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Ismail Kadare as a poet or novelist

Ismail Kadare (b. 1936) is one of the best writers of our time. He has been translated into thirty languages and has received the prestigious Man Booker International Prize. Quite a few translations of his works into English have been done from works that previously had been translated into French. During over four decades of totalitarian regime in Albania, Kadare's insightful understanding of the political situation became a reassuring guideline for readers and writers in Albania. Many give Kadare credit for saving the Albanian people from entering upon a precipitous political revolution. However, when the time was right, in 1999, Kadare left the communist country to request political asylum in France, which became a signal to the Albanian people to move toward democracy. In that sense, it can be said that Kadare has had two kinds of readers. There are those who look at him as a political and cultural guide and those who see in him the makings of an international writer who has shaped world literature in the 20th century. A list of his works in English translation is featured at the end of this interview.

Kadare began his literary career in Albania with poetry but turned increasingly to prose, of which he soon became the undisputed master and by far the most popular writer of the whole of Albanian literature. His works were extremely influential throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and for many readers, he was the only ray of hope in the chilly, dismal prison that was communist Albania. Ismail Kadare lived the next thirty years of his life in Tirana, constantly under the Damocles Sword of the Party. He was privileged by the authorities, in particular once his works became known internationally¹. Indeed, he was able to pursue literary and personal objectives for which other writers would certainly have been sent into internal exile or to prison. But Kadare knew well that liberties in Albania could be withdrawn easily, by an impulsive stroke of the tyrant's quill.

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¹ Robert Elsie, *Translation Review*, ALBANIAN LITERATURE IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD, 2008, p.4