

**‘THE MONSTER’ OF ISMAIL KADARE:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS****Literature**

Keywords: Ismail Kadare, The Monster, political allegory, censorship, revision.

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Abstract

Ismail Kadare's 'The Monster' was perhaps his most ill-fated work during the socialist period, a doubly-heretic novel of modernist experimentation and political allegory. Published in 1965, it was immediately criticized and banned. After the fall of communism Kadare was able to revise freely and publish it in its definitive form. The aim of this paper is to interpret the nature of the extensive changes made to this final version and to offer a new reading of it. After summing up the principal interpretations given thus far for the first version, a comparative analysis of the changes in the final version follows. Except for a brief assessment of these changes in the linguistic, narrative and structural level, the main focus is on the plot. Relying on textual clues as well as historic data, a more specific analysis of the characters is submitted, on which ground then a new interpretation of the novel is expounded. It is demonstrated that the final version of 'The Monster' might be read as an allegory of both Albania and Kadare himself as a writer during the communist period, written from a post-totalitarian viewpoint.

1. Introduction

Ismail Kadare has won a worldwide renown as one of the best novelists of the former socialist East European countries. Writing under strictly Stalinist conditions, he managed to slide into his work a veiled critique of totalitarianism, notably embodied in his subversive trespassing of the strictures of socialist realism. *The Monster*, his second published novel, is perhaps the best example of his daring experimenting with modernist elements and its' history shows clearly the thin ice that artistic freedom was forced to tread under totalitarian censorship. Published originally in the literary magazine *Nëntori* in 1965, it was immediately criticized and banned. Kadare made several retouches to make it publishable, but it brought to nothing (Faye 2007: 235). Thus, to phrase it in a paradox somewhat typical of Ismail Kadare's own thinking, the 'death' of communist totalitarianism became the condition of possibility of bringing *The Monster* again into life. That is, only after the death of the monster that totalitarianism was, did it become possible to bring again into life its literary depiction by Kadare. After the collapse of socialism in 1990, *The Monster* underwent some reworking as did Kadare's entire oeuvre in general. Its' final version appears now in the first of the writer's twenty-volume complete works in Albanian published between 2007 and 2009. This paper's aim, then, is an interpretation of the nature of the extensive changes made to this final version.¹ On the linguistic, narrative, and structural level *M2* carries all the hallmarks of Kadare's mature style. But the main focus here will be on the alterations of the plot and the political interpretations they are meant to steer.

2. The plot

M1 is based on the story of the Trojan Horse from Homer's *Illiad*. Genth, a student of construction engineering, falls in love with Elena, a student of literature. Although she is engaged,

¹ Henceforward, the first edition of 1965 will be referred to as *M1* whereas the last version *M2*.

the two elope together. Maks, her humiliated fiancé seeks revenge and aims to kill them both. Together with five other men, Odisea K., Constructor, Robert, Akamant and Millosh (all represented as foreigners), he takes refuge in a wooden horse resembling a van nearby the city, and just like the ancient warriors, they wait for the citizens to pull the horse inside the walls, in order to conquer it. Genth is thus a modern Paris and Elena a modern Helen; her avenge seeking fiancé Maks is a modern Menelaus, Odisea K. is the ancient conceiver of the horse, and Akamant parallels Acamas, one of the Greek warriors inside the horse. There is also a Lako, a parallel of the Trojan priest Laocoön, who warns against the horse and gets killed.

But in consistency with the author's idea that Troy's destruction was one of the first great crimes of humanity,² the modern city doesn't fall prey to the horse scheme (except in the Constructor's dream), and Maks doesn't achieve his revenge; he is unknowingly mistaken by darkness and kills another couple.

3. Four Interpretations?

On the surface level, this plot is an elaboration of a love triangle story, strongly reminiscent of Kadare's own personal life. His future wife Helena had likewise broken her engagement and moved on with him.³ But as always with Kadare, it is the allegorical and symbolical levels which hold the keys to his works meaning. So then, what represents this wooden horse? What political messages is it meant to convey? Albanian literary scholar Gëzim Aliu has submitted four possible interpretations of *MI*.⁴ First, the novel could be seen as a warning toward the 'imperialist' (i.e. American) and 'revisionist' (i.e. Soviet) danger for Albania. Elena mentions that USA has gone crazy in their intervention in Vietnam (*MI* 35), and several times the poster of a documentary film entitled 'Yankee, out of the Dominican Republic' is mentioned (*MI* 66). Yet, despite some attempts to overthrow the regime by infiltrating field agents, american military intervention in Albania was quite improbable in 1965, so these indicators seem to be what Barthes called 'signaling stickers' (Barthes 2008: 69) of socialist discourse more than a plausible narrative thread.⁵ The Soviets, on the other hand, whose military intervention had been looming on Albania in the early 1960-es (as Kadare's own *The Great Winter* would later document), are not mentioned explicitly. However, the historical context as well as some subtle details make it impossible to rule them out as a possible interpretation. This taciturn implication of the Soviets might be seen as a touch of artistic finesse, as a sign of prudence toward such a dangerous political topic,⁶ or else as a strategy to add to the immanent ambiguity that permeates the novel.

A second interpretation would be to see the novel as centered on a socio-political topic. Elena has been engaged by the old, traditional way of matchmaking and doesn't love her fiancé.

² See Faye 2007: 235; Kadare 2009: 223.

³ See Aliu 2016: 187.

⁴ See Aliu 2016: 45-50.

⁵ For the practice of inserting this kind of "stickers" in order to circumvent censorship, see Kadare 2009: 220.

⁶ Kadare has asserted later that the break of political relations between Albania and the Soviet Union was the greatest taboo topic of all, and that there is no other literary work on it in the entire former socialist bloc except his own *The Great Winter* of 1973 (Kryeziu 2014: 398).

By abandoning him, she abandons at the same time the moribund old world that socialism had supplanted politically, and was steadily eradicating culturally. Her lover Genth, is typically a representative of the new (socialist) world, an idealist man of great political consciousness and vision, with great hopes, courage and bravery. His profession as construction engineer⁷ is also very significant, because it refers obviously to the 'building of the new (socialist) world'. One of his dreams is to design a block of buildings which at sunset would reflect the red light to one another (*MI* 70). Maks, on the other hand, driven by his jealousy ends up collaborating with 'foreign enemies', representing thus those 'last remnants' of the old, dark, reactionary world which Elena and socialist correct consciousness despises most of all. It is significant that Genth tries to calm down Elena's fears of the wooden horse's foreboding presence and from Maks' threats just in terms of old-new world oppositions. He tells her: 'The old world naturally will not forgive you for abandoning it, just as any age doesn't forgive when you desert it. You got out of a bad world and came to us and that world will try to pull you back again, but it has no power to do that. It may eliminate you, but it will never be able to take you back' (*MI* 43).⁸

As a matter of fact, the trope of the abandoned fiancé who joins with foreign enemies and/or reactionary forces was already a tarnished cliché in Albanian socialist realism, in literature as well as in cinematography, opera, ballet, etc. This schematism is added an extra bad tone by the motif of pregnancy. In the 'old world' with Maks, Elena could not have children, thinking she was sterile. But in the 'new world', with Genth, she can. The surprise and happiness about the pregnancy is the mood on which the couple makes its' last appearance in the novel.

A third interpretation would be to see *MI* as a novel on political terror. The very opening with Virgil's verse 'Do not trust the horse', instills a mood of disbelief and premonition. At the very outset too, the writer establishes a kind of indeterminacy, beginning: 'Some miles outside the city, in the open field, there was a large abandoned van' (*MI* 26). Then, only a paragraph afterwards, he writes: 'Some miles outside the city, in the open field, stood the large wooden horse' (*MI* 27). What is it then, a horse or a van? Does it move or is it stuck in mud? Is it threatening to the city or just an innocuous rattletrap that will slowly rot? This mood of doubt and paranoia is perfect for propaganda, enabling it to use reality according to political or ideological self-interest. As Aliu notes, there may be a van out there in the field, but if state power needs it, that may become a Trojan Horse, thus an imagined enemy. This requires then a strong leadership to protect the people from invasion. The horse-van 'danger' is a metaphor of power's breathing. When power seems more 'liberal', there is only an abandoned van in the field, but when power means to repress, the wooden horse appears. However, there is 'something' there in the field, and the people, the city must know this, must be always conscious of this. The control and indoctrination of the masses proceeds this way, by means of political terror which sometimes is silent and quiet, sometimes vociferous (Aliu 2016: 47). In this reading, *MI* is a novel on political

⁷ The author's self-identification with him is indicated by the fact the he is also a writer, albeit on science, not literature.

⁸ All citations from the original in Albanian in this paper are translated in English by its' author.

terror and paranoia in communist Albania, as epitomized by the chronic and spectacular purges within the ranks of the Party itself.

The fourth interpretation of *MI* centers on its artistic experimentalism with modernist techniques. The first of them is the ‘mythic method’, or the use of myth as ‘a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama’ of the modern world.⁹ In a political climate where writers and artists were constantly sent to collective farms to ‘acquaint themselves with reality’, this seems quite remarkable. No less so is the manipulation of time, where modern characters and situations run parallel to the ancient story of the myth. A third modern feature concerns the topic of sexuality, a domain strictly censored by socialist realism (Groys 1992: 92). Elena’s sexual ‘coldness’ is literally a taboo topic, and it is stunning that it is discussed at some length by the couple. A telling example of Kadare’s modernist experimentalism in this novel is his usage of some features widely correlated with James Joyce, that most unholy of the ‘unholy trinity of modernism’ (Tall 1980: 341). In chapter seven Genth and Elena enter a restaurant where she happens to have celebrated her engagement with Maks. Embarrassed and anxious not to be recognized by the waiter, Elena is inundated by a swirl of memories from that event (given in brackets in the text). Dispersed between cursory dialogues with Genth, initially they seem neatly remembered (as shown by their dialogue form), gradually becoming ever vaguer. The third sequence is an interior monologue quite in the manner of Joyce. It consists of bits of disjointed phrases, rendered with no punctuation signs. The fourth and last sequence is even more typical of Joyce, with its ‘endless’ word-compounding. It reads:

(bromshëndetisithejulutemnanahajdekushkelenahaha) (*MI* 70), which in English could be approximated as follows: bromcheerswhatdidyousaypleaseheyheycomebridefatherelenahaha.

It is clear then that Kadare’s modernist elements in this novel are far from concealed. On the contrary, they are explicitly at the foreground. Hence it is no surprise that communist censorship banned it. According to Shaban Sinani, this was the *only* reason for the ban as he claims that there is no detectable ideological motivation for it (Sinani 2009: 68). But it must be stressed that neither of the abovementioned interpretations can be ruled out altogether, howsoever forceful or convincing any of them may be separately. The political dimension of the narrative is impossible to miss, regardless of what you make of it.

4. Rewriting in Freedom

After the fall of communism in 1990, Kadare was able to rework freely most of his previous works. He has claimed continually that his reworking has been only on the artistic aspect, not the political one.¹⁰ His final version of *The Monster*, here referred to as *M2* might be an interesting case in point.

⁹ See Beebe 1972: 182. In this regard, Albanian scholar Sh. Sinani sees *The Monster* as Kadare’s first venture toward a comparative literature, merging scholarly research with creative imagination (Sinani 2009: 68).

¹⁰ See Kryeziu 2014: 401.

As stated earlier, on the linguistic, narrative, and structural level *M2* carries all the hallmarks of Kadare’s mature style. The vocabulary is more broad and nuanced, the syntax is more pliable, the narration is more exact, assured and variegated. On the compositional or structural level, *M2* has been considerably expanded. It has eighteen chapters, that is, seven added chapters compared to *M1*. The chapters related to the six ‘enemies’ (the world inside the horse) are reproduced almost identically, with only minor changes. The added chapters either expand on the story of Gent and Elena (the world inside the city), or are synopses indirectly related to the plot,¹¹ as are for instance chapters X, XI, and XII on Laocoön, Thremoh (an imaginary Trojan Homer), and Menelaus’ palace after the fall of Troy, respectively. The following table gives a clearer view of these changes.

Table 1. Comparison of the ordering of chapters in *M1* and *M2*¹²

<i>M1</i>	H		H	H		C	H	H	C					H	C	CInv	H	
<i>M2</i>	H	C	H	H	C	C	H	H	C	L	Th	M	C	H	C	CInv	H	C

It is obvious that the structure of *M2* is more balanced. If we exclude the chapter on the crime scene investigation, the proportion of the chapters *H* and *C* in *M1* is 7:3, that is, more than 2:1. In *M2*, on the other hand, it is 7:7, i.e. perfectly balanced, 1:1. But as the three synopses betoken, the structure of *M2* is more variegated also. Yet, the main focus of this paper is the plot, so let’s concentrate on it our comparative analysis. First of all, the main character has been given a full name, Gent Ruvina. He now appears as a philosophy student, not of construction engineering. Just returned from Moscow, Gent is waiting for the outcome of the Albanian-Soviet political conflict to see if he will be able to return there to complete his studies. When that possibility drops, he continues in Tirana, where he is in the process of preparing a PHD thesis on the Trojan Horse myth. These details are much nearer to Kadare’s own biographical events than in *M1*. His elopement with Helena is now given in much more detail. Chapter five consists almost entirely of Gent’s meditations on the Trojan Horse myth. In other *C* chapters his prominence has been widely extended also. So it may be said that *M2* is much more Gent-centered than *M1*.

Gent’s new profession is very important. Relying on Marx’s celebrated eleventh Feuerbach thesis,¹³ socialist discourse considered such disciplines as philosophy or aesthetics as too pure, speculative and useless to warrant occupying oneself with.¹⁴ Hence its stress on constructing; praxis as opposed to theory. Representing Gent as a philosopher, then, is an effective strategy to blockade right from the start the second interpretation of *M1*, centered on the construction of socialism topic. Likewise, all incidental clues referring to American or otherwise western intervention are suppressed.

¹¹ This feature is fairly common in Kadare’s mature style, as is particularly evident in his *The Concert* (1981).

¹² *H* signifies the chapters centered on the characters inside the horse; *C* signifies those centered on the city (that is, Gent and Elena); *L, Th* and *M* refer to the synopses on Laocoön, Themoh and Menelaus respectively; *CInv*, refers to the chapter on the crime scene investigation, where the corpses of the mistakenly murdered couple are found.

¹³ “Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it.”

¹⁴ See Heller 1997: 62.

Contrary to *M1*, the Albanian-Soviet conflict stands now center stage, which is a historically truer representation of the early 1960-es in Tirana. In *M2* the wooden horse is time and again referred to as the Total-Horse, which means that it is definitely a symbol of communist totalitarianism. Therefore, we are left with two apparent alternatives: either the novel is about Soviet intervention (first interpretation in *M1*), or it is about local political terror (third interpretation in *M1*). What follows is another, third interpretation which we will submit by analyzing first the characters.

Since it is quite certain that the horse in *M2* represents totalitarian communism, the logical move would be to detect what do the characters inside it represent. Odisea K., then, the conceiver of the ‘horse’ is clearly Karl Marx. In chapter eight there is a jumble of documents dispersed by the wind inside the horse. Kadare writes:

‘At first they had tried to keep them in order, and even had files for all of them, but, with years passing, despite Odisea K.’s constant interventions, diligence had waned, the files had been damaged, because they used them to fill the holes [inside the horse] whereby wind blew and rain leaked, so the papers began to whirl around, here and there, at the cavities. There were certain days when they whitened in numbers everywhere, because nobody collected and put them aside, and even Odisea K. himself, tired, seemingly, from his multiple interventions, pretended not to notice them’ (*M2* 323).

The allegory is clear. Marxism’s implementation in political practice had revealed a lot of ‘holes’, which communist leaders try to close with pieces of ‘papers’ (Marxist principles), but the structure has become so perforated that even Marx himself has surrendered to the disorder. Kadare takes the point a step further:

‘Phew, these papers, they said, making a somewhat very tiny effort not to step on them, but their feet, dulled by the long absence of movement, stepped precisely on them. Time ago, Odisea K. used to get very angry about this. He used to rebuke, scold them, but then, getting tired from his own yells, he used to end up with an imploring voice...’ (*M2* 322).

Thus, communist leaders not only have lost their scrupulosity in preserving Karl Marx’ principles properly, but they have even become annoyed by them. Even if they make any ‘very tiny effort’ not to step on them, it is to no avail. Despite Marx’s irritation and pleas, they step them anyway.

The Constructor refers to V. I. Lenin, because if Marx was the conceiver of communism, Lenin was its’ constructor, its’ implementator in political practice. Whenever he is reminded about the holes and deteriorating conditions of the horse, the Constructor replies by referring to the inconvenient terrain and extremely severe conditions under which it was built. This clearly alludes to the anomalous condition of communist revolution in Russia. According to Marx, at the forefront of revolution would be the working classes. Imperial Russia was a very backward country compared to other western powers of the time. Hence, it was no negligible dissonance to

orthodox Marxist theory that the ‘proletarian’ revolution had happened in a country whose vast majority of population was rural, which therefore met least the necessary conditions.

After the ‘horse’ is finished, the Constructor stands for a while contemplating it. He narrates:

‘It dawned. The fog had begun to dissolve and the somber morning was coming from the east. I stared another time at my creation, and from underneath its feet I stared the sky and the horizon and I understood the greatness of what I had created. I was tired, my limbs called for sleep, but I wouldn’t leave. I stood in front of it, with my arms crossed on my chest, and thought about my future glory ...’ (M2 312).

And then: ‘... I entered the belly of my creation ... I laid down ... and slept immediately. It was a very deep sleep’ (M2 313).

It is obvious that the ‘very deep sleep’ in the ‘belly of the horse’ with ‘arms crossed on the chest’ refers to Lenin’s mummy displayed in his mausoleum at the famous Red Square. As Kadare knew very well from his student years in Moscow, this was not just a controversial curiosity but a veritable symbol of Soviet political power.¹⁵

Akamant is the only person from those inside the horse who infiltrates in the city, spies on Gent and Helena, provides newspapers, books and other information about what goes on therein. A merciless murderer (even of children), he brags to Robert: ‘I am more comfortable with knives than with such soph... sophisms’ (M2 310). It is evident that he represents the infamous secret service [alb. *Sigurimi*], communism’s most frightful repression machine. As Akamant is shot dead near the end of the book, one would be led to identify him specifically with Kadri Hasbiu, who had been Enver Hoxha’s Minister of Interior Affairs for twenty six years, ultimately being shot by a firing squad in 1983. But Akamant’s murder is present in *MI* of 1965 also, which automatically excludes Hasbiu. Moreover, it is mentioned specifically that Akamant is a foreigner, and that he doesn’t know Albanian well. Then Lavrentiy Berya comes to mind, the man whom Stalin introduced to Roosevelt in Yalta as ‘our Himmler’. Well-known for his ruthlessness, Berya was Stalin’s longest-lived and most influential secret police chief, and significantly, it was him who organized the communist takeover of the state institutions in postwar Central and Eastern Europe (and the ensuing political repression). Kadare alludes to his sexually predatory nature in chapter six, when Helena is deeply disturbed by his ‘sick staring’ at the bar. Moreover, in *MI*, the hepatitis that Gent ascribes him because of his ‘yellowness’, is referred to in Russian, namely *botkin* (M1 37).

¹⁵ As Groys writes, the construction of the mausoleum on Red Square and the founding of the Lenin cult were vigorously opposed by traditional Marxists and the representatives of left art. The former spoke of “Asiatic barbarism” and “savage customs unworthy Marxists” (Groys 1992: 66). However, the Lenin cult has undeniably exerted a hidden formative influence on all subsequent Stalin-ist and post-Stalinist Soviet culture, if for no other reason than the central position it occupies in the invisible Soviet sacred hierarchy. Twice a year, “the entire Soviet land” submits its “report” in parades and demonstrations that pass by the mausoleum, and the leaders who accept this report stand on the roof of the structure, symbolically basing their power on the mummy of Lenin concealed within (*ibid.*).

The name's origins as well as the character's features indicate that Robert stands for western socialism. He is the most concerned by the holes in the horse's belly, which implies theoretical diligence. Although he doesn't protest to the crimes of his companions, he is never shown participating actively in any of them. Even in the Constructor's dream, when they invade the city, Robert is not shown taking part in any of the massacres. In chapter six of *M1*, when the Constructor is dreaming that the horse is being pulled inside the city, a citizen scornfully throws a bottle to it. Inside the horse Millosh and Robert lash heavy curses on him (*M1* 55). In *M2*, on the other hand, Kadare acquits Robert even from this bit of verbal vulgarity, entrusting the duty only to Millosh (*M2* 325).

Millosh, as his name attests, refers to ex-Yugoslavia, at the time considered as one of Albania's chief enemies (Kadare 2009: 234). In fact, in 1948 Yugoslavia almost succeeded to incorporate Albania as its 'seventh republic'. Millosh is mentioned as young and as a latecomer inside the horse, which complies with Yugoslavia's situation as a young state (it was created only after World War I) and consequently a latecomer in Marxism also. That his father has been shot in the city is an allusion to the frequent Albanian-Serbian wars at least since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. His obsessive fantasizing about Helena and his profile as a rapist are a metaphor of Serbia's traditionally predatory policy towards Albania.

And last but not least, there is Maks. He refers to none less than the dictator Enver Hoxha himself. Being the only Albanian among such distinguished knights of communism, one is inevitably led to think about him. Moreover, Maks is represented as having dealt for a long time with museums (*M2* 258), which is most likely an allusion to Hoxha's (and Kadare's own) native city Gjirokastra, which in 1961 had been proclaimed a 'museum city' (Pipa 1999: 52). This becomes even more plausible considering the fact that it is missing in *M1* printed in totalitarian conditions, where any miscalculated allusion could be ruinously dangerous for the author. The only details surfacing in *M1* in this regard are the old iron shirt Helena had once discovered in his briefcase and the ancient spear that Maks keeps to kill her.¹⁶

There are also several significant temporal references with upturned meanings. Thus, Maks plans to murder Helena (and Gent) in an April night, which retrospectively might be seen as an allusion to Hoxha's own death on April 11th 1985. Likewise it is stressed several times that during

October days, especially, the horse vanishes from the city's horizon 'as if it had never existed' (*M2* 237). Ironically, it seems, this suggests Hoxha's birthday on 16 October. Gent also meets Helena in an October day. The last chapter in *M2*, where Gent is turned into a marble Laocoön, is situated likewise in mid-October. Before summing up the interpretation we are submitting here, a last remark should be made, namely, that Helena must be read symbolically. She is specifically outlined as the exclusive focus of Maks' ire. In fact, if Maks' real purpose would have been to invade the city, then our identification of him with Enver Hoxha would not stand, because Albania was *already* invaded by him. In our reading, we view Helena as a symbol

¹⁶ They are kept in *M2* also.

of Albania's authentic spirit, its essence. It is very revealing that Maks plans a symbolic murder. He confesses to Akamant:

'I shall approach them, with the moon in front of me, so that my shadow won't disturb them. And, when beside them, I shall thrust this spear, first, in her bosom, then on his back. You know, Akamant, what a terrifying wound such an ancient spear inflicts ... a large, red wound, with side incisions, caused by pulling out the spearhead. It resembles the sun at sunset, when only some red rays around it have remained. Well, with such a wound shall I kill Helena' (*M2* 258).

It is significant here that Maks aims at her heart, and wants to inflict on it a wound that is practically a red star, communism's fundamental symbol, a wound in fact Hoxha had already inflicted to Albania's flag, by adding to it precisely that red star over the two-headed eagle. In this view, the basic message would be that in Maks/Hoxha's hands, Helena/Albania was inevitably barren, whereas with Gent/Kadare she was not. The one had treated her with harshness, cruelty and menace, whereas the other with love, understanding and compassion, which ultimately refers to the communism-democracy or totalitarianism-freedom dichotomies. Hence it is meaningfully symbolical that during the city's imaginary invasion in the Constructor's dream, Maks murders Helena precisely at the stairway entrance of the University (*M2* 335). Actually, after Hoxha's death in 1985, Tirana's state University had been named after him, and one of the first requests of the student uprisings in 1990 that ultimately led to the fall of the socialist regime was precisely its removal.

The consistency of this interpretation could be further corroborated by Kadare's later pronouncements,¹⁷ or by additional textual clues from the novel itself. At a certain extent, however, this would be beside the point. Sharing Barthes' idea that one must reject to halt meaning, we do not claim this to be the only *possible* reading, howsoever plausible or convincing it may be. As a matter of fact, some of the interpretations of *M1* expounded in section three, for instance, would stand at least as partly valid in *M2* either. Moreover, it is important stressing that our interpretation of *M2* is latent in *M1* also. As stated earlier, the chapters centering on the characters inside the horse/van have remained widely unaltered in *M2*. And whatever our assessment of the political dimension of the revision might be, there is no doubt that such a complex weaving of meanings is a sign of undisputed artistic mastery.

5. Conclusion

'The Monster', perhaps Kadare's most ill-fated work of the socialist period (Sinani 2009: 67), was a doubly-heretic novel in the context of Albania's orthodox Stalinism. On the one hand, it was Kadare's most daring experiment with modernist literary techniques, as the explicitly Joycean features of *M1* attest. As a novel of political allegory, on the other hand, it harbored devastating

¹⁷ The opposition Hoxha-Kadare (or Maks-Gent) is intimated by the writer himself when he expounds on his inner reaction toward the internationally reiterated formula that E. Hoxha and I. Kadare were 'the most renowned Albanians in the world' (Kadare 2009: 234). The opposition could be couched in strictly literary terms too, because the dictator's literary ambitions were well-known. According to Kadare, this envious ruler was 'an average, if not ... mediocre writer' (Kadare 2009: 211).

messages about Albania's heinous regime and communist totalitarianism in general, disguised in a masterfully dominated system of ambiguity and allusions. This is even more remarkable considering that Kadare wrote it in his late-twenties. After the fall of communism in 1990, Kadare revised the novel removing the 'contextual compromises' (Aliu 2016: 47) he once was obligated to embed into his work, which is the principal source of the 'twist' that *M2* takes. It is significant that despite this, some of the former interpretive tracks are still valid, and that our new interpretation of *M2* is latent as a possibility in *M1* also. Finally, this interpretation shows clearly how the personal and the social, the individual and the symbolic are inextricably intertwined in Kadare's work.

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