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Linguistic Camouflage in Totalitarianism: Ismail Kadare's Resistance through Literature

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ABSTRACT

Ismail Kadare holds an important position in contemporary literature, maintaining significant influence across Albanian and global literary landscapes. During the latter half of the twentieth century, Kadare faced the oppressive constraints of socialist realism imposed by the totalitarian communist regime in Albania. To survive under this regime, he employed a perilous strategy known as the "Pact with the Devil" (*Pactum Cum Diabolus*). This approach entailed a dual mechanism: on one hand, Kadare conformed to the dictatorial system's ideological demands in certain aspects of his work, thereby ensuring his survival and continued publication. On the other hand, he crafted anti-system literature that subtly resisted and undermined Socialist Realism. By situating his narratives in historical settings such as the Turkish empire, ancient Egypt, or Greece, Kadare crafts a metaphorical dialogue that transcends the immediate temporal and political constraints of his era. His strategic use of linguistic tools, including symbolic imagery, rhetorical questions, and allusions, enables him to encode resistance within his narratives. The "Pact with the Devil" thus serves as a linguistic camouflage, allowing Kadare to evade the constraints of communist propaganda and ideology, which sought to suppress intellectual freedom and creativity. The "Pact with the Devil" serves as a literary camouflage, enabling Kadare to evade communist propaganda and ideology, which sought to suppress free expression and talented intellectuals within the country. Through this nuanced strategy, Kadare's literature becomes a form of camouflaged resistance against totalitarian oppression.

Keywords: Ismail Kadare; Linguistic Camouflage; Literary Resistance; S Metaphorical Dialogue; Historical Settings; Linguistic Strategies; Subversive Language; Censorship

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1. Introduction

Totalitarian regimes have always found mechanisms to control public life, stripping individuals of personal freedoms and using propaganda as a tool of power and communication with the masses. Literature, particularly in the second half of the 20th century in communist regimes, became one of the key weapons of propaganda, subjected to control and censorship with the aim of aligning public tastes with the rules, principles, and norms of the ruling regime. Albania, one of the most isolated countries in the world during communist regime, did not escape this logic. On the contrary, it had sharpened its propaganda tools so effectively that the method of socialist realism had become a condition adhered to by both talented writers and those selected by the regime. This reality had its consequences, stifling, drying up, and surgically cutting off the sprouts of talent in authors who might have showcased a modern worldview before the establishment of communism in Albania.

One of the most notable cases of this transformation was that of the Albanian writer Sterjo Spasse. After his debut novel *Pse? (Why?)*^[1], first published in 1935, which bore traces of modern inspiration, influenced by Nietzschean philosophy and oriented toward a nihilistic spirit that saw humanity as lost in the contemporary world, Spasse conformed to the principles of socialist realism following the establishment of communism. This transformation marked a broader reality: conform to the rules, accept the directives, and blend in with the masses—or face the consequences. And these consequences were cruel most of times. Albania stands as one of the rare countries where, in the name of poetic verses, two poets, Vilson Blloshmi and Genc Leka, were executed by firing squad in the infamous year of 1977. This tragic fate of writers and poets under totalitarian regimes resonates deeply with the reflections of Charles Bukowski: “*Sometimes, you don’t even have time to understand; everything happens in the blink of an eye. Everything changes. You are alive. You are dead. And the world moves on*”^[2]. If we examine the political conditions that shaped Ismail Kadare’s literary universe within Albanian literature, it becomes clear that even the smallest attempts to challenge the ruling power in communist Albania were subject to censorship or punished by the mechanisms of the regime. There was no other means to express intellectual and creative independence except through indirect methods—metaphorical bridges, the use of symbols,

and double meanings—crafted in ways that were subtle and not easily interpreted at first glance. This inability to act otherwise gave rise to a literature where allegory, metaphor, symbolism, and double-layered language became the only tools available to reshape and sustain the freedom of the human spirit^[3]. Kadare’s works, while seemingly distant from any direct critique of the communist reality, allowed for the creation of a unique form of resistance through the power of art and nuanced expression. Ismail Kadare, reflecting on life under totalitarianism, described this reality when he had the possibility to do so: “*Many things were murky because two realities were closely intertwined—concrete reality and the other, virtual reality. It was a kind of geographical or spiritual negative landscape. That’s roughly how Mandelstam imagined Dante’s inferno, as an indeterminate place, like the fringes of an epidemic*”^[4]. This interplay of concrete and virtual realities not only defined life under such regimes but also infiltrated the literary imagination, creating a fragmented, often surreal worldview for those living under and writing about totalitarianism. The Czech playwright Tom Stoppard pushes deals with a similar worldview: “*We cross our bridges when we come to them and burn them behind us, with nothing to show for our progress except a memory of the smell of smoke, and a presumption that once our eyes watered*”^[1]. Under a dictatorship, literature could not build bridges, nor could it truly exist if the writer was imprisoned, sent to forced labor, or executed. This raises the question: For the sake of those bridges, can a temporary compromise with the devil be justified? Is it possible to create the illusion that the writer is adhering to the official line of the regime, while simultaneously crafting literature that serves as dynamite, demolishing the very structures that uphold the dictatorship? From this perspective, we can examine the literature of Ismail Kadare, who, through the works he created during Albania’s communist dictatorship, provided a unique meditation on resilience, pain, sleep, and forgetfulness. Kadare places humanity before a mirror in which it does not see its own reflection but instead the indelible marks left by dictatorial regime. The human heart initially seeks joy, then the absence of pain, and eventually moves toward colorless events that lighten suffering, only to finally turn toward sleep—whether as a punishment of fate or the will of a Judge—where the freedom of death both is and is not within human control. And for another kind of sleep, one

that transforms humanity and its emotions, there exists the dictatorship, which kills, persecutes, and suffocates while those around it, the entire world, seem as if they are asleep.

Kadare's ability to intertwine these existential themes with the oppressive realities of totalitarianism reveals the delicate balancing act he mastered. His works navigate the narrow space between outward conformity to the regime and the inner rebellion of a writer who, through his literary craft, sought to dismantle the very structures that sought to silence him. The writer often employed historical allegory and symbolic language to critique authoritarianism and reflect on the human condition. Claude Durand recounts an extraordinary episode during one of Ismail Kadare's visits to Paris in 1986. Kadare confided his intention to deposit unpublished manuscripts in France, as their publication in Albania was impossible under the prevailing regime. Durand writes: "*In 1986, during one of his trips to Paris, Ismail Kadare confided to me that he wanted to deposit some manuscripts in a secure place in France, as their publication in Albania at that time was impossible. These included two short novels, a story, and several poems. The author had brought with him part of these texts. Since the export of original manuscripts was strictly prohibited under Albanian law, Kadare had slightly altered these pages so that they might be mistaken for translations by a Western author. To achieve this, the names of characters and settings had been replaced with German or Austrian equivalents*"^[5].

While outwardly conforming to the ideological demands of the regime to ensure his works were published, Kadare embedded subtle yet powerful critiques of totalitarianism within his narratives. An introductory overview of the historical and political factors connected to Ismail Kadare and his work seems important for properly contextualizing the author and his novels within their spatio-temporal framework. A valuable source of information on this topic is the volume by Peter Morgan, *Ismail Kadare, The Writer and the Dictatorship 1957-1990*^[6]. By situating his stories in historical settings, such as the Ottoman Empire or ancient civilizations, he created metaphorical dialogues that transcended the immediate political constraints of his era. His use of linguistic tools—symbolism, rhetorical questions, and allegory—enabled him to camouflage resistance within his works, allowing his literature to flourish as a vehicle for intellectual and artistic freedom. In his works, Kadare captures

the interplay between human resilience and the oppressive forces of history, ensuring his voice continues to resonate across generations. As David Damrosch states: "*My claim is that world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike*"^[7]. Kadare exemplifies this dynamic mode of circulation. Through translations and international recognition, his works have crossed cultural and linguistic barriers, introducing readers to Albania's unique historical and cultural landscape while engaging with universal themes that resonate beyond national borders. David Bellos, who has translated Kadare's works into English, underscores this duality by observing that Kadare writes "double" — for his Albanian readers and for a global audience. Bellos notes: "*My own impression is that Kadare has long understood the constraints of writing 'double'—for his Albanian readers, on the one hand, and for a world audience, on the other. He doesn't think that anything he writes in prose is 'untranslatable'—on the contrary, he thinks that what he has to say will come through in pretty much any language*"^[8].

We can expand on translator David Bellos's perspective to further examine Kadare's dual approach to writing, especially in relation to his complicated relationship with Enver Hoxha's harsh communist dictatorship in post-World War II Albania. The "double standard" in Kadare's writing was a kind of "pact with the devil"—a necessity, an effort to give himself the chance to live as a human being, and, by extension, to survive as a writer. The second role, that of the writer, could not exist without the first. This "pact with the devil" allowed Kadare to create works that, on the one hand, depict and even center the figure of dictator Enver Hoxha (The Great Winter), while on the other, expose the depths of cruelty and horror inherent in totalitarian regimes that surveil, spy on, control, and punish their citizens—not only in the real world but even in the realm of dreams (The Palace of Dreams).

Kadare's literary compromise thus reflects a delicate balance, enabling him to navigate the demands of a repressive regime while producing works that resonate deeply with the universal human struggle against oppression.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodology to examine Ismail Kadare's literary works, with a particular focus on his use of allegory, linguistic camouflage, and subtle resistance to totalitarianism. In *The origins of totalitarianism* Hannah Arendt examines totalitarianism as a phenomenon rooted in modernity^[9]. She characterizes it as a system that requires individuals to pledge unwavering, absolute loyalty to a specific ideology, overriding all other social ties, including those to family, friends, or peers. By situating Kadare's narratives within their socio-political and historical contexts, the research seeks to uncover the layers of meaning embedded in his texts and the strategies he employed to circumnavigate the constraints of socialist realism during Albania's communist regime.

The research relies on an interdisciplinary approach that bridges literary analysis, historical contextualization, and linguistic interpretation. The primary materials include a selection of Kadare's most significant works, such as *Gjenerali i Ushtisë së Vdekur* (*The General of the Dead Army*), *Pallati i ëndrrave* (*The Palace of Dreams*), *Dimri i Vetmisë së Madhe* (*The Great Winter*). These texts serve as the core of the analysis, offering insight into Kadare's thematic and stylistic choices. Additionally, the study incorporates secondary sources, including critical essays, reviews, and theoretical works, to provide a comprehensive understanding of Kadare's literary reception and historical significance.

The research is grounded in an analytical framework that combines historical and political contextualization with thematic and allegorical analysis. Kadare's works are examined against the backdrop of Albania's communist regime, exploring how his narratives reflect, critique, and subtly subvert the ideological doctrines of his time. Particular attention is given to the use of allegory, which Kadare employed to encode resistance within seemingly conformist texts. Through the examination of symbolic motifs, rhetorical questions, and layered narrative techniques, the study seeks to demonstrate how Kadare's works communicated dual meanings: one that conformed to the regime's expectations and another that spoke to the discerning reader. Kadare's portrayal of Albania under communism often reflects a nation that initially embraced dictatorship with a sense of celebration, as he succinctly remarked, "*Albania entered dictatorship as if entering a festivity*"^[10]. This observation underscores the

paradox of a regime that demanded public displays of loyalty while simultaneously suppressing individual freedoms. Kadare's ability to encode such critiques within his narratives highlights his mastery in maneuvering the boundaries of permissible discourse, creating works that resonate both as historical documents and timeless explorations of human resilience. In *Pesha e Kryqit* (*The Weight of the Cross*)^[11], Kadare reveals that the most troubling accusations he faced came not from regime loyalists, but from its opponents—particularly dissidents who had once been members of the secret police before switching sides. This ambiguity, openly acknowledged by the writer, has shadowed his entire public life, casting doubt on the value of his literary works among those who seemed unwilling to understand that a "pact with the devil" was an unavoidable reality under Europe's harshest communist dictatorship. For our study, shedding light on these specific dynamics is one of the key focal points we aim to explore. Furthermore, the analysis considers Kadare's linguistic strategies, focusing on his use of imagery, rhetorical devices, and symbolic language to evade censorship and maintain intellectual freedom. By comparing Kadare's works with those of other writers who resisted repressive regimes, such as Milan Kundera and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the research highlights shared strategies of literary resistance and situates Kadare within a broader tradition of subversive literature. But even when turning to classic writers of the past, such as Dante Alighieri, we can discover profound connections to Kadare's literary imagination. Alighieri's works have long held a profound significance for Ismail Kadare. For Albanians living under dictatorship, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, particularly *Inferno*, was a reflection of Albanian reality during communism. The vivid depiction of Hell in *Inferno* could be likened to the stifling atmosphere of life under communist rule, where oppression and fear pervaded every aspect of existence. In this context, Dante's *Inferno* stood as a haunting metaphor for the gulags and the systemic brutality of the regime^[12].

Ultimately, this methodology provides a robust framework for analyzing Kadare's contributions to literature. It illuminates the nuanced strategies he employed to critique totalitarianism and highlights the universal themes in his works, demonstrating their continued relevance beyond the borders of Albania.

3. The Castle: Allegory, Resistance, and the Eternal Dialogue with Power

Ismail Kadare's novel *The Castle* (Kështjella), first published in 1969, stands as one of the most striking examples of his ability to embed resistance and historical reflection within a framework of allegory and narrative complexity. This novel focuses on the resistance of Albanians against the siege of the Ottoman imperial army, highlighting not only a historical confrontation but also the universal struggle of the individual and the collective against overwhelming forces.

The novel's deeper challenge lies in its dual purpose: the renewal of a literature that, on one hand, must defend itself against obliteration, and on the other, must sacrifice itself to be reborn. As Kadare suggests, *The Castle*, like all works of art, is deeply rooted in the historical moment of its creation, fulfilling its mission by uncovering a transformative journey that reveals the arduous path a writer must take to achieve his metamorphosis^[13]. The narrative is structured around two primary planes: the first, a choral chronicle representing the collective Albanian resistance, and the second, a detailed account from the Ottoman perspective. Through these dual perspectives, Kadare situates the reader in the liminal space between the oppressor and the oppressed, forcing an empathetic examination of both sides. The castle, a symbol of Albanian defiance, is described as a dark and ominous entity, alive with emotion and purpose. Kadare's description of the Albanian landscape, dense with suffocating clouds and impenetrable mountains, creates an atmosphere of dread that mirrors the psychological tension of both the besiegers and the besieged:

"The castle that was erected in front of him this time was gloomy. There was something unnatural, almost ominous in its planimetry and in the placement of the towers... He had never seen such mountains. They were like a severe anxiety, that presses and presses constantly against you and doesn't let you wake up"^[14].

This sense of foreboding is not merely atmospheric; it animates the castle itself. In Kadare's hands, the castle transcends its materiality to become a living character, bearing

witness to and embodying the collective anxieties, hopes, and resistance of those within its walls. Scholars have observed that Kadare's works often imbue architecture and objects with metaphorical resonance, transforming them into active participants in the narrative drama^[15]. The castle becomes a protagonist, expressing its pain and rebellion through the voices of its defenders and the tremors of its ancient stones:

"The bloody stones... getting wet, were releasing the accumulated heat during the day. They looked alive, and at every moment it seemed to me that they would move and breathe"^[14].

This transformation of the inanimate into the animate aligns Kadare with a tradition of allegorical literature that transcends the boundaries of realism. Allegory, as Kundera notes, allows literature to critique not just the historical moment but also the broader human condition^[16].

Kadare himself has acknowledged the deeply personal and surreal connections between his creative process and the narrative elements of *The Castle*. In his memoir *Invitation to the Studio* (*Ftesë në Studio*), he recounts how a physical ailment—pain and noise in his ear—found its way into the character of Turkun Pasha, the Turkish commander besieging the castle. This unintentional mirroring underscores the symbiotic relationship between author and text, where personal experiences bleed into fiction, blurring the lines between reality and narrative invention^[17].

The castle's omnipresence in the text serves as a metaphor for everlasting resistance, echoing the plight of individuals and nations under oppressive forces. Its shadow, described as "ominous and inexplicable," frightens the invading army and symbolizes the indomitable spirit of those who refuse to submit to tyranny. Kadare's portrayal of the castle is emblematic of his broader literary project: to confront the ghosts and shadows of totalitarian regimes, not only through direct critique but also through allegory and the fantastic. Kadare's ability to transcend the confines of realism enables him to address the spiritual and psychological ramifications of living under dictatorship. His work becomes a medium for processing personal and collective trauma, a way to challenge the imposition of historical and political constraints on artistic expression. In *The Castle*, Kadare crafts a narrative that is at once historically rooted and universally resonant. The allegorical elements, combined with his exploration of

the metaphysical and the fantastic, elevate the novel beyond its immediate context, making it a profound meditation on resistance, identity, and the eternal struggle against authoritarianism. As such, Kadare's work invites readers to see beyond the walls of the fortress, to consider the ways in which literature can serve as both a refuge and a weapon in the face of oppression.

4. The Transhistorical Resonance of the General of the Dead Army: Kadare's Masterpiece of Moral Reckoning

As scholar Ani Kokobobo observes, "[...] so much of Ismail Kadare's art is inherently Albanian. From the language that emerges in all of its richness and dialects in his manuscripts; to the Albanian history, culture, and myth; to the unique wealth of experiences that would otherwise be unseen and unaccounted for among Western audiences"^[18]. His debut novel, *The General of the Dead Army* (1963), exemplifies these qualities. The novel captures the daily life of communist Albania with reminiscences of World War II history, while transcending its immediate context to speak to universal themes of memory, loss, and the haunting weight of history. Published in 1963, this novel immediately revealed itself as a work of profound significance, one destined to endure through time. The book's title alone presents a provocative juxtaposition of two seemingly irreconcilable ideas: the "army," symbolizing strength, vitality, and action, and "dead," evoking stillness, passivity, and lifelessness. This paradox encapsulates the novel's thematic exploration of war's moral and existential futility. The dead army represents the weight of guilt, the haunting echoes of violence, and the emptiness of conquest.

The novel's unique and unsettling premise unfolds as an Italian general and a priest arrive in Albania in the early 1960s to retrieve the remains of soldiers who perished during World War II. Tasked with exhuming and collecting the bones of fallen comrades, the general assembles what he ironically calls the "Grand Army of Nylon," a grotesque parody of a once-mighty force. His grim mission serves as a moral allegory for the futility of war, transforming him into the titular General of the Dead Army. Kadare enriches this narrative with philosophical and psychological depth,

drawing on broader literary traditions that transcend Albania's communist-era restrictions. In one instance, the priest reflects on human behavior, observing how certain social classes find powerful emotions in crime, emotions that others might only derive from art. This notion parallels ideas from Oscar Wilde, whose works were banned in communist Albania for being considered "decadent." By paraphrasing Wilde's perspective, Kadare subtly weaves the essence of Western literary thought into his novel, despite the ideological barriers of the time. As scholar Ag Apolloni points out, Kadare's ability to encapsulate Wilde's thinking, likely influenced by his exposure to literature during his studies abroad, demonstrates how universal literary themes can enrich Albanian narratives^[19]. This interplay of ideas underscores the novel's exploration of moral ambiguity and the human condition, elevating it beyond a simple allegory for war.

Kadare's narrative is steeped in the symbolic and metaphysical, reflecting the motifs of traditional Albanian ballads, where the living and the dead coexist in a delicate interplay. As the living dig into the earth, they metaphorically descend into the realm of the dead, while the exhumed ascend to the surface, creating a dialogue between life and death. The general's journey through a desolate and rain-soaked Albania becomes a pilgrimage into the collective memory of violence and loss, where even the air carries the weight of despair. As Kadare notes through the general's reflections, "*Everything smells of death,*" an observation that encapsulates the pervasive despair woven throughout the narrative^[20].

Kadare's narrative invites comparisons with the literary traditions of magic realism, where reality and the extraordinary intersect. As V. Canosinaj notes, Albanian literature finds a natural space within this dimension: "*Given that Albania belongs to a Balkan area where myths and legends, old customs of an ancient era... are preserved till the twentieth century, it is natural that elements of ontological magic realism emerge in its literature*"^[21]. Through its intricate interplay of memory, loss, and history, the novel transcends its immediate setting in postwar Albania to grapple with universal human questions, all while navigating the constraints of a repressive regime. In doing so, Kadare not only preserved his artistic integrity but also established a unique literary voice. Kadare's biting irony and masterful use of allegory transform the general's seemingly noble mission into a chilling meditation on the absurdity of human endeavors. The

General of the Dead Army is not merely a novel but an intelligible reflection on the human condition, where the line between the living and the dead blurs, and the shadows of history continue to haunt the present.

5. The Allegorical Labyrinth: Challenging the Devil in *The Palace of Dreams*

Ismail Kadare's *The Palace of Dreams* (*Pallati i Ëndrerrave*) vividly illustrates the suffocating mechanisms of totalitarian control, imagination, and the human subconscious. Written during the authoritarian rule of communist Albania in 1981, the novel stands as a subversive critique of totalitarian regimes, cloaked in allegory and symbolism. At its heart lies the Palace of Dreams, a fictional institution within the Ottoman Empire that scrutinizes dreams to identify a "master-dream" capable of revealing potential threats or opportunities to the state. The Palace serves as a chilling metaphor for the regime's invasive reach into private lives, exposing the horrors of authoritarian control.

Kadare, reflecting on the inspiration for the novel, drew heavily on Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*. He envisioned the Palace as a labyrinthine hell where the subconscious is mined for meaning, and individuals are stripped of their autonomy. Kadare explained:

"I was tempted to design an Inferno for a long time. I knew it was difficult, if not impossible, to create an original project after what had been written in the past, from the anonymous Egyptians, to Homer, St. Augustine, Dante. That's why when I started writing The Palace of Dreams, or rather when I was thinking about the middle chapters, with both joy and fear, I saw that I was inadvertently realizing the old dream: in the whole structure of my novel, as a second plan, it was possible to perceive, to capture, the image or the idea of Inferno."^[22]

The novel's labyrinthine structure and oppressive atmosphere mirror the mechanisms of control described by Shaban Sinani, a scholar who examined the intricate relationship between art, censorship, and dictatorship in Albania.

Sinani highlights the dual nature of censorship under the communist regime: the overt, officially published criticism and the covert, unpublished bureaucratic criticism, which served as a secret tool for the state to control and manipulate literary output. This second layer of critique allowed authorities to maintain an iron grip on literature while avoiding public confrontation with authors, reflecting the pervasive surveillance and control embodied in Kadare's novel.

The Palace of Dreams was a bold challenge to this system. Rather than making a pact with the regime, Kadare used the novel to expose its hidden ambitions. The book provoked a strong reaction from the state, with Ramiz Alia, then responsible for propaganda and ideology within the Communist Party, openly condemning its publication. Alia criticized the publishing houses for their "carelessness" in allowing such a work to reach the public, stating:

"Publishers finance and publish books and works of art that are needed by the people, the Party, and the country, in the required quantity, quality, and relevance. The criteria of publishers are political, ideological, and aesthetic. Therefore, for the works given to the public—whether good or weak—responsibility lies not only with the authors but also with the publishers and editorial offices."^[23]

This condemnation underscores the novel's subversive power and Kadare's courage in challenging the regime's oppressive ideology. The novel's allegorical structure, which merges the real and the surreal, allowed Kadare to critique the communist state without directly naming it, creating a work that was both a product of its time and a timeless reflection on the dangers of unchecked power.

The novel's narrative intertwines reality and dream, highlighting the fragility of human autonomy under authoritarian regimes. *The Palace of Dreams* mirrors the ambitions of Orwell's *1984*, where the Thought Police monitor citizens' innermost ideas. In both works, totalitarian regimes seek to control not just actions but thoughts, extending their reach into the most intimate realms of human existence. However, while Orwell's protagonist, Winston Smith, actively resists the Party's control, Kadare's Mark-Alem passively ascends the ranks of the Palace, reflecting the insidious nature of complicity and survival under totalitarianism.

The Palace of Dreams also resonates with broader themes of dehumanization and alienation. The labyrinthine structure of the Palace transforms its inhabitants into objects, stripping them of individuality. Mark-Alem's transformation into a cog in the Palace's oppressive machinery underscores the erosion of humanity under such regimes. This theme is poignantly captured in a scene where Mark-Alem is mistaken for a door handle, symbolizing the reduction of individuals to mere functional components within the totalitarian state.

The novel's conclusion offers a sobering reflection on the pervasive nature of authoritarianism. By controlling dreams, the regime asserts its dominance over the subconscious, reducing individuals to pawns in its quest for absolute power. Kadare's allegorical use of the fantastic becomes a vehicle for resistance, offering readers a means to critique and understand the mechanisms of oppression. This subversive potential was not lost on the regime, which sought to suppress such literature but ultimately failed to silence its powerful message.

The Palace of Dreams transcends its historical context, standing as a universal meditation on power, control, and the resilience of the human spirit. Its intertextual connections to Dante's *Inferno* and Orwell's *1984* enrich its allegorical depth, positioning it as one of Kadare's most significant contributions to world literature. By refusing to compromise with the regime, Kadare demonstrated the power of literature to challenge tyranny and inspire resistance, leaving a legacy that continues to resonate in the struggle for freedom and human dignity.

Kadare's Self-Criticism: A Strategy for Preserving Literature under Totalitarianism

In the early 1980s, Albania remained firmly under the control of a totalitarian regime that imposed strict ideological requirements on its literature. Writers were expected to glorify socialist ideals and align their works with the party's doctrines. Amid this oppressive climate, Ismail Kadare, one of Albania's most prominent authors, found himself maneuvering the delicate balance between compliance and resistance. To safeguard his creative voice and ensure the publication of his works, Kadare employed a strategy of carefully crafted self-criticism. This maneuver, while outwardly an acknowledgment of state control, served as a subtle act of defiance that preserved his literature for future generations.

Kadare's self-criticism appeared in a speech titled Completion of the Tableau of the Socialist Era published in the magazine *November (Nëntori)*. He wrote:

“Since my discussion concerns the completion of the tableau of the socialist era in Albania, and thus the broad treatment of contemporary themes in literary works, before beginning, I would like to state that I fully understand the criticisms made here regarding the treatment of historical themes in our literature and, specifically, in some of my novellas. Without going into details, I wish to say that, for me, as for all creators, rational critiques and objections aimed at developing our literature in the right direction and properly orienting each writer's creativity are valuable. These include demands for a more materialist treatment of subjects and greater clarity in our works, clarity that is directly tied to their ideological and artistic value. As for the imbalance noted in literature between the theme of contemporary times and that of history—an imbalance rightly observed in my recent publications—I, as a creator, am making every effort to correct this imbalance in my work. In fact, I am taking swift steps to favor the theme of contemporary times, which will take a dominant place in my future publications and creative plans”^[24].

Public acknowledgment of state critique demonstrated Kadare's ability to bypass the ideological requirements imposed by the regime. By addressing the imbalance between contemporary and historical themes in his literature, Kadare signaled a willingness to align his creative priorities with the state's expectations. However, this was not an act of capitulation. It was a calculated move to maintain his place within the state-sanctioned literary sphere while continuing to produce works that subtly critiqued the totalitarian system. Kadare's actions cannot be dismissed as a “pact with the devil.” Unlike those who conformed to totalitarian demands to perpetuate their careers without resistance, Kadare's self-criticism allowed him to challenge the regime from within its own confines. The act of self-criticism served a dual purpose. It protected Kadare's works from outright suppression and

provided a veneer of compliance that allowed his subversive ideas to reach a wider audience. The calculated nature of Kadare's self-criticism demonstrates his intellectual dexterity and his commitment to preserving the integrity of his literature. Far from being an admission of failure or submission, it was a survival tactic that ensured the continuity of his creative output. He also reveals the broader dynamics of literary production under totalitarian regimes. Writers faced immense pressure to conform to state ideologies, and deviations were met with censorship or persecution. Yet Kadare's ability to bypass these constraints illustrates the resilience of literature as a form of resistance. His works not only survived but also thrived, becoming testaments to the human spirit's capacity for defiance and creativity.

In retrospect, Kadare's self-criticism stands as a testament to the power of literature to endure and challenge oppression. His willingness to engage with the regime on its terms while crafting narratives that undermined its authority highlights the complexities of artistic production under authoritarian rule. Kadare's strategy ensured that his works could be published and read, offering a voice of dissent in a world that sought to silence it. His literary legacy endures as a powerful reminder of the role of creativity in resisting tyranny.

6. *The Great Winter: A Complex Portrait of Power and Survival*

Éric Faye reflects on Kadare's incisive exploration of Enver Hoxha's regime in *The Successor*, noting that "Kadare has rarely delved as deeply into the hidden workings of the tyrant's mind as he does here"^[25]. Faye emphasizes that the novel extends Kadare's earlier portrayals of Hoxha, presenting him as increasingly Machiavellian and enigmatic, an aging and deteriorated figure wielding immense fear and admiration. This intricate psychological portrait underscores Kadare's ability to portray the intersection of political power and personal paranoia, a theme he revisits across his works, from *The Great Winter* to *The Successor*.

In *The Great Winter*, Ismail Kadare presents a nuanced portrayal of Albania's tumultuous break from the Soviet Union during the early 1960s. The novel captures the intricate interplay between history and fiction, focusing on the dramatic events surrounding Albania's withdrawal from

the Soviet-led Eastern Bloc under Enver Hoxha's leadership. Kadare uses this pivotal moment to explore the themes of political isolation, ideological independence, and the personal and national struggles that arise from navigating such complex historical terrain. At the heart of the narrative is Enver Hoxha, depicted in a multi-dimensional light. Unlike other works where dictators are unambiguously vilified, Kadare presents Hoxha as a figure of both cunning and calculation. This choice has sparked debates among critics, with some accusing Kadare of glorifying Hoxha, while others argue that the novel's nuanced portrayal ultimately serves as a critique of totalitarianism. Hoxha is portrayed as a leader who, despite his despotic tendencies, boldly stood against the immense pressure of Khrushchev and the Soviet Union, asserting Albania's sovereignty.

One of the novel's most striking features is its ability to balance the personal and the political. Kadare does not limit his scope to the corridors of power; instead, he interweaves the experiences and reactions of intellectuals, workers, secret police agents, and ordinary citizens. These diverse perspectives provide a comprehensive view of the profound impact of Albania's political decisions on its people. The narrative oscillates between the grand scale of international politics and the intimate struggles of individuals, creating a tapestry that captures the era's complexity.

A particularly compelling passage from the novel reflects Hoxha's internal and external struggles during a critical meeting with Soviet representatives:

"Enver Hoxha vaguely recalled something being said about the poplars, but what exactly, he could not remember. The poplars were now bare. This thought flickered wearily in his mind. Could it be possible that everything had begun so naturally and imperceptibly, just as the seasons changed? In these discussions, there was something akin to the yellowing and falling of leaves. Everything fell, everything withered. The frost was nearing.

'We have sincerely helped you... we wanted Albania to be an example for the Arab countries in the Mediterranean. This, as I have told you before, was of theoretical importance for us.'

'I did not interrupt you the last time, but now that you're repeating it, I must say I still cannot understand this reasoning,' said Enver Hoxha. 'I cannot understand how a country can be spoken of as if it were a pavilion in an international exhibition.'

'I understood you very well,' said Enver Hoxha. 'But you, I believe, know better than I do that the fates of small nations, due to their unique struggles, are weighty and tragic. They cannot be used to validate various theories.'^[26]

This excerpt demonstrates Kadare's use of natural imagery, such as the bare poplars and the encroaching frost, to symbolize Albania's political isolation and the stark reality of its break with the Soviet bloc. Hoxha's dialogue reflects his rejection of Soviet paternalism, asserting the dignity of small nations whose histories cannot be reduced to ideological experiments. The seasonal metaphor suggests the inevitability and painfulness of such transitions, reinforcing the gravity of the historical moment.

Kadare's approach to depicting Hoxha has sparked significant scholarly debate. Critics have argued over whether Kadare's portrayal constitutes an endorsement of Hoxha's actions or a subtle indictment of his regime. The novel's reception has been deeply polarizing. At the time of its publication in the early 1970s, *The Great Winter* was lauded within Albania as a patriotic work, celebrating Hoxha's defiance against the Soviets. However, as the political climate shifted and the true extent of Hoxha's tyranny became evident, readers and critics began to re-evaluate the novel. Many now view it as a layered text, one that simultaneously narrates historical events and critiques the oppressive mechanisms of power.

Kadare's decision to present Hoxha as a complex figure has often been linked to his strategy of surviving censorship under the communist regime. While some have labeled this a "pact with the devil," it can also be interpreted as a form of literary subversion. By portraying Hoxha as both a defiant leader and an implicit participant in the oppressive system he upheld, Kadare manages to critique the dictator without explicitly challenging the regime's propaganda. This duality is evident in the juxtaposition of Hoxha's triumphant stance in Moscow with the sinister undercurrents of state control

and repression that permeate the novel.

The depiction of Albania's secret police, is another crucial element of the narrative. Kadare describes these figures with disdain, portraying them as grotesque and bloodthirsty instruments of the regime's control. The character of Koçi Xoxe, the former number two in the regime, serves as a chilling embodiment of state terror. While Xoxe is condemned for his crimes, Kadare subtly implicates Hoxha by highlighting the interconnectedness of their actions. The novel's exploration of political violence and its psychological toll on both perpetrators and victims adds depth to its historical narrative.

The novel's contemporary reception has evolved significantly. International critics, such as Eric Faye, have characterized *The Great Winter* as a "song of farewell to the communist camp"^[25], recognizing its role in documenting the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc. The novel's emphasis on Albania's isolation resonates with modern readers as a meditation on the costs of ideological rigidity and the complexities of political identity. By embedding a critique of totalitarianism within a narrative that ostensibly celebrates Albania's sovereignty, Kadare challenges readers to engage with the ambiguities of history and power.

7. Results

This study on Ismail Kadare's literary legacy reveals profound insights into the complexities of his work and the socio-political environment in which it was created. At the core of Kadare's literary genius lies a strategy referred to as the "Pact with the Devil." This approach reflects the delicate balance Kadare maintained during the repressive communist regime in Albania, where he outwardly conformed to ideological expectations while embedding subtle critiques of totalitarianism within his narratives. This strategy allowed Kadare to maneuver censorship and ensure his works reached an audience, even as they offered a covert resistance to the very system that sought to suppress intellectual freedom. One of the most striking aspects of Kadare's literature is his use of allegory and historical settings to critique authoritarianism indirectly. By situating his narratives in distant times and places, such as the Ottoman Empire or ancient civilizations, Kadare created a metaphorical dialogue that transcended the immediate political constraints of his era. His use of symbolic imagery, rhetorical questions, and linguistic subtext

allowed him to encode resistance within his works. This method, which scholars have likened to linguistic camouflage, ensured that his critiques resonated with discerning readers while evading the watchful eye of the regime.

Kadare's ability to depict authority figures in a nuanced light further underscores his literary dexterity. In *The Great Winter*, for instance, he portrays Enver Hoxha not as a one-dimensional tyrant but as a complex figure—a leader both defiant and complicit. This portrayal sparked debates among critics, with some interpreting it as an endorsement and others as a veiled critique. The novel's layered depiction of Hoxha's defiance against Soviet pressure, juxtaposed with the oppressive mechanisms of his regime, reflects Kadare's ability to critique power without directly challenging the regime's propaganda.

The study also highlights Kadare's mastery in blending the personal and the political. His narratives interweave the grand scale of historical events with the intimate struggles of individuals, offering a comprehensive view of the societal impact of political decisions. In *The Palace of Dreams*, Kadare delves into the psychological and spiritual toll of living under totalitarian control. The novel's labyrinthine structure and oppressive atmosphere serve as a chilling metaphor for the regime's invasive reach into private lives. Drawing comparisons to Orwell's *1984*, Kadare explores themes of dehumanization and the loss of individuality, creating a work that resonates as a universal meditation on power and control.

Kadare's literature also reflects the dual nature of censorship in communist Albania, where overt state criticism was complemented by covert bureaucratic suppression. Works such as *The General of the Dead Army* and *The Castle* reveal Kadare's skill in using allegory and symbolic language to critique authoritarian control while preserving the integrity of his narratives. The reception of Kadare's works has evolved significantly over time. Initially celebrated in Albania for their perceived patriotism, his novels later gained international acclaim for their nuanced critique of totalitarianism. Scholars have noted how Kadare's works transcend their immediate political context to address universal themes of identity, resistance, and moral reckoning. This universality has positioned Kadare as a vital figure in both Albanian and global literature, with his works drawing comparisons to those of Milan Kundera and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

Kadare's literature is ultimately a testament to the

power of art to endure and challenge oppression. Through his nuanced narratives, he invites readers to grapple with the ambiguities of history and power, offering a voice of dissent in a world that sought to silence him. His legacy, marked by profound reflections on the human condition, resistance, and moral dilemmas, continues to resonate as a powerful exploration of the struggles that define moments of profound political and personal upheaval.

8. Discussion

One of the central findings from this study is Kadare's exceptional use of allegory and historical parallels. By anchoring his narratives in historical or mythological contexts—such as the Ottoman Empire in *The Castle* or the dream surveillance of *The Palace of Dreams*—Kadare created layers of meaning that allowed readers to interpret his works as critiques of contemporary authoritarian rule. This allegorical strategy is not merely a creative choice but a survival mechanism, enabling Kadare to produce subversive literature under a regime known for suppressing dissent.

Kadare's ability to depict power dynamics and their impact on individuals and societies is particularly striking in *The Great Winter*. This novel exemplifies his nuanced portrayal of Enver Hoxha, presenting him as both a defiant leader and a participant in the machinery of oppression. This duality challenges readers to grapple with the complexities of leadership under extreme political pressures and highlights Kadare's refusal to render history in simplistic moral binaries. The inclusion of diverse perspectives—from intellectuals to secret police agents—further enhances the novel's depth, offering a multifaceted view of Albania's historical rupture with the Soviet Union.

Another critical aspect of Kadare's strategy lies in his mastery of symbolism and metaphor. In works like *The Palace of Dreams*, the labyrinthine institution that monitors dreams functions as a chilling metaphor for the invasive nature of totalitarian regimes. Such symbols transcend the specifics of Albania's political context, situating Kadare's works within a broader literary tradition of resistance, akin to George Orwell's *1984* or Franz Kafka's *The Trial*. Unlike Orwell's active resistance or Kafka's existential dread, Kadare's narratives often explore the subtler forms of complicity and survival, reflecting the lived realities of life under

dictatorship.

The role of self-criticism in Kadare's career adds another layer of complexity to his relationship with the regime. His public acknowledgments of state critiques, such as those published in *Nëntori*, were not acts of submission but calculated moves to maintain his literary presence. These moments illustrate Kadare's skill in handling the ideological constraints of his time while ensuring that his works remained accessible. Rather than diminishing the integrity of his writing, these tactical concessions enabled him to critique the regime from within, safeguarding his voice for future generations.

The reception of Kadare's works highlights their relevance. While initially celebrated in Albania for their apparent alignment with state ideology, his novels have since been reevaluated as profound critiques of authoritarianism. This shift underscores the layered complexity of Kadare's writing and its capacity to speak to different audiences across time. Internationally, critics have recognized Kadare's ability to capture universal themes of resistance, power, and survival, elevating him to the status of a global literary figure.

In conclusion, Kadare's legacy lies in his ability to craft literature that operates simultaneously as a product of its time and a timeless exploration of the human condition. His works transcend their immediate political context, offering insights into the dynamics of power and the resilience of creativity under oppression. By embedding resistance within his narratives, Kadare not only survived as a writer under one of the most repressive regimes of the 20th century but also left an indelible mark on world literature. His achievements underscore the potential of literature to challenge, endure, and inspire, making his contributions a cornerstone of both Albanian and global cultural heritage.

9. Conclusions

This study emphasizes Kadare's strategy of employing allegory, historical settings, and symbolic language to critique authoritarian systems subtly. In *The Castle*, historical resistance becomes a universal meditation on defiance against oppression, while *The General of the Dead Army* reflects on the futility and moral decay of war. These narratives transcend their specific contexts, offering reflections on power, survival, and human dignity. Such a capacity

to transcend specific cultural or historical settings aligns with broader debates in literature. As some scholars have argued, literary works often exhibit archetypes or "invariants" that resonate across cultures, as proposed by Northrop Frye and the French comparatist Etiemble. In his work *Ouverture(s) sur un comparatisme planétaire*, Etiemble suggests that common literary patterns provide the foundation for a global understanding of literature^[27]. However, this universalist approach has been critiqued for its tendency to reduce cultural complexities into generalities that risk becoming superficial. Kadare's works resist such superficial readings by embedding local specificities within universal themes. While his narratives resonate with archetypes of resistance, moral struggle, and human dignity, they remain rooted in the historical and cultural realities of Albania. This duality enriches his work, allowing it to engage meaningfully with global audiences while maintaining its distinct cultural identity.

Kadare's ability to handle the oppressive mechanisms of censorship is evident in his self-criticism, a strategy that preserved his creative freedom while satisfying the regime's ideological expectations. This approach, far from being a capitulation, enabled him to continue producing literature that resonated with deeper truths, allowing his works to serve as a vehicle for dissent and critique. His engagement with the regime's demands, particularly through his calculated portrayals of figures like Enver Hoxha in *The Great Winter*, reflects the complexity of maintaining artistic integrity in an environment where overt defiance could mean personal and professional ruin. The international reception of Kadare's works further highlights their universal relevance. While deeply rooted in Albanian history and culture, his novels speak to global audiences by addressing themes of identity, resistance, and the psychological toll of authoritarianism. As general features in Kadare's work, we find a penetrating nature that reaches deep into the consciousness of his characters. The author continuously narrates and unfolds the fates of his characters before the reader's eyes but does not express emotions about what happens^[3].

Kadare's legacy is defined not only by his survival under a totalitarian regime but also by his ability to transform the constraints of his environment into opportunities for artistic innovation. His use of historical allegory, layered narratives, and symbolic language allowed him to critique

the very systems that sought to suppress him. This style aligns with the image of Mario Vargas Llosa, who observed that “literary works emerge as shapeless shadows within the depths of the writer’s consciousness.”^[27]. By creating works that endure beyond their immediate historical and political contexts, Kadare has ensured his place as one of the most significant literary figures of his time.

In sum, Kadare’s literature exemplifies the power of art to challenge and transcend oppression. Through his engagement with history, politics, and human resilience, he has created a body of work that continues to inspire critical reflection and dialogue, bridging the particularities of Albanian experience with universal questions about freedom, power, and the human spirit.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, I.S.; methodology, E.R.; software, I.S.; validation, E.R. and J.S.; formal analysis, I.S. and J.S.; investigation, I.S. and E.R.; resources, I.S.; data curation, J.S.; writing—original draft preparation, I.S.; writing—review and editing, E.R. and J.S.; visualization, E.R.; supervision, I.S.; project administration, I.S.; funding acquisition, I.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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