Skanderbeg appears in all cases in his work. Nameless characters appear in the heaven, who are mainly a symbol of evil, fleeing and it is not known where they are going. There are dozens of souls fleeing through the rain, searching for distant places and probably never getting there. They are the souls of the invaders killed at different times in the Arberian battles. The author focuses mainly on famous characters such as Tursun Pasha in *"The Siege"*. But while the heaven is a symbol of Paradise, to Kadare when it comes to the symbolists of evil, the heaven takes on a double meaning in this case: the heaven is hell, a short journey without an address.

In the large Dantean structure, there are stratified areas, *Inferno, Purgatory, Paradise* which for a change in Kadarean structure we will call these strata *Underworld, Earth, and Heaven*. In these layers, Kadare also puts the hero, Gjergj Kastriot - Skanderbeg, with a completely different optics, which is a feature of the author's style.

Skanderbeg, therefore, appears in these three spaces. The appearances are multiple, twice, many times, eternally. In one state, two or more.

Skanderbeg on Earth

In Kadare's pen, Skanderbeg on *Earth* is given to us in several states and many images: as a real character, earthly, warrior, leader, diplomat and hero, with defined places and geography. He leads the battle, fights himself, wins, has relations with historically defined names such as in the novel *"The Siege"* or in the poems *"Portrait of Skanderbeg"*, *"Death of Skanderbeg"* etc. Also, the action of his return to earth from the underworld appears in three images, as a superstition, or cult as in the *"Ballad of the Exhumation"*, in the form of memory and as a resurrection. The Turks exhume Skanderbeg's bones, crush them and make talismans.³ With these bones they wander across continents. So Skanderbeg is back on earth, as a superstition, or as a cult. Returning to earth in the form of national memory, he appears in songs, legends, etc. He has the grave (underworld) in the blood of Albanians (*Ballad of the Exhumation*), as the author puts it. His return in the form of resurrection is understood as a historical need. This is what the poem *"Terror in Kosovo"* (1981) reminds us of. Skanderbeg is therefore ubiquitous and permanent. Terrestrial that comes in various forms through which the hero returns to earth from the underworld, but let us artistically look at another path of return. This path, the return to *Earth*, has its beginning in *Heaven*.

*"His body, like a heavy rain
Fell over hundreds of battlefields,
Now the earth evaporates legends
From the Balkans to Canakkale."*⁴

He, Skanderbeg, returns to earth in the form of rain, or rather, returns. So he returns from the sky, as the rain falls from the sky. And he does not return only to his land, Arbri, he returns to the land, *from the Balkans to Çanakkala*. So he returns in two forms: as rain and as a legend. And this reciprocal relationship *Earth-Heaven*, is without time limits, is eternal. The

³ "History does not say anything about this undoing of him. Did you deal with it yourself since you were alive? Were his followers taken? Apart from a legend of Ottoman soldiers, the spread of which was sometimes encouraged and sometimes punished, according to the judgment of which Kastriot would be more dangerous, whether he was or was not, body or soul, no other chronicle could explain the mystery." – I. Kadare, *The Dispute*, Onufri, Tirana, 2012, pp. 136-137.

⁴ I. Kadare, *Time*, N. Frashëri, Tiranë 1976, p. 31.

word now, which defines the present tense in the third verse, expresses this idea. The word *evaporates* means the reciprocal *Earth-Heaven* relationship. The steam that goes to the sky and falls back to earth means timelessness, eternity. So Skanderbeg is always on earth or returns to earth. Figuratively returning to earth, is his presence as an eternal part of the living who live on this earth. Kadare talks about the living Albanians in the poem "*Ballad of the Exhumation*" and says to the Hero: "Your grave is in their blood."⁵ So, the living live on this earth and in their blood, even Skanderbeg.

In Dante Alighieri, the underworld is *Inferno*. The word *Inferno*, cannot be guessed when talking about Skanderbeg in the work of I. Kadare, only the word *underworld* is mentioned. In Skanderbeg's triple presence, the underworld occupies the least time and place. The hero lives only a short time in the underworld, in the grave of the earthlings. He is then exhumed and gets two other names: Earth and Heaven and forever this. The underworld is never mentioned, it is not his place. That is why Kadare devotes the least verses, the least attention and time to Skanderbeg's underworld.

Skanderbeg's Heaven

In Kadare's work, Skanderbeg, being more earthly, little or not underworldly, appears forever heavenly. The heaven in relation to Skanderbeg, as the third Dante-Kadare dimension, appears in a multiplicity of times and forms. The first time and the first form is the life of Skanderbeg. As long as Skanderbeg was alive, he was heavenly, says Kadare:

*"As a full day he wandered
with clouds and wind over the homeland"*⁶

So he was heavenly, for the day (light) comes from heaven. As a full day, meaning the other half, that is, the night. He is a full day that wanders over the homeland.

The *second time*, the second form, is the time of the afterlife, the form of rain. Skanderbeg, turns into rain that stretches and lives in the heavens and occasionally falls to the earth, so he is heavenly. In the second form, he evaporates from the earth and lives in the heavens, in the form of a legend. The steam-legend binomial still has space in heaven.

The third time, again, is related to heaven, but it is definite, that is, it is the omnipresence, the immensity, the eternity of the hero. As vapors and rains are measureless, timeless and eternal, so is their synonym Skanderbeg. Immortal as the heavens and reversible, implies the author. Thus, by other, modern means, Kadare completes the three worlds of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*: Earth, Heaven, and Underworld. Certainly with different messages, other characters, but often also approximate.

The fourth time, is the heaven within man. Heaven, like a measureless space, can be contained by the human soul, as legend is contained. As Kadare writes: "Now the earth evaporates legends." And so we are repeating, that the legend lives only in the soul of the people. Yes the steam legend goes to heaven, and being part of the human soul and their consciousness, the legend presupposes the human soul as heaven. So, the fourth heaven of Skanderbeg, is the soul of the eternal Albanian man. Thus, he, has four heavens, or four forms in Skanderbeg's heaven. Just like an ancient Albanian formula, it seems borrowed from the

⁵ Ibid.:p. 31.

⁶ Ibid.: p. 19.

Holy books, it speaks of "seven pairs of earth and seven pairs of heaven." So, Skanderbeg also has some pairs of earth and some pairs of heaven as his space.

The totality of the work as an artistic figure, ambiguity and multiplicity

It is known that the composition of every work of art has as its basic device the artistic figure, so Kadare's works have a great wealth of figures. Various scholars have noticed that in this field, he is a great innovator of Albanian literature. The symbol is one of the devices, perhaps the founder of modern world literature, so we think that this device plays an important role in Kadare's work. But in his creativity, we notice another innovation, many of his works constitute a single figure. Thus, for example, it can be said that the whole novel "The Siege" is a single symbol. It can also be interpreted as a single metaphor. The whole portrait of Skanderbeg, given in the poem with the same title, is also a symbol.

Within this image, two prominent features of Kadare's creativity appear: ambiguity, multiplicity. These are features of modern literature. Thus, the *castle* symbol itself is ambiguous and timeless. By the word castle we mean resistance, war, but also siege, confinement or isolation. In Kadare's novel, the Castle (translated into English as "The Siege") takes on another semantic dimension: that of an entire country, in the concrete case of Albania. At the time the novel was written, Albania was isolated. Scholars of the time have noticed that the author perhaps alludes to the current time of Albania, of the second half of the twentieth century, although the events of the novel "The Castle" take place in the fifteenth century. So here's how contemporaneity emerges. It is also noted that in "Palace of Dreams", the author alludes to the communist dictatorship in Albania, although in the first reading the events take place in Istanbul, centuries ago.

So there are universal themes that do not belong to just one time and one place, but to many times and many places. The theme of freedom, resilience, human dignity, etc., are timeless themes and belong to all countries, all humanity. Exactly these themes are the axis of these works of Kadare.

The outlook in the artistic figuration created by Kadare, to best explain the figure is *ambiguity*. For aesthetes and researchers, this creates difficulties, but also leaves open paths for further study. This quality, i.e. ambiguity, is one of the basic elements of his work, which ranks this work in modern literature. It is an expressive device by which Kadare breaks with traditionalism in literature. Thus, within an artistic figure several figures come to life. Aesthetic categories are mixed within one category and with this feature breaks the scheme. The figure of Skanderbeg, created by him, encompasses several aesthetic categories: the tragic, the heroic, the sublime. It also contains in itself the simple, the human, the everyday, the earthly. The stylistic devices that the author uses to create the artistic figure are numerous, but have a technique and opposite direction from traditionalism.

Reading Kadare's entire work, especially those parts of the work that speak of Skanderbeg, a question arises: does time repeat itself, does it return?! Indirectly what is essential in Kadare's work, he gives a definite answer: Yes! Time does return in different ways and mindsets. Only the devices change. The return of time, its resurrection, in Kadare's optics, appears in two ways, with antithesis and contrast. The Middle Ages returned to the Balkans in the form of blood, violence, mass graves, primitivism, represented by Tsar Dushan, Prince Lazarus, etc. But it also appears in another way, / *That after Dushan, scary tsar, / Like lightning Skanderbeg arrives* /. So time repeats itself both as tragedy and as comedy, but still with blood. Different peoples, even when they did not have heroes or epics, created them by way of their imagination. The English have the epic of Robin Hood. Without any complex, without any

prejudice, after all who was Robin Hood of the English epic? A hero who lived in the forest, who robs the rich and helps the poor. In a word, a social type.

One of the masterpieces of humanity "Iliad", which had become the source for thousands of literary works over the centuries, a masterpiece of Greek culture, basically has an aggression: the Greeks go out of their territory, attack Troy for 10 years. So that is how an epic was created. This also happens with Albanians. Centuries before Skanderbeg, they had their legendary epic known as the *Songs of Heroes* or the cycle of Muji and Halil. Albanians did not need glory. Centuries later, they created Skanderbeg, the epic about the deeds and the era of Skanderbeg. Not as a literary need, but as a recall of the past in actuality. Times return, therefore, sometimes in the form of stage props and sometimes as a national predicament. They returned to Kosovo by June 1999. How the stage props turn into a call, as a reminder of the symbol of resistance and freedom in the figure of Skanderbeg.

Conclusion

From this new style, this new method of upper levels that Kadare brought to Albanian literature, we can distinguish two schools: the study school, which serves and will serve pupils, students, scholars and artists of art, and the art school which will serve poets, writers, people of different fields, types and genres of art everywhere. Thus, the style used, the experience of Kadare, ranks Albanian literature with dignity alongside other general contemporary literatures.

Kadare is an institution in itself, with extraordinary codes and rules and information. No encyclopedia written to date has as much information about Albanians as the major work by Ismail Kadare does. This work is today the proudest passport of Albanians to the ways of the world we live in. He also has the gift, opportunity and coded philosophy of his art that manages to best decipher the psychology and flaws of the whole Balkans and thus through this gives all-Balkan and all-human messages. Through his genius, he reveals another dimension of his art: foresight and timeless message.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Albanian art, or the message of the Albanian art, especially that of Kadare have a name: peace, understanding, fellowship, and future.

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