# The Mythopoetics of Debt: Exploring the Works of Ismail Kadare

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Medieval and Modern Languages**

**University of Oxford**

**Zana Chaka**

**Pembroke College**

**Michaelmas Term 2022**

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## SHORT ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the novels of the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare. It studies four novels: *Les Tambours de la pluie* [*Kështjella*], *Qui a ramené Doruntine ?* [*Kush e solli Doruntinën*], *Le Général de l'armée morte* [*Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur*], and *Le Palais des rêves* [*Pallati i Ëndrrave*]. The methodological angle of this thesis is two-fold. It investigates the formal devices of repetition, circularity and intertextuality in these texts, but it does so with the aim of exploring one central thematic complex: the idea of Albanian identity as it is imagined and refracted through a variety of perspectives in the novels. This dual methodological perspective—textual and thematic—also means that the aim of this thesis is two-fold. It makes a contribution to scholarship on Kadare by demonstrating a formal and thematic coherence within some of his major works. It also makes a contribution to a wider context of critical and scholarly discourse on the Balkans. First, the intervention I make in this field is characterised by the decision to follow Kadare in his predominantly national, rather than a more broadly regional, perspective. In his works, this national perspective is self-reflexive. As his novels show in their rewriting of historical events and salient elements of folk morality, a reflection upon national identity is part of the national identity of Albania.

Second, and in continuity with this emphasis on self-reflexivity, the perspective that this thesis presents on cultural themes is always textual: it examines how themes are embedded in stories and how they become reinterpreted by narrative. Across this corpus of texts, and from the perspective of a movement from history to modernist abstraction, this thesis shows a fundamental continuity in Kadare's artistic concern with questioning Albanian identity.

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**LONG ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the novels of the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare. It studies four novels: *Les Tambours de la pluie* [*Kështjella*], *Qui a ramené Doruntine ?* [*Kush e solli Doruntinën*], *Le Général de l'armée morte* [*Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur*], and *Le Palais des rêves* [*Pallati i Ëndrrave*]. The methodological angle of this thesis is two-fold. It investigates the formal devices of repetition, circularity and intertextuality in these texts, but it does so with the aim of exploring one central thematic complex: the idea of Albanian identity as it is imagined and refracted through a variety of perspectives in the novels. This dual methodological perspective—textual and thematic—also means that the aim of this thesis is two-fold. It makes a contribution to scholarship on Kadare by demonstrating a formal and thematic coherence within some of his major works. It also makes a contribution to a wider context of critical and scholarly discourse on the Balkans.

First, the intervention I make in this field is characterised by the decision to follow Kadare in his predominantly national, rather than more broadly regional, perspective. In his works, this national perspective is self-reflexive. As his novels show in their rewriting of historical events and salient elements of folk morality, a reflection upon national identity is part of the national identity of Albania.

Second, and in continuity with this emphasis on self-reflexivity, the perspective that this thesis presents on cultural themes is always textual: it examines how themes are embedded in stories and how they become reinterpreted by narrative. This approach is different to using a cultural context to provide an explanatory grounding for these texts; where this thesis mediates between formalist literary criticism and contextual cultural analysis, the textual remains at its centre.

The Introduction draws out the question of identity that this thesis seeks to answer: how does Ismail Kadare explore and problematise Albanian identity in his novels? It considers how the writer does this through encounters between literary narrative and cultural concerns that conceptualise *Albanianness* in different ways. Explorations of these different conceptualisations of *Albanianness* draw attention to Kadare's procedure of rewriting perspectives of historical narration, which lays bare a theme of ownership: who owns history and Albanian identity? It further argues that each of the novels is concerned with elements of Albanian history and folklore, and, through the use of the term 'mythopoetic', it draws out a set of pre-textual material that the writer mobilises as a source of literary imagination.

The thesis then follows a movement of progression in abstraction to conceptualise how Kadare poetically imagines Albanian identity in each of the four novels. Chapter One deals, in historical terms, with a predominantly historical novel: *Les Tambours de la pluie* [*Kështjella*]. It approaches questions of shared identity and narrative authority by paying particular attention to the location of the castle in the novel, which functions as a symbolic site around which the stakes of history and its memorialisation play out as battlegrounds for the Albanians and Ottomans. It traces how the narrative conflict between the besieged Albanians and invading Ottomans can be read as allegory on three intersecting levels. First, it examines the context in which the novel was written and published as Enver Hoxha's isolationism created a nation under siege. Second, it looks to Albania's cultural reawakening in the nineteenth century—a time when myths of nationhood, self-determination, and heroism were mobilised and nationalist aspirations asserted within the *Rilindja* artistic movement; this was also when the figure of Skanderbeg as a mythic image of Albanian

resistance gained prominence, whom this chapter interprets as a spectre in the novel. Finally, it examines the chronicle as a medium for recording history. The chapter uses these three contextual layers to analyse how history and memory are organised textually in *Les Tambours de la pluie*.

Chapter Two turns to Kadare's novel *Qui a ramené Doruntine ?* [*Kush e solli Doruntinën*]. It interrogates how the writer reimagines the well-known myth of Constantine and Doruntine encoded in the text's title into a postmodern work of detective fiction: a whodunit without a crime. The chapter investigates the relationship between history and the mythic imaginary and its representation in fiction as it draws attention to the novel's concern with a key element in Albanian cultural memory—the notion of an unbreakable promise, the *besa*. Through the lens of the *besa* and debt, it also develops how the Kadarean *impossibly indebted figure* is a part of the writer's rewriting of folk morality.

The role of the impossibly indebted figure is also the concern of Chapter Three, which delivers a close textual reading of Kadare's modernist novel *Le Général de l'armée morte* [*Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur*]. It examines the location of the grave and how it plays a significant structural role in the text; the grave is read as a site of transition and ruptured temporality as the remains of dead soldiers are excavated so that they can be reburied, not in Albania but in Italy. This process of reburial brings into question the broader context of national debt and how traces of the past can be reconfigured and rewritten. Alongside the location of the grave, exploring the mirror relationship between Albania and Italy and between characters shows how the novel problematises rituals of national and personal mourning.

Chapter Four examines the most allegorical and subversive novel of the corpus analysed in this thesis: *Le Palais des rêves* [*Pallati i Ëndrrave*]. Through a close textual analysis, it examines the nature of the novel's impossibly indebted figure and how his restricted movement can be understood through the chronotope of the threshold. As in the first chapter, the symbolic location

of the castle plays a significant structural role in the novel as it acts as a boundary marker between an oppressive, bureaucratic and absurd institution and the world outside that it controls.

Across this corpus, and from the perspective of this movement from history to modernist abstraction, the thesis shows a fundamental continuity in Kadare's concern with the questioning of Albanian identity.

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## List of Abbreviations

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| *D* (F) | Kadare, Ismail, *Qui a ramené Doruntine ?*, in *Œuvres: tome premier*, trans. by Jusuf Vrioni (Paris: Fayard, 1993) |
| *D* (A) | Kadare, Ismail, *Kush e solli Doruntinën*, (Tirana: Onufri, 2014) |
| *G* (F) | Kadare, Ismail, *Le Général de l'armée morte*, in *Œuvres: tome sixième*, trans. by Jusuf Vrioni (Paris: Fayard, 1998) |
| *G* (A) | Kadare, Ismail, *Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur* (Tirana: Onufri, 2015) |
| *P* (F) | Kadare, Ismail, *Le Palais des rêves*, *in Œuvres: tome troisième*, trans. by Jusuf Vrioni and Alexandre Zotos (Paris: Fayard, 1995) |
| *P* (A) | Kadare, Ismail, *Pallati i Ëndrrave*, (Tirana: Onufri, 2011) |
| *T* (F) | Kadare, Ismail, *Les tambours de la pluie*, in *Œuvres: tome deuxième*, trans. by Jusuf Vrioni and Alexandre Zotos (Paris: Fayard, 1994) |
| *T* (A) | Kadare, Ismail, *Kështjella*, (Tirana: Onufri, 2015) |

# Introduction

In this thesis, I study four novels by the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare: *Les Tambours de la pluie* [*Kështjella*], *Qui a ramené Doruntine ?* [*Kush e solli Doruntinën*], *Le Général de l'armée morte* [*Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur*], and *Le Palais des rêves* [*Pallati i Ëndrrave*]. The reason for this choice of corpus is that these novels—written and published between 1963 and 1981—are representative of Kadare's work and its development, and they deal in various ways with questions of Albanian identity.

Ismail Kadare's oeuvre encircles a recurrent idea of Albania. Within the architecture of his works, he creates areas of overlap and commonality that often go beyond the thematic and extend to the tangible worlds, the 'Albanias', of his creation: a shared place name—references to an *Auberge des Deux Robert* [*Bujtina e dy Robertëve*] appear in *Qui a ramené Doruntine ?*, *Le Palais des rêves*, *Le Pont aux trois arches* [*Ura me tri harqe*], *Avril brisé* [*Prilli i thyer*] and *Le Dossier H* [*Dosja H*]—or a character's name that signals at once kinship and tribalism. Gjons, Gjergjs and Streses populate many of his novels, from the previously mentioned *Qui a ramené Doruntine ?*, *Le Palais des rêves*, *Le Pont aux trois arches* to *Chronique de la ville de pierre* [*Kronikë në gur*] and *Le Concert* [*Koncert në fund të dimrit*]. Indeed, Albania and the Albanians, writes Enis Sulstarova, appear in almost all of Kadare's writings.[1]

Selecting the novels for study in this thesis then involved a consideration of how the writer approaches the question of Albanian identity in ways that can also be mapped *onto* his other works. For example, questions of bardic creation and national heritage visible in *Qui a ramené*

[1] Enis Sulstarova, *Arratisje nga Lindja: Orientalizmi Shqiptar nga Naimi te Kadareja* (Tirana: Botimët Dudaj, 2006), p. 134.

*Doruntine ?* also appear in *Le Dossier H*. And the notion of rewriting present in each of the novels examined here guides the form and structure of the novella *Trois chants funèbres pour le Kosovo* [*Tri këngë zie për Kosovën*]. The texts studied here are representative of Kadare's work and its development, and where it is helpful, I draw on and make reference to other novels and essays by the writer—as well as interviews with him—to show how they can be read in dialogue with one another and contextualise some themes and images.

*Le Général de l'armée morte*, which granted the writer his first great success, and *Le Palais des rêves*, which faced hostility from Hoxha's regime and was later censored, are two of Kadare's best-known works and illustrate his shifting reception as a writer under the dictatorship. Read as a corpus, the four novels I study here are also representative of a particular time period in twentieth-century Albania. Kadare was born in 1936. Enver Hoxha took office in 1944 and was Albania's ruler until his death in 1985. From the success of *Le Général de l'armée morte* in 1963 and the criticism of *Le Palais des rêves* (1981), the publication of the four novels studied here then also reflect Kadare's artistic coming-of-age and his rise to fame as well as Hoxha's consolidation of power and its decline. In their content, they reflect a spirit of isolationism, alienation and absurdity—of an Albania considered as a netherworld with an impossibly indebted figure at its centre.

## The Novels

In *Les Tambours de la pluie*, Kadare poetically imagines the siege of an unnamed Albanian citadel by an invading Ottoman army during the Middle Ages, before Albania was under the rule of the Sublime Porte. The novel gives a voice to the invaders and the besieged in a way that acknowledges their enmeshed history. We see the main narration told from the Ottoman perspective, through the eyes of a range of characters within the invading army: from the military campaign's leader to its chronicler. The Albanian sections are fragmentary vignettes narrated from within the citadel walls by an anonymous figure; they bracket each Ottoman chapter. In the novel,

the invading Ottomans encircle the citadel and find themselves similarly surrounded by Albanians in the mountains, led by the unseen figure of Skanderbeg—the hero of the Albanian mythic imagination.

Kadare takes inspiration from Albania's oral literary traditions in *Qui a ramené Doruntine ?*[2] as he reconfigures the well-known ballad of Constantine and Doruntine into a work of detective fiction that centres around the titular question. Exploring the (transgressive) relationship between brother and sister, the novel interrogates the ballad's premise—that Constantine rises from the grave to honour his promise and bring his sister home—while the story of his resurrection spreads in mythic form diegetically within the narrative's pre-Ottoman medieval community. *Le Général de l'armée morte* is set in the twentieth century and focuses on the military figure of the title, an unnamed Italian, who is tasked with excavating and returning the remains of the Italian soldiers killed in Albania during the Second World War to their homeland. Looking at Albania through the eyes of an outsider, the novel raises questions about the possibility of a national narrative and the writing of historical memory. Finally, in *Le Palais des rêves*, we return to a fictionalised 'United Ottoman States' in which the dreams of the Empire's citizens are recorded and analysed for signs of danger to the imperial project. The novel focuses on the experience of Mark-Alem Quprili within the surreal, absurd institution as he bridges the space between the Palace of Dreams and his influential family of Albanian origin.

By examining this corpus of Kadare's texts, the main question that my thesis raises and seeks to answer is: how does Kadare explore and problematise Albanian identity? The thesis thus situates itself between Kadare's literary works and a cultural and political context in which other discourses would lay claim to having an answer as to what constitutes Albanian identity. Without attempting to take sides in the debate about Kadare's personal complicity or non-complicity in Enver Hoxha's dictatorship that often colours Kadare scholarship, we can acknowledge how this is true of the

[2] I refer to the novel as *Doruntine*.

author's own context of writing as he works dialectically up against and in subversion of Hoxha's regime and its official ideology. It is also true of this thesis, which mediates between formalist literary criticism and contextual cultural analysis. At the centre of this encounter between literary narrative and cultural or ideological questions concerning identity, we can see, in Kadare's work, a procedure of rewriting.

A Procedure of Rewriting

We will see how, in some cases, his novels allude to or are themselves versions of ballads, chronicles and historical events. *Doruntine,* for example, is a reimagining of an existing Albanian—and Balkan—legend that is itself predicated on the significance of the spoken word. *Le Palais des rêves* reconfigures the Albanian Rozafa immurement legend as a ballad within the narrative and as a metaphor for sacrifice and for the unresolved tension between two opposing powers. Within the broader framework of Kadare's works, the image of the dead man returned from the grave that we see in *Doruntine* and the figure of the immured body that Kadare makes oblique reference to in *Le Palais des rêves* recur and are rewritten. *Le Pont aux trois arches* [*Ura me tri harqe*] centres on the sacrifice of a man within the titular structure; the legend of the immured sacrificial victim alters and is rewritten within the boundaries of the narrative to interrogate the nature of a legend's original version. Similarly, the image of the dead man who returns to the realm of the living to honour his promise fulfils many functions in Kadare's novels, and he is rewritten to emphasise the different facets of his identity: 'the dutiful son, the honourable warrior, [ … ] the faithful brother, the gothic revenant arisen from the tomb, the taboo-breaker'.[3]

In other cases, the act of telling a story from different points of view becomes part both of the narrative fabric of the text and of its thematic structure. *Les Tambours de la pluie* attends to the concern of writing history between the winner's and loser's narrative while artistically representing

[3] Peter Morgan, *Ismail Kadare: The Writer and the Dictatorship* (London: Legenda, 2010), pp. 185-186.

Albania's national hero, Skanderbeg, as a figure who is memorialised by both sides; the novel looks to the artistic medium of the chronicle to conceptualise how history is recorded and rewritten. How are the past and narrative present connected in *Le Général de l'armée morte*? As sites of conflict are revisited and historical memory is excavated—as the remains of the dead soldiers are disinterred—we see how the men killed in battle assume new meanings as their individual lives and deaths are overwritten in the service of a greater national narrative.

Thus, the four novels I examine in this thesis are, in a very fundamental way, concerned with perspectives of historical narration. This formal problem of perspective gives rise to a theme of ownership: who owns history? And who owns Albanian identity? To approach these questions, I use the term *Albanianness* to mark a contested and never definable term around Albanian identity that the novels both write towards and presuppose. These novels are concerned with basic elements of Albanian history and folklore, which they simultaneously affirm and problematise, for we see reflected in the works the nation's Illyrian origins and its communal, bardic literary traditions; the period before the Ottoman invasion; the emergence of Skanderbeg and collective resistance against occupation; life as part of the Ottoman Empire; a burgeoning self-determination movement against the backdrop of a waning Sublime Porte; and the rise of Enver Hoxha and isolationism.

## *Albanianness* and the Question of the Balkans

My assumption concerning Kadare's relationship to his country and his project of writing, and rewriting in literary form a kind of national history, is that he can be termed a national but not a nationalist writer. I argue this is because his texts encircle—in different ways—the question of what constitutes *Albanianness,* but never from the point of view of a nationalist, combative or isolationist discourse. Tatjana Aleksić suggests the contrary; in her reading of Kadare's works, particularly his historical novels of the 1970s, she contends that the writer has a tendency to weave into his works ideas of a more nationalistic bent in order to criticise how outside influences and

ideologies encroach onto Albanian culture.[4] However, it is important to note that within Kadare's understanding of *Albanianness* lies an awareness of the outside influences that have shaped the country's history, folklore and cultural memory; and he is cognisant of Albania's place within the Balkans and the region's complex ethnic mixture. For example, in *Eschyle ou le grand perdant*, he acknowledges the archaic intertwining of tragedy with funeral and marriage rites in the Balkans: 'Dans aucune région au monde ils ne ressemblent autant à des représentations théâtrales que dans la péninsule balkanique'[5] ['*Në asnjë rajon të botës këto rituale nuk janë aq të ngjashme me shfaqjet teatrale, sa te popujt e Gadishullit Ballkanik*'[6]]. And, in his conversation with Alain Bosquet, he notes the region's artistic potential and its common legacy of occupation:

> On y trouve toutes les races, toutes les religions, les climats, les paysages, tous les drames des peuples et, par-dessus tout, tous les mécanismes de l'oppression totalitaire depuis l'Empire romain, Byzance, les Mongols, jusqu'au III$^{e}$ Reich et à l'Empire soviétique. Tous les écrivains balkaniques, presque sans exception, ont fouillé et puisé dans cette mine.[7]

Kadare's repeated invocation of 'la péninsule balkanique' in *Eschyle ou le grand perdant* points to the region's commonalities: a shared history, geography and culture. Indeed, he looks back to the ancient world, and uses the eponymous figure of Aeschylus, to trace what he describes as a common experience of (artistic) loss and invasion. The Balkan world, writes Kadare with an artistic flourish, was like a house that knew only death.[8]

The Balkans as metaphorical structure—house, bridge, castle—recurs across scholarship on the region. In Maria Todorova's influential *Imagining the Balkans*, she uses the image of the bridge to highlight what she describes as 'the perpetual Balkan refrain of in-betweenness'.[9] The bridge metaphor captures the ambiguity and liminality of the Balkans: between East and West, Europe

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[4] Tatjana Aleksić, *The Sacrificed Body: Balkan Community Building and the Fear of Freedom* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), p. 64.
[5] Ismail Kadare, *Eschyle ou le grand perdant*, trans. by Jusuf Vrioni and Alexandre Zotos (Paris: Fayard, 1995), p. 26.
[6] Ismail Kadare, *Eskili, ky humbës i madh* (Tirana: Onufri, 2015), p. 28.
[7] Ismail Kadare, *Dialogue avec Alain Bosquet*, trans. by Jusuf Vrioni (Paris: Fayard, 1995), p. 89.
[8] *Eschyle*, pp. 68-69; *Eskili*, p. 66.
[9] Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 49.

and Asia. For Todorova, the region is also a bridge between stages of growth, which 'invokes labels such as semideveloped, semicolonial, semicivilized, semioriental'.[10] Positioning what she calls 'balkanism' in relation to existing orientalist and postcolonialist discourses (importantly, she does not draw a direct line between 'balkanism' and these concepts), Todorova illustrates how historical developments and shifting perceptions have led the Balkans to be viewed as the European cultural Other. Todorova's exploration of 'balkanism' is particularly revealing of how the Balkans, over centuries and through different media such as travel writing, political statements, journalism and fiction, have come to be regarded with negativity outside of the region. Against the conception of Europe as a symbol of order, cleanliness and justice, the Balkan stereotype stood for 'cruelty, boorishness, instability, and unpredictability'[11] by the early twentieth century. This negative view of the Balkans chimes with the opinion of the protagonist of Kadare's *Le Général de l'armée morte*; through the eyes of the alienated foreign outsider and his Catholic priest companion, Albania is looked upon as backward, violent and unforgiving. This perspective is also documented by Mark Mazower in his short overview, *The Balkans: From the End of Byzantium to the Present Day*.[12]

*Le Général de l'armée morte* deploys irony to problematise these concerns about national identity in a layered way: through the alienated perspective of the foreigner and the extratextual writer with an eye to how his homeland is seen from outside. This dialectic between the internal and the external—how Albania (and the Balkans, more broadly) is viewed from within and *without*—is revealing of the limitations of Todorova's balkanist discourse. Diana Mishkova, in *Beyond Balkanism*, begins her work by highlighting these very limitations:

> In recent years, western discourse about the Balkans, or "balkanism," has risen in prominence. Characteristically, this strand of research sidelines the academic input in the production of western representations and Balkan self-understanding. Looking at the

[10] Ibid., p. 16.
[11] Ibid., p. 119.
[12] In this work, Mazower presents and dismantles these negative Balkan stereotypes. Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: From the End of Byzantium to the Present Day* (London: Phoenix, 2001).

> Balkans from the vantage point of "balkanism" has therefore contributed to its further marginalization as an object of research and the evisceration of its agency.[13]

Mishkova reverses such a perspective and instead looks at the Balkans 'inside-out, from within the Balkans towards its "self" and the outside world, where the West is important but not the sole referent'.[14] Looking at the Balkans from the inside outwards, Mishkova traces how the region as a whole has been marked by the assimilation of different cultural clusters and the overlapping of oral literatures. Indeed, there is an important cultural permeability across communal practices in the Balkans—in 'popular poetry, dances and superstitions, in customs and mores'[15]—that acknowledges shared folklore, linguistic diversity and a common historical heritage. More broadly, throughout her study, Mishkova interrogates and analyses how historians, geographers and linguists have sought to negotiate the space between the local and the exogenous within the Balkan context and against shifting political stakes: imperial powers (and their dissolution), totalitarian ideologies and modern nation-states.

Although Kadare speaks to Albania's place in the Balkans culturally, ritually and geographically in a way that accords with Mishkova's view of the region as a site of exchange and criss-cross, I see the writer as primarily concerned with the question of Albanian identity. Writing within the particular context of Hoxha's dictatorship, a period that sees Mishkova describe Albania as 'maverick'[16] and, citing historian Hugh Seton-Watson, 'a law unto itself'[17], we can see how a culture and spirit of isolationism informed Kadare's writing even in light of the 'massive ethnographic, folkloric and literary borrowings'[18] that existed across the Balkans. How unique, then, is Albania's claim to uniqueness? Where Kadare can be seen to use tropes and images associated with Albanian exceptionalism or a nationalist historiography—as we will see in his

[13] Diana Mishkova, *Beyond Balkanism: The Scholarly Politics of Region Making* (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), p. iii.
[14] Ibid., p. iii.
[15] Ibid., p. 59.
[16] Ibid., p. 140.
[17] Ibid., p. 186.
[18] Diana Mishkova, 'The Production of Space: A Balkan Perspective', *Istraživanja: Journal of Historical Researches*, 32 (2021), 222-232 (p. 224).

multi-layered exploration of Albanian history in the first chapter of this thesis—I suggest this is a part of his project of writing the country's national history in that the novel mobilises irony and satire to problematise this very question.

A key element in Albanian cultural memory is the notion of an unbreakable promise—or *besa*. *Doruntine* is specifically concerned with the nature of such a promise; it is the invocation of an unfulfilled *besa* that causes Constantine to rise from the grave. *Le Général de l'armée morte* and *Le Palais des rêves* develop the theme of debt more indirectly. In the former, the eponymous General is bound by duty, conveyed through a lexis of moral debt, to carry out his repatriation mission. Alongside the General's debt, the novel interrogates a broader question of collective debt that comes from the act of localising and repatriating the dead men, for to be in debt is to be existentially out of place [19], as we shall see. In *Le Palais des rêves*, debt is patrimonial and personal—it is an inherited condition that restricts the movement and internal development of the novel's protagonist, Mark-Alem.

The Impossibly Indebted Figure

I employ the technical term 'impossibly indebted figure' to describe a characteristic of Kadare's rewriting of folk morality. We will see in each of the texts how the impossibly indebted figure assumes different faces—although they are often a military figure with a brittle and illusory power—but shares a common experience of restriction and alienation: no indebted person can ever be free.[20] The impossibly indebted figure is duty-bound to carry out a mission on the orders of an established authority that cannot be completed with a neat resolution. Tursun Pasha, the military leader of the Ottoman invasion in *Les Tambours de la pluie*, is the novel's impossibly indebted character. He understands the nature of his position at the head of the imperial army and his lack of

[19] Stathis Gourgouris, 'Xenia – Debt at home, debt is always foreign', *Social Science Information*, 58.3 (2019), 521-535 (p. 524).
[20] Ibid., p. 524.

individual agency: he is doomed if the campaign fails *or* succeeds. In *Doruntine,* the regional Captain, Stres, who carries out the investigation into who brought Doruntine back embodies the impossibly indebted Kadarean figure. He works up against the myth of resurrection that is generated within the novel's community to find out the truth of Doruntine's return, but the investigation—and the nature of truth itself—is restricted by the obscurantist religious authority of the Church.

During his mission to locate and exhume the dead soldiers buried in Italy, the General finds his existence restricted within a claustrophobic circular movement between gravesites that ultimately alienates him from his selfhood—and his conception of nationhood. Mark-Alem Quprili in *Le Palais des rêves* is the only impossibly indebted figure examined here who is not a military figure with (illusory) authority. He is, instead, a bureaucrat whose interior life and external movement are restricted by his inescapable position between two poles of power: the state and his family. Like the General, Mark-Alem's movements are circular; this is reflected in the organisation of the spaces he navigates in the novel. Moving through the circular corridors of the Palace of Dreams, his existence is limited.

## The Mythopoetic

In this thesis, I also use 'mythopoetic' as a technical term to describe the method of this study and its focus. This mythopoetic angle of reading examines the literary reworking of historical and other cultural—or even political—material that has acquired a mythical status prior to the writing of the texts. The method of rewriting then consists of drawing out and heightening the mythical stakes of this pre-textual material, using the mythical dynamic of this material as a source of the literary imagination.

Writing of Olga Freidenberg's ideas around poetic thinking and mythological image, Nina Perlina shows how Freidenberg approaches the question: where is the beginning of all beginnings?[21] Do myths have points of origin; was there a place and time before metaphor? These questions raise two points of interest. For Freidenberg, 'culture is endowed with the capacity to reconstitute its own forms'.[22] And in early mythological thought, each image had a shadow—a double—as the properties of objects were considered living things.[23] In *Image and Concept: Mythopoetic Roots of Literature*, Olga Freidenberg focuses on archaic Greek literature to trace the genesis of poetic thought and forms; pre-textual, communal materials were transformed through ritual practice, for example, through oral literature passed from generation to generation, and acquired aesthetic qualities like metaphor and simile. Ancient literature, then, has an entire history as pre-textual imagery contained within it. Indeed, Greek literature 'was a whole at once dual and single'.[24] In this thesis, I aim to show how pre-literary, mythic material is reconstituted poetically into a literature that is, at once, dual and single. It is single in that it is the product of Kadare's artistic imagination; it is his writerly voice. And it is double as the writer's texts have been informed by a history of oral ballads and communal practices.

In relation to the role of the double in poetic thought, Freidenberg writes: 'Mythologically, the world was represented as divided into identical doubles, of which one had the "property" and the other did not'.[25] The double in Kadare's own mythic imaginary can be read in a similar way, as we will see; in the corpus of novels, the writer creates a mirror relationship between protagonists and locations to bring out particular qualities. For example, Italy as Albania's double in *Le Général de l'armée morte* connotes civilisation and order, whereas the Balkan country does not.

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[21] Nina Perlina, 'Ol'ga Freidenberg on Myth, Folklore, and Literature', *Slavic Review*, 50.2 (1992), 371-384 (p. 374).
[22] Ibid., p. 374.
[23] Olga Freidenberg, *Image and Concept: Mythopoetic Roots of Literature*, ed. by Nina Braginskaia and Kevin Moss, trans. by Kevin Moss (New York, NY; London: Routledge, 1997), p. 40.
[24] Ibid., p. 37.
[25] Ibid., p. 40.

Freidenberg's discussion of mythological imagery and poetic forms in literature is far-reaching and ambitious; she offers close readings of tragedies by Aeschylus and examines the illusions of mimesis. Thus analysing her work further would go beyond the scope of this thesis, but I have sought to demonstrate what it is I mean by myth and its relationship to pre-textual imagery.

Turning toward Mircea Eliade's understanding of myth reveals a different conceptualisation of the term. Although myth can relate to language, it is not, to Eliade, an invention or fiction. Instead myth captures '"une histoire vraie" et, qui plus est, hautement, précieuse parce que sacrée, exemplaire et significative'.[26] It is the medium through which sacred meanings (to particular communities) and the notion of a 'true history' are conveyed. As a result, such a 'true history' serves as a model for human behaviour, and Eliade contends that the originary stories of many traditional societies are rooted in this paradigm of sacred, exemplary myths. By contrast, René Girard sees myths as foundational (to culture) but also violent in origin. I examine this conceptualisation of violence and myth in relation to the sacrificial Albanian Rozafa legend in further detail in the first chapter. It is important to note here, though, that the cultural material that Kadare draws from—in the form of regional myths and practices—often centres on violent or transgressive practices that involve and implicate an entire community: the immured victim, the broken promise, the inability to overcome one's history.

The mythopoetic reading in this thesis seeks to analyse precisely how this literary unfolding of cultural material is organised textually in each of the four works of the corpus. This means that the internal structure of each chapter is dictated by the specific poetic problem of each novel. The analysis seeks to identify this poetic problem, describe how it is developed in the text and show how the problem gains complexity both contextually and on the level of specific literary devices. Two devices are particularly important—first, a location where meaning is generated. Second is

[26] Mircea Eliade, *Aspects du mythe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 11. I quote from the French here as the English version of the text—*Myth and Reality*—comes via the French.

the presence of a structuring mirror relationship. The archetypal locations of the castle and the grave play a significant structural role in these texts.

The Castle as Archetypal Location

In *Les Tambours de la pluie*, the castle is the narrative's organising centre around which the Albanians *within* the walls and the Ottomans *without* define themselves. The novel's distinct narrative perspectives, which move between the besieged and the invaders, structurally reflect the enclosed space of the castle. The castle becomes a symbolic signifier of the intratextual chronicle as an artistic medium in the novel; the closed-off structure conceptualises what can and cannot be allowed into cultural memory. The castle's weighty tangibility as a stone edifice can be read as a continuation of the importance of stone structures within the Albanian mythic imaginary, from the Rozafa immurement legend to the recurring trope of the bridge.

In *Le Palais des rêves*, by contrast, the castle-like structure of the title appears surreal. As a physical space it is nebulous and hazy—less grounded in material reality and closer to the subconscious world of dreams it monitors. However, like the castle in *Les Tambours de la pluie*, the palace is a building that delineates the space within and without. It is a political edifice. Within its walls, information is guarded and controlled. This is reflected in the claustrophobic structural arrangement of the building itself. The archetypal location of the castle, then, throws into relief the concept of enclosure.

The Grave as Archetypal Location

The grave is a site of rupture, (re-)generation and, paradoxically, aperture. It is not a final resting place but a space that allows for the movement between different temporalities and spatialities. In *Doruntine*, the locus of the grave is at the heart of the investigation into the titular question: who brought Doruntine back? The suggestion that it was her brother Constantine—returned from the

dead to fulfil his *besa*—plays with the transgressive problem of resurrection and the movement between the realm of the dead and the realm of the living. The grave becomes the site where new mythic versions of Doruntine and Constantine are generated. As professional funeral mourners perform lamentations at their gravesides, the community creates mythic doubles of the brother and sister that seem to take on lives of their own.

In *Le Général de l'armée morte*, the location of the grave marks a legacy of conflict and war on Albanian soil—the Second World War being the most recent iteration of this—but it is explored through the eyes of an outsider. The narrative perspective focuses on the Italian General. His mission to excavate the war dead is part of a national project to repatriate the men and rewrite their history as heroes. The grave reflects this transition in their biographies; while the dead men's individual lives are erased, they assume a new, collective identity that is constructed around their future interment in their homeland. However, we see the voices of the dead men emerge from the grave in vignettes as the physical spaces are excavated; these fragmentary narratives problematise the nature of reburial and (re-)writing national history through the lens of heroism.

The Mirror Relationship

Like these archetypal locations, the notion of an inescapable mirror relationship either between the protagonist and another character or between Albania and another country—Italy, the Ottoman Empire (before Albania became a part of it), or Albania itself (from inside the Ottoman Empire)—plays a significant structural role in the texts. In *Les Tambours de la pluie*, we see the mirror relationship between Albania and the Ottoman Empire in the time before Albania had been absorbed into the Sublime Porte. However, the novel acknowledges their enmeshed history and Albania's eventual fall to the imperial power as the pressure of future sieges and occupation remains on the horizon. To a lesser extent, in the novel, we see a mirror relationship between Tursun Pasha and Skanderbeg play out through a dialectic of absence and presence. Tursun Pasha is described in terms of his physical presence—his corporeality. Skanderbeg, by contrast, is

mediated through the words and memories of others; he emerges from the darkness as the Albanians' unseen saviour.

The mirror relationship in *Doruntine* between Captain Stres and Constantine sees Stres take on Constantine's qualities and characteristics. He comes to believe in the power of the *besa* and its elemental power. For Captain Stres, it is his growing understanding of the *besa* that ultimately leads to him revealing to the community that Constantine did rise from the grave and culminates in his disappearance. For both Tursun Pasha and Captain Stres, this inescapable mirror relationship with another does not offer a means of overcoming their status as impossibly indebted figures.

In *Le Général de l'armée morte* the mirror relationship is configured through the relationship between Italy and Albania and through characters that have an asymmetrical relationship with one another: the General has a double in the German Lieutenant-General who is carrying out the same type of mission in Albania. Colonel Z—and his remains—shares a perverse umbilical connection with a soldier he killed. And Colonel Z's widow and mother have a mirror relationship with the old Albanian woman who killed him. Finally, in *Le Palais des rêves*, we see the mirror relationship between the state and the Quprili family, and between the centre of an imperial project and Albania as a distant province.

The locations of the castle and the grave can take on different functions in the plot, but the very fact that his novels are often organised around such a saturated, excessively meaningful location means that Kadare's narratives are not entirely character-centred. According to the mythopoetic reading, Kadare's novels rewrite historical and cultural material, often centred on unresolvable geopolitical questions or mythical questions of absolute debt. Hence, the protagonists of these novels do not drive the narrative in the sense of changing situations through their initiative. Rather they are the centre of a story that, in some sense, is *given* to them. They enter a story, which they then have to pursue. It is natural, therefore, that the centre of the plot can often tend to become a meaningful location and not the character's decisions.

Similarly, the mirror relationships between characters situate the protagonist in an objective context that he cannot fully control or dismantle since the mirror relation is quasi-static. It is not like a dramatic relationship, which changes as a result of the character's actions.

Wider Scholarship

In the development of this mythopoetic angle of reading, I have been inspired, on the one hand, by certain perspectives in the theoretical writings of Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Derrida and, on the other hand, by a handful of very perceptive critics of Kadare's works. Writing about Kadare under Enver Hoxha's dictatorship, Peter Morgan traces the interplay between the writer's life and the publication of his works in a way that is often fruitful for discussion, although he tends to frame this relationship through the prism of the Kadare as complicit or dissident artist debate.[27] Tatjana Aleksić conceptualises the trope of sacrifice in the Balkan imaginary through the prism of the immurement legend, which exists in literary traditions across the region.[28] Stathis Gourgouris's conception of debt—debt as a division of space and time; debt as alienating and destabilising to the self—helpfully elucidates the restricted experience of Kadare's impossibly indebted figures.[29]

Reading Kadare's works through this prism of debt demands an exploration of what it is to be in debt. Debt is multivalent, and Stathis Gourgouris speaks to the different meanings of the term. First, in his article 'Cavafy's Debt', he outlines a system of artistic debt to show how no 'poetics exists outside of a history (or histories) of some kind'.[30] Debt in this sense, writes Gourgouris, relates to the ways in which a particular poetic event encounters other poetic events in time and

[27] For an overview of Peter Morgan's Kadare scholarship, see *Ismail Kadare: The Writer and the Dictatorship.* Morgan begins the work by focusing expressly on this question of complicity or non-complicity: 'Ismail Kadare has experienced a life of controversy. In his own country and internationally he has been both acclaimed as a writer and condemned as a lackey of the Albanian dictatorship' (p. 1).
[28] Aleksić, *The Sacrificed Body.*
[29] Gourgouris, 'Xenia', p. 524.
[30] Stathis Gourgouris, 'Cavafy's Debt', *boundary 2*, 44.3 (2017), 129-157 (p. 130).

across spaces and languages.[31] Within this understanding, Kadare's own procedure of rewriting is itself a system of debt—of encounters with existing ballads and historical chronicles that are ongoing as they are repeated in retellings and new forms across the writer's oeuvre and cannot be resolved or overcome; they exist in these variations.

It is this conceptualisation of debt as unresolvable and repeatable that this thesis uses to explore the knotty nature of indebtedness in Kadare's four novels. In 'Xenia – Debt at home, debt is always foreign', Gourgouris defines debt in the following way: debt is a social (and economic) force that can engender alienation of the 'domestic economy'[32]—that is, familial structures. He contends:

> Debt only has meaning within time: as much the time that it takes for it to be alleviated, if this can happen at all, as the time that its very accumulation, its actual existence, signifies and mobilizes in very specific parameters of power. Along these lines, debt also might be said to divide time [ … ] For the time of being in debt is in many ways time beholden to an other: a truly heteronomous time that disables one's autonomous relation to history, one's own history. [ … ] Debt's division of time is also, in this respect, a division of space—again, in an obvious sense: an indebted person is, through the duration of this debt, existentially out of place, alienated from his/her property. One's very self is irreparably alienated while in debt, which is why in the last instance no indebted person can ever be free.[33]

Here, debt as a social condition has the destabilising capacity to separate an individual from his self, his family, and his history, community and nation. We see this in Kadare's impossibly indebted figures as they share a common experience of being cut off from their selfhood. In the cases of Tursun Pasha, Captain Stres and Mark-Alem, they are cut off from a (hopeful) future. Instead, they remain restricted in their existence through death, disappearance and an impossible position between family and the state.

Moving beyond debt, where there is a tendency in Kadare scholarship to relate his texts to a historical or political context more or less directly, without paying too much attention to their narrative form, I found that Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope and Jacques Derrida's

[31] Ibid., p. 130.
[32] Gourgouris, 'Xenia', p. 521.
[33] Ibid., p. 524.

concept of the spectre—the ghost—when taken together, provides just enough of a frame to bring into light the repetitive, circular structure of these texts.

The spectre comes back—its expected return repeats itself, again and again.[34] In this way, the past is always in the present in the form of haunting. We see this in the figure of Skanderbeg, a recurring spectre who *haunts* the Albanian national-historical imagination and, therefore, captures a concern of writing and rewriting history. We see it, too, in the figure of Constantine—the revenant. The spectral is predicated upon the return of that which tests temporal boundaries, like Constantine's return from the grave.

The chronotope is the organising centre of a text. Bakhtin describes it thus:

> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens. Takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.[35]

In *Le Palais des rêves*, we see the palace's circular corridors as a space with significant meaning since they are governed by the chronotope of the threshold—a particular time-space that, to Bakhtin, signals a breaking point or change in a life. It is a moment to cross over the threshold or not. Bakhtin also notes how the chronotope provides a grounding for the distinguishing aspects of different genres. For example, he observes how the plot points of ancient Greek romances are noticeably similar to one another because of their focus on adventure and how it unfolds within the novel. In the generic romance, the starting point is the moment when the hero and heroine meet, and the endpoint is their union in marriage. Although these points are significant moments in the characters' biographies, it is the action that takes place between the points that structure the novel. However, this action is, in a sense, superfluous. It does not have any bearing on the novel's outcome—the hero and heroine's marriage—as this outcome is always directly related to, and tied

[34] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 11.

[35] Bakhtin, Mikhail, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, trans. and ed. by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), p. 84.

to, the text's starting point.[36] In *Le Palais des rêves*, the palace is the start and end point of a narrative which is itself circular, just like the building's corridors.

Kadare and France

In his dialogue with Alain Bosquet, Kadare makes reference to some of the literary canon's most well-known names. He presents his admiration for the giants of literature via a lexis of growth as he connects the figures to his own artistic maturation:

> Mon respect pour Homère, Eschyle, Dante, Cervantès, Shakespeare, a ainsi grandi et forci naturellement, pour une part durant mon enfance, pour une autre durant mes études, pour une autre encore de manière buissonnière, dans ma tête.[37]

These names recur across Kadare's works, in his fiction and nonfiction writings: *Le Dossier H, Eschyle, ou le grand perdant*, *Dante, l'incontournable* [*Dantja i pashmangshëm*], and *Hamlet, le prince impossible* [*Hamleti, princi i vështirë*].[38] What does it mean then for Kadare as an Albanian writer to attach himself and his works to these canonical figures—these artists distant in time and space?

It could be a means of positioning himself as a writer who is recognised for his literariness. Indeed, these figures give credence to a claim to a kind of literary prestige as Pascale Casanova writes: 'Les noms de Shakespeare, Dante ou Cervantès résument à la fois la grandeur d'un passé littéraire national, la légitimité historique et littéraire que confèrent de tels noms à une littérature nationale, et la reconnaissance [ … ] de leur grandeur'.[39] Casanova also notes that classic literature of this kind embodies the very notion of literary legitimacy. Ani Kokobobo, in the preface to *Essays on World Literature*, draws out this connection between Kadare and literary legitimacy by aligning him with the figures he writes about: 'These essays chart a map of world literature and its geniuses

[36] Ibid., p. 89.
[37] Kadare, *Dialogue avec Alain Bosquet*, p. 195.
[38] Ani Kokobobo's English translations of these three essays about Aeschylus, Dante and Shakespeare have been published together as a collection in *Essays on World Literature*, although the texts themselves were not written or originally published at the same time.
[39] Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des Lettres* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999), p. 34.

dating back to antiquity with such critical awareness, that we may soon see Kadare himself bookending this lineage of geniuses'.[40]

The characterisation of Kadare as a writer on the cusp of becoming—or being seen as—a literary 'genius' brings out interconnected questions about the artist, his national identity, his proximity to French literary space and the field of world literature that I will briefly discuss here.

Describing Kadare as a writer in a 'fledgling literary tradition'[41], Erica Weitzman writes of Albania and Albanian culture:

> Certainly no one would dispute the claim that Albania is a minor nation on the world stage, not only politically but also culturally and linguistically. Yet despite a position in the global political and literary economy that could hardly be called central, Albania is in many ways what one might call a "major" culture, endowed with strong national myths, heroic figures, folkloric practices, and cultural touchstones.[42]

Although Albania has a rich cultural and literary heritage of orality, ballads and folklore within its borders, Kadare's international renown as a writer has come from outside of them through the French translations of his work by Jusuf Vrioni. Indeed, the English versions of his novels—in some cases translated by David Bellos or Barbara Bray—often come by way of the French through a process of double translation (although John Hodgson is an exception to this as he translates into English directly from the Albanian). Kadare's connection with France crystallised during the 1990s when he sought asylum in Paris after the collapse of Communism in Albania. However, he had already seen his status as an established literary figure in France—in the Eastern European tradition of Milan Kundera, Danilo Kiš and Eugène Ionesco—rise since the publication of *Le Général de l'armée morte* in France in 1970,[43] when he first experienced international acclaim.

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[40] Ani Kokobobo, 'Translator's Preface', in Ismail Kadare, *Essays on World Literature* (Brooklyn, NY: Restless Books, 2018), p. xii.
[41] Erica Weitzman, 'Specters of Narrative: Ismail Kadare's "The General of the Dead Army"', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 41.2 (2011), 282-309 (p. 283).
[42] Ibid., p. 285.
[43] The novel was first published in Albanian in 1963.

World literature is a negotiation between literary margins and centres. We see this articulated by David Norris as he writes how the literatures of smaller European nations depend on their larger neighbours 'to facilitate their introduction and acceptance in an international literary context'.[44] For Kadare, his proximity to the French literary space has allowed the artist to move between, or from, the margins—as a writer in a minor language—toward a significant literary centre since Paris, as Pascale Casanova notes, is the 'capitale dénationalisée de l'univers littéraire'.[45] In Kadare's case, the prestige that comes from being attached to France as a literary space has seen his profile grow on the international stage among readers who would not be able to access his writing in their original language; for example, he has, in recent years, frequently been named as a potential Nobel laureate (the Nobel prize being the ultimate arbiter of literary excellence).[46]

The importance of France as a literary and cultural space also highlights a mirror relationship between Kadare and Enver Hoxha.[47] Hoxha was educated in Montpelier and Brussels, and to him, France and French culture were signifiers of intellectualism and prestige; he harboured intellectual and artistic ambitions during this time that remained with him throughout his life. Peter Morgan writes of his interest in France: 'Enver Hoxha in particular was impressed by France, remained in thrall to ideas of French culture and civilization, and longed to be read in France'.[48] And Kadare, in his dialogue with Alain Bosquet, also notes Hoxha's 'obsession' with the nation.[49] Hoxha even approached Kadare's French publishers for his own autobiographical works.[50] France represented, even for the leader who turned Albania in on itself, the centre of the literary world.

[44] David Norris, 'The Global Presentation of Small National Literatures: South Slavs in Literary History and Theory', in *Translating the Literatures of Small European Nations*, ed. by Rajendra Chitnis and others (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), pp. 9-26 (p. 9).
[45] Casanova, p. 61.
[46] Ibid., p. 147.
[47] Both men were also born in and grew up on the same street in Gjirokastër, in southern Albania—although a generation apart.
[48] Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, p. 54.
[49] Kadare, *Dialogue avec Alain Bosquet*, p. 103.
[50] Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, p. 55.

A long national past allows writers to lay claim to a literary existence in the present.[51] Albania, as a literary culture, has the advantage of being both old in that it has a long tradition of oral literature and young since the language itself was only standardised in the nineteenth century when it became a legitimate medium for the written (and artistic) word. Kadare, as a writer concerned with questions of national identity, is himself implicated in this dynamic as he has come to be seen as *the* modern Albanian writer, both within the nation's borders and without—he is the representative of a nation, its history and art. In this way, Kadare has shaped how Albania sees itself and is seen by those outside.

Kadare's success as a writer outside of Albania, attached to the prestige of the Parisian literary space, highlights how his works can be read through the prism of world literature. His artistic trajectory and international renown accord with David Damrosch's definition of world literature:

> I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language [ … ] a work only has an *effective* life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture.[52]

While acknowledging world literature as a productive paradigm through which Kadare and his works can be analysed, the focus of this thesis remains national, anchored within the original culture, toward the inside of Albania—of identity and *Albanianness*.

In this thesis, I refer to and quote from both the Albanian and French versions. I treat the French translations almost on a par with the Albanian original, sometimes pointing to an illuminating nuance of meaning in the French version, which is not there in the Albanian version. While not treating his work as bilingual, I consider him to belong with other modern—or modernist—authors such as Nabokov and Kundera whose works have come alive *between* two different languages and whose works can equally be considered parts of world literature.

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[51] Ibid., p. 90.
[52] David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 4.

Jusuf Vrioni's French translations are a constant within Kadare's artistic output. Kadare's international success as a writer came via the translated version of *Le Général de l'armée morte*, and he was involved in Jusuf Vrioni's translation process. David Bellos points out the importance of Vrioni's versions to Kadare's literary output:

> Vrioni translated everything Kadare wrote; Kadare's French was good enough for him to be able to read and appreciate Vrioni's labors; there were also things that Vrioni could keep in the French that had to be cut or altered from the Albanian; and there were of course whole works appearing in French that never came out as books, or never came out at all, in the people's paradise of socialist Albania.[53]

Working within the two languages through close readings, I seek to negotiate the interface between the two languages as an appropriate filter for the texts' exploration of cultural identity. This feeds into my aims with this thesis, which are two-fold.

First, I hope that the mythopoetic reading will demonstrate the profound originality of Kadare's place as a writer between European modernism and a literature of cultural memory.

Second, I also wish to show that his seemingly infinite rewriting of some of the knots of Albanian identity and history is like a prism, allowing us to see *Albanianness* as something that comes to exist only in its variations.

[53] David Bellos, 'The Englishing of Ismail Kadare: Notes of a Retranslator', *The Complete Review*, 6.2 (2005) <https://www.complete-review.com/quarterly/vol6/issue2/bellos.htm>.

## Chapter One: Skanderbeg and the Shadow of the Past

*Kruj' o qytet e bekuar,*
*pritë, pritë Skënderbënë,*
*po vjen si pëllumb' i shkruar.*
(Naim Frashëri, *Histori e Skënderbeut*, 1898)[1]

Looking at Ismail Kadare's 1970 novel *Les Tambours de la pluie* [*Kështjella*],[2] this chapter seeks to examine the text's generic qualities between chronicle and modernist statement. It does so through the lens of a problem of archaic debt. The question that I ask is: How is debt configured in the communal psyche? And how can a community restore or overcome debt? This chapter aims to address these concerns by focusing on the ways in which Kadare's text approaches and explores questions of shared identity and narrative authority. This chapter also brings to the foreground discussions of myth and history, and their points of interconnection, as Kadare (re-)writes Albania's past through the lens of its twentieth-century experience and, at the same time, draws attention to the nation's mythic hero, Skanderbeg. In *Les Tambours de la pluie*, Kadare depicts the siege of an unnamed Albanian fortress during the Middle Ages, in the period before the Fall of Constantinople. Like *Le Palais des rêves*, which I analyse in Chapter Four, *Les Tambours de la*

[1] Skanderbeg is a significant figure in *Les tambours de la pluie* and in the Albanian imaginary more widely. In order to understand the mythic importance of Skanderbeg in Albania, particularly the reputation he has held since the nineteenth-century *Rilindja* movement, the literary and cultural context will be traced and discussed in this chapter since it was from this tradition that Kadare drew many elements of *Les Tambours de la pluie*. Naim Frashëri's epic poem, *Histori e Skënderbeut* (The History of Skanderbeg), in particular, contributed greatly to Skanderbeg's image as a mythic figure, as well as, earlier, Marin Barleti's *The Siege of Shkodra*. The poem here refers to the first siege of Krujë in 1450, and this extract sees Skanderbeg as a heroic figure who will save the besieged citadel—and, by extension, Albania—from Ottoman rule: 'Krujë, o blessèd town / wait, wait for Skanderbeg / he is coming like a beautiful dove' (my translation). The adjectival form 'i shkruar', which comes from the verb 'shkruaj' (to write), can also mean 'written'. The implication here of fate being written adds to Skanderbeg's mythic image as the fated saviour of Albanian identity.

[2] The novel has different titles across languages. In Albania, it was originally called *Daullet e Shiut* (The Rain Drums); this original title is reflected in the name of Jusuf Vrioni's French translation of the novel. The Albanian publishers then decided to change the title to *Kështjella* (The Castle) as it was seen as more heroic (see David Bellos, 'Afterword', in Ismail Kadare, *The Siege*, trans. by David Bellos (Edinburgh; London: Canongate, 2009), p. 327). In his translation of the text, David Bellos outlines the decision-making process that went into the title of the English version of the novel. He writes that, when deciding on the English version's title, Kadare asked him to 'invent a title that would collectively signify both the besiegers and the besieged' (p. 325). After much thought, both Bellos and Kadare agreed that *The Siege* was the 'least unsatisfactory' title they could find (p. 328).

*pluie* forms part of Kadare's 'période impériale'[3] as the novel examines Albania's relationship with the Ottoman Empire, and uses the Sublime Porte as an allegory for Enver Hoxha's government. But where, as we will see, *Le Palais des rêves* presents a fictionalised vision of the vast Ottoman Empire, into which Albania has been absorbed, *Les Tambours de la pluie* looks to the period *before* Ottoman occupation. Kadare draws a clear distinction between the two sides—the Albanians, the Ottomans—through the novel's distinct narrative perspectives. The Albanians and Ottomans are kept apart from one another through the novel's structure. It is interesting to note, though, that Kadare devotes the main part of the narration to the Ottoman viewpoint as he weaves in multiple narrative voices from across the ranks of the army of invaders. The Albanian passages, by contrast, are brief, enigmatic and self-contained; they are told from the point of view of a nameless figure within the walls of the citadel. The shift between narrative perspectives provides insight into—and gives voice to—the experience of both the besieged and the invaders. Kadare writes in the preface of the Albanian text that the novel aims to nuance the question: 'who is surrounded by whom?'[4] The text's structure reflects this artistic concern as the shifting perspectives create a sense of disorientating enclosure: which narrative encircles which?

## *Les Tambours de la pluie*: The Novel and a Layered History

> Ils ignoraient même sûrement que, parmi eux, un historien se consacrait à immortaliser cette campagne. Parfois, à cause de sa mise, on le prenait pour un médecin, d'autres fois pour un mage, mais lui-même trouvait la chose plutôt naturelle, la plupart ignorant jusqu'au mot *histoire*.[5]

> *E vërteta ishte që pothuajse kurrkush midis ushtarëve nuk e njihte kronistin, madje, me siguri, as që e dinin se midis tyre kishte edhe një historian që përpiqej ta bënte të pavdekshme këtë luftë. Disa herë, për shkak të veshjes, ata e kishin kujtuar për mjek ose për falltar dhe kronistit kjo i ishte dukur e natyrshme, përderisa shumica e tyre as që e dinin ç'do të thoshte fjala "histori"*.[6]

[3] Éric Faye, 'Introduction', in Ismail Kadare, *Œuvres : tome deuxième* (Paris : Fayard, 1994), p. 13.
[4] This is my translation of the question 'Kush është rrethuar prej kujt?', which can be found in Kadare's preface to *Kështjella* (Tirana: Onufri, 2015), p. xxxi.
[5] *T* (F), p. 215.
[6] *T* (A), pp. 168-169.

The image of encirclement can also function as a framework to understand the emplotment of a version of Albanian history in *Les Tambours de la pluie*. Indeed, positioning the novel at the centre of a series of concentric spheres informs us of the ways in which multiple layers of Albanian history and culture interact with, and have a bearing on, Kadare's text. This positioning of the text offers a fruitful point of entry to an analysis of the novel because, as Erica Weitzman writes, Kadare's take on the national narrative is rarely straightforward or linear.[7] Recognising the writer's complex, even contradictory, depictions of a national narrative requires an exploration of the intratextual and intertextual layers that come to inform it. The polyphonic nature of *Les Tambours de la pluie* demands such a layered examination as Kadare gives a voice to the Albanians here as well as their enemy. In doing this, he also acknowledges their enmeshed history. But by setting out the two sides as opposing narrative perspectives in the novel, Kadare is ultimately able to interrogate the power held by both sides. He looks at how different voices can articulate the experience of siege, from within the citadel and outside of it. Kadare approaches this through questions of narrative authority that reflect the ways in which history interacts with his writing as he asks: how are identities formed and reformed by different narratives? And how has *Les Tambours de la pluie* as a novel been influenced by narrative discourse around Albanian identity, myth and history? The first layer that demands such an examination encompasses the immediate context in which Kadare wrote and published the novel. This layer, in particular, has influenced the text's contemporary analysis as a symbolic depiction of Albania under Hoxha's rule.

## Albania under Hoxha—Life under Siege

*Les Tambours de la pluie* was published in 1970, seven years after the original publication of *Le Général de l'armée morte* in 1963, which marked the writer's first great success as a young artist. By the time Kadare wrote *Les Tambours de la pluie* when he was in his early thirties, he had already enjoyed critical success in Albania and abroad as a novelist and poet. Despite his status as

[7] Weitzman, 'Specters of Narrative', p. 285.

an established and celebrated writer, Kadare produced the novel at a challenging point in his artistic career and at a difficult time in the twentieth-century Albanian political landscape. Peter Morgan observes that Kadare wrote *Les Tambours de la pluie* during a period of writerly reclusion[8]; in 1969, Kadare began a programme of intense research for *Le Grand Hiver* [*Dimri i madh*], and, in 1970, he completed his semi-autobiographical text *Chronique de la ville de pierre* [*Kronikë në gur*]. In a sense, these two texts serve as artistic buttresses that support *Les Tambours de la pluie*, both within the chronology of Kadare's output and with regard to their content. *Le Grand Hiver* looks to Albania's break from Khrushchev's Soviet Union, and *Chronique de la ville de pierre* focuses on Kadare's place of birth, Gjirokastër, during the Second World War. Between the chapters in *Chronique de la ville de pierre*, Kadare works in fragments of a chronicle. In *Les Tambours de la pluie*, Kadare brings these elements together; he weaves fragmentary vignettes around the text's main narration, and he recasts Albania's protracted break from the Soviet Union through the symbolic prism of an Ottoman invasion.

Albania's break from the Soviet Union is depicted as allegory in the novel. The significance of the political rift in the novel was affected by Kadare's experience on a personal level and as a part of the Albanian national collective. Over a decade before the publication of *Les Tambours de la pluie*, in 1958, Kadare left Albania to study at the Maxim Gorky Institute in Moscow as part of a cultural training and diplomatic exchange programme. By the time he returned to his home country in 1960, the dynamic of Albania's relationship with the Soviet Union had altered significantly. In that same year, Soviet-Albanian relations had soured dramatically against the backdrop of the Sino-Soviet split; when, in 1960, Anastas Mikoyan informed Enver Hoxha of the deterioration in Sino-Soviet relations, the Albanian government interpreted the message as nothing more than anti-Beijing propaganda.[9] Albania continued to remain neutral in the relationship between Moscow and Beijing. This position shifted as intraparty conflicts in the Balkan nation escalated, and Hoxha

[8] Peter Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, p. 121.
[9] Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist Period* (Princeton, NJ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 202.

directed his sympathies towards a more pro-China stance. But as tensions between the Soviet Union and China began to rise, eventually culminating in the schism that tore the Communist world apart, Enver Hoxha's decision to side with Beijing was still seen as an unexpected move.[10] It was, arguably, Hoxha's political manoeuvring between the two Communist powers and its renunciation of the 'decadent' West, which ultimately led to Albania's unique position of profound isolation during the mid-twentieth century. Commenting on this in his conversation with Alain Bosquet, Kadare observes how, despite its geographical proximity to the West, Albania's relationship to occidental powers at the time of the Sino-Soviet split differed significantly to neighbouring Yugoslavia's: Hoxha 'avait perdu tout espoir de se voir absoudre par l'Occident et admettre en son sein, comme Tito'.[11] Straddling the space between East and West, and European, Soviet and Asian relations, Albania stood alone; it rejected, and was rejected in turn, by both the perceived bourgeois world of the West and its former Socialist allies.

During the 1960s, relations between Albania and the Soviet Union continued to worsen. Following a dispute over the Soviets' continued naval presence on the Adriatic coast, at the Pasha Liman base near Vlorë, Khrushchev excommunicated Albania. And despite having been one of the original members of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation since its inception in 1955, the Pact was used to discipline the Balkan nation. Indeed, the restrictions that the Soviet Union and their allies imposed on Albania resemble the 'anneau de fer'[12] ['*unazën e hekurt*'[13]] that Kadare refers to in *Les Tambours de la pluie* as the Ottomans threaten to use war and famine to force the Albanians to capitulate and submit to their rule. In the novel, this threat forces the Albanians to retreat inward within the walls of their citadel. In reality, the economic uncertainty caused by this application of pressure drove Albania further into an unequal alliance with Beijing; when Hoxha's government sought out supplies from China, Mao's provision of food aid did not come without conditions.[14]

[10] Elidor Mëhilli, *From Stalin to Mao: Albania and the Socialist World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), p. 199.
[11] Kadare, *Dialogue avec Alain Bosquet*, p. 49.
[12] *T* (F), p. 21.
[13] *T* (A), p. 3.
[14] Lüthi, p. 204.

However, it is significant that the motif of famine also became a part of Albanian propaganda; images of poverty were used by Hoxha's party machine to associate the people's noble suffering with Albanian self-determination. This is exemplified in Enver Hoxha's speech from November 7th 1961, in which the dictator spoke out against the punishment inflicted on Albania by the Soviet Union and its allies. Hoxha used language that aligned suffering with honour as he declared that 'the Albanian people and the Party of Labour will survive on grass if necessary, rather than sell themselves for thirty pieces of silver; they would rather die honourably on their feet than live in shame on their knees.'[15] But as the Soviet Union tightened their 'band of iron' around Albania, and other European states, during the 1960s, the Balkan nation's isolated position meant that food shortages started to become a real and immediate threat to the population.

Similarly, the continuing threat of invasion posed by the Soviet Union was also brought into sharp relief when tanks rolled into Prague and Alexander Dubček's Czechoslovakian government was overthrown. At this point, as David Bellos writes in his afterword to *The Siege*, Albania could feel the cold breath of the Soviet Union on its very doorstep.[16] This threat of invasion, from outside the nation's borders to within Albanian space, forced Hoxha to respond with the breathtakingly paranoiac venture for which he is probably best known outside of the country: he ordered the construction of hundreds of thousands of bunkers across the nation's landscape. To Hoxha, Albania was a country under siege. And to Kadare, the mentality of siege that prevailed in Albania at the time was artistically significant for him and his work. In his conversation with Alain Bosquet, he points to its generative potential for his literary output at the time: 'la rupture de l'Albanie avec le camp socialiste et son repli m'avaient semblé constituer non seulement un prodige, mais le principal événement à traiter dans la littérature de l'époque'.[17]

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[15] The original speech was included in Enver Hoxha's selected works. In the original Albanian, he has been quoted as saying: 'populli shqiptar dhe Partia e tij e Punës do të rrojnë edhe me bar po të jetë nevoja, por kurrë nuk do të shiten "për 30 aspra", se ata preferojnë më mirë të vdesin në këmbë e me nder sesa të rrojnë me turp e të gjunjëzuar'. In Enver Hoxha, *Vepra* 22 (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1976), p. 127. Kadare paraphrases this speech in *Printemps albanais: Chronique, lettres, réflexions*, trans. by Michel Métais (Paris: Fayard, 1991), p. 43.

[16] David Bellos, 'Afterword', in Ismail Kadare, *The Siege* (Edinburgh; London: Canongate, 2009), p. 325.

[17] Kadare, *Dialogue avec Alain Bosquet*, p. 39.

This first sphere spotlights the context of Kadare's lived reality, of writing in Albania, and an internalised, collective Albanian fear against external threats and the way in which the writer was able to draw from it artistically in order to evoke the state of siege depicted in *Les Tambours de la pluie*. By moving outwards again to explore another layer that makes up the novel's contextual framework, we must look to the nineteenth century and the rise of an Albanian nationalist movement rooted in folklore, mythology and communal resistance.

## The *Rilindja* and the Emergence of Albanian Nationalist Aspirations

In contrast to the persistent threat of invasion that hung over Hoxha's Albania, the vision of *Albanianness* that emerged during the nineteenth century was set in opposition to a more abstract threat that had the capacity to take on many forms and faces. At the time of this resistance movement, Albania had already been subsumed into the Ottoman Empire after a successful invasion in the fifteenth century. But the fundamental idea that anything *not* Albanian, or anything not sympathetic to *Albanianness*, should be viewed as a force to resist and overcome through armed struggle, or be represented in art, came to be embedded within this perception of external threat. This image of resistance has also been woven into the fabric of Albanian identity. Noel Malcolm puts forward this argument as he writes of how the most significant myths of Albanian national identity have often been tied up with the motif of struggle: 'from Illyrians resisting Roman conquest to Albanians fighting under Skanderbeg, there were many examples of active resistance to invasion or foreign rule'.[18] However, among these mythic conceptions of Albanian endurance, the image of Albanian conflict against the Ottomans is one of the most long-lasting and significant struggles. The image of Albanian resistance to Ottoman rule emerged from the nineteenth-century nationalist *Rilindja* movement, at a time when Albania was a part of the Ottoman Empire, but the

[18] Noel Malcolm, 'Myth of Albanian National Identity: Some Key Elements', in *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, ed. by Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd Fischer (London: Hurst, 2002), pp. 70-87, p. 82.

Sublime Porte's power was beginning to diminish. The *Rilindja* was a significant period of national (re-)awakening in Albanian history, and its influence and evocation of nationalistic themes can still be seen in Kadare's output, particularly in his historical novels from the 1970s, like *Les Tambours de la pluie*. Folkloric culture and the Albanian language were two of the foundational elements of the *Rilindja* movement as they promoted a cohesive image of national identity and shared patrimony.

During the nineteenth century, self-identifying national groups from across the Balkans and from within the borders of the Ottoman Empire began to gain visibility. Although the process of Albania's national awakening, and its movement towards statehood, started later than in the case of its neighbours, the growing national movements among Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian and Serbian groups were mainly staged around literary, political and military activities. However, in Albania, it was also the emergence of more localised vernacular works of literature that allowed for the revival of pre-existing cultures and the promotion of an innate sense of collective identity that ultimately led to the development of nationalist aspirations.[19] The standardisation of the Albanian alphabet became a central element of the *Rilindja* claim to national identity and the ways in which identity discourse was mediated through art and literary productions. The Albanian language had always been an oral medium through which ballads and songs exploring the nation's history and its legacy of struggle could be articulated communally, but with the emergence of this standardised written language, the formalisation of Albanian assumed great importance. The written language became a more official, legitimate channel for identity creation and resistance. Indeed, in his *Historical Dictionary of Albania*, Robert Elsie asserts that the *Rilindja* had 'inestimable significance' for Albania's cultural survival.[20] The movement's significance stems from its core promotion of language alongside its promotion of a growing awareness of a unifying national identity, which brought Albania's past into contact with the reality of living under

[19] Jane C. Sugarman, 'Imagining the Homeland: Poetry, Songs, and the Discourses of Albanian Nationalism', *Ethnomusicology*, 3 (1999), 419-458 (p. 420).
[20] Robert Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Albania*, p. lvii.

Ottoman rule. In this way, *Albanianness* could be framed around both historic and more immediate struggles of collective identity; through its promotion of *Albanianness*, *Rilindja* art and culture were also able to collapse the temporal distinction between past and present. Instead, it gave rise to the creation of an idea of a continuum of mythic struggle.

There are visible traces of the *Rilindja* movement's core conceptions of *Albanianness* in *Les Tambours de la pluie*. In a sense, Kadare can be seen to recast the problem of identity creation in the novel through the structural arrangement of the castle. Symbolism and structure in the novel both highlight how Albania is viewed from within and without. The image of the unnamed citadel metonymically represents the nation since this structure is suggestive of Albanian resistance to outside influence. Still, the edifice is not impervious to real and symbolic attacks. In one instance, the Ottoman Quartermaster reassures the Pasha of the psychological damage that the invasion will have on the besieged Albanians: 'n'oubliez pas que les plus grandes brèches, nos canons les ont faites aujourd'hui dans le cœur de ces infortunés rebelles.'[21] ['*mos harro se të çarat më të mëdha këta topa i kanë bërë sot në zemrat e atyre fatkëqijve*'[22]]. The Quartermaster's emphasis on the inevitability of invasion highlights the generative effect that destruction and conflict can have on identity creation—a nod, perhaps, to Kadare's view of the artistic potential of Albania's isolation during the twentieth century. The exchange also shows that, in a sense, breaches and invasions *must* happen. This is because, in order to ensure the survival of an Albanian national identity, *Albanianness* has to be set against external forces that are hostile to it. We can also view the Quartermaster's words as an anticipation of Albania's eventual fall to the Ottoman Empire in an unseen future. The Quartermaster sets out the visceral emotional response the besieged would experience if a foreign army defeated them, and the image of the irreparably damaged heart is symbolic of the sense of collective existential alienation from a particular conception of Albanian

[21] *T* (F), p. 90.
[22] *T* (A), p. 58.

identity—that is, Albanian culture as autochthonous[23]—that the Albanians would have to confront once they submitted to Ottoman rule.

The *Rilindja* and the Figure of Skanderbeg

Alongside the novel's examination of a collective identity in the face of struggle, Kadare's exploration of the historical figure of Skanderbeg in the novel is also consistent with, and an extension of, cultural productions that emerged during the period of Albania's national awakening. The figure of Skanderbeg loomed large in *Rilindja* art; he came to be seen as the embodiment of Albanian defiance. It is worth noting that this mythic vision of Skanderbeg continued and was even perpetuated further under Enver Hoxha's government. Under Hoxha, the Communist state built much of its legitimacy on the back of national mythology, and it used folkloric tales and historical figures as the foundations on which to construct it. In 1968, this symbolic connection was concretised as, on the five hundredth anniversary of Skanderbeg's death, Tirana's main square was renamed Skanderbeg Square [*Sheshi Skënderbej*], and a monument to him was erected in the space.

Despite his appearance as a unifying figure of Albanian struggle from the *Rilindja* period to Hoxha's dictatorship, the process of Skanderbeg's mythologisation has been characterised by conflict and contradictions. He was and continues to be a complex figure—a hero twice over. A fifteenth-century military commander, Skanderbeg's original mythic image was constructed around his valour in combat and his Catholicism; he was seen as a defender of Christianity against Ottoman Muslim barbarism. During the *Rilindja*, he then became mythologised for a second time as a national, folk symbol of collective resistance instead of a religious symbol. The shift in Skanderbeg's mythic image is consonant with the idea that *Albanianness* is bound up with blood [*gjak*] and with ethnicity, language and culture, rather than being based on a quality defined around religious identity. In his study of the *Rilindja*, Stavro Skendi thus notes that the promotion of

[23] Aleksić, p. 64.

identity markers that brought people together, like their shared language, was more important than religion for the leaders of the national movement.[24] Peter Morgan likewise suggests that this rejection of religion is significant as organised religion tended to be associated with the Ottoman Empire.[25]

The construction of Skanderbeg's contradictory mythic identity reflects Albania's history: Skanderbeg was known by both his Turkish mononym and his given name, Gjergj Kastrioti; he was born a Christian, was made to convert to Islam when he fought as a janissary *for* the Ottomans and then became a Christian again to fight *against* them. In this way, Skanderbeg not only encapsulates Albanian resistance, but his mediated image also embodies the conflictual and complex nature of post-Ottoman Albanian identity. Indeed, Skanderbeg's place in the Albanian imaginary as a venerated mythical figure comes from his reclamation of Albanian identity in the face of Ottoman rule. He is, in a sense, symbolic proof that an individual can find their way back to their Albanian identity and that, ultimately, *Albanianness* is something that can always be restored.

## Skanderbeg in Literature—in Albania and Beyond

As we saw in the extract from his poem at the beginning of this chapter, Naim Frashëri was one of the leading proponents of Albanian nationalism during the *Rilindja*. Writing during the nineteenth century, when Albania was part of the Ottoman Empire, he significantly contributed to the mythopoetic vision of Skanderbeg as the nation's protector and hero. Frashëri is widely considered one of Albania's most significant poets and is best known for his epic poem *Histori e Skënderbeut* (The History of Skanderbeg), as well as his Romantic depictions of the natural world as an earthy repository for *Albanianness* and the sublime in other works like his poem of 1886 *Bagëti e Bujqësi* (*Livestock and Agriculture*). *Histori e Skënderbeut* is a monumental depiction of Skanderbeg's

[24] Stavro Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 111.
[25] Peter Morgan, 'Between Albanian Identity and Imperial Politics: Ismail Kadare's "The Palace of Dreams"', *The Modern Language Review*, 97.2 (2002), 365-379, (p. 372).

rebellion and victories at his castle in Krujë; the poem consists of over 11,000 verses. Robert Elsie argues that Frashëri's symbolic status in the Albanian cultural imaginary does not just stem from his artistic ability but rather comes from the socio-political and philosophical messages that his poetry transmitted at a time when Albania's aspirations for nationhood were being promoted in artistic forms.[26] The socio-political messages of his poetry promote a nationalist vision of Albanian struggle against the Ottomans that we can also read as Orientalist; it depicts an idyllic and idealised version of Medieval Albania as a bastion of civilised, European values that is destabilised by eastern, Ottoman forces. We can see how Frashëri's literary output was often centred on these artistic expressions of Albanian national identity, from his epic exploration of Skanderbeg's heroism to his depictions of the natural world.

In *Les Tambours de la pluie*, Kadare writes himself into a similar literary space as he employs the tropes of Albania fighting a barbaric, eastern horde and looks to an artistic tradition of Albanian mythology in which Skanderbeg is positioned as a figure of hope and resistance. Tatjana Aleksić sees this as an 'unfortunate occurrence' in Kadare's work as he creates a dichotomy between outside influences—in this case, Muslim Ottomans—and an autochthonous Albania.[27] However, I argue that in *Les Tambours de la pluie*, the evocation of nationalist and Orientalist tropes similar to those visible in Frashëri's poetry, and which are present in the art of the *Rilindja* more broadly, can be seen to conceptualise Albania's twentieth-century isolation and its position between east and west—Europe, the Soviet Union and China—within an existing framework of struggle in Albanian art. By situating himself within an established Albanian cultural tradition, Kadare also contributes to a mythic image of national identity as the novel examines conflict in the face of an external, existential threat to *Albanianness*. The novel also evokes the natural world in the text to show how it is a force that is on the side of the Albanians. For example, just as Frashëri focuses on the beauty of Albania's mountains in the first line of *Bagëti e Bujqësi*[28], the jagged peaks are the first sight the

[26] Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Albania*, p. 151.
[27] Aleksić, p. 64.
[28] 'O malet' e Shqipërisë e ju o lisat' e gjatë', Naim Frashëri quoted in Robert Elsie, *Albanian Literature: A Short History* (London: Taurus, 2005), pp. 232-33. Robert Elsie translates this line as: 'Oh mountains of

Ottoman army has of Albania in Kadare's novel and they signal hostility to these invaders; their beauty is reconfigured into signifiers of danger to these outsiders.

Similarly, when the rain eventually comes at the end of *Les Tambours de la pluie*, the Ottomans are swiftly pushed back and defeated. In the brief account of the event in the Albanian section, the simile, which aligns the droplets of rain with Albanian tears, communicates an archaic and elemental bond between the besieged and their landscape. By evoking this signifier of grief and mourning, the passage shows how the natural world is perceived as an extension of a cohesive and all-encompassing Albanian identity that aligns with Romantic *Rilindja* ideals: 'Il se mit à pleuvoir à l'aube du premier jour du mois de la Saint Shenmiter. Je m'apprêtais à faire relever les sentinelles quand les premières gouttes se mirent à tomber, lourdes comme des larmes.'[29] ['*Shiu nisi në agun e ditës së parë të muajit shëmitër. Po bëhesha gati të ndërroja shërbimin e rojave, kur ranë pikat e para, të rënda si lot*'[30]]. The image of nature is taken further in the novel as Albania becomes a place where magic and the divine intersect with the physical reality of siege. The invocation of elemental pagan spirits, 'La bonne Fée de l'Albanie'[31] ['*Orën e Mirë të Shqipërisë*'[32]] and 'les fées et les farfadets'[33] ['*orët e zanat*'[34]] rather than angels and the Christian marvellous, show the vestigial traces of a pre-Christian belief system rooted in nature and the supernatural. By combining Christian and pre-Christian imagery in the text's Albanian sections in this way, Kadare weaves in threads of mythic *Albanianness* from across centuries to reflect the multi-layered nature of national identity.

Returning to Skanderbeg, it is interesting to note that before the *Rilindja*, Skanderbeg also held an important place in the European literary imaginary during the Renaissance as a figure of rebellion

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Albania and you, oh trees so lofty' in *Classical Albanian Literature: A Reader* (London: Centre for Albanian Studies, 2015), p. 14.

[29] *T* (F), p. 341.
[30] *T* (A), p. 279.
[31] *T* (F), p. 62.
[32] *T* (A), p. 36.
[33] *T* (F), p. 213.
[34] *T* (A), p. 167.

and a hero of the Western world—as a Christian triumphing against the Ottomans. For example, *The Scanderbeide* by Margherita Sarrocchi, which first appeared in unfinished draft form in 1606 and was published in full posthumously in 1623, was one of the first heroic epics to be written by a woman. Rinaldina Russell points out how, in Sarrocchi's time, the choice of Skanderbeg and his triumph over the Ottomans as the hero of the epic would have seemed an obvious one: to the Roman Church, the Ottoman Empire represented the greatest threat to Christianity.[35] Voltaire, too, wrote about Skanderbeg in his *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756). With this European cultural context in mind, Alexandre Zotos traces the significant interest Skanderbeg received in Western European literature and looks at his place in French and Italian cultural products during the Renaissance, with Christianity, mercantilism and political alliances all contributing to the creation of his image outside of Albania:

> Que ce thème Scanderbeg ait pris naissance et connu son premier essor en Italie, cela se conçoit aisément: le rôle de Venise dans la lutte du prince albanais contre les Ottomans, son alliance avec le royaume de Naples, l'intéressement de Rome, capitale de la chrétienté, la proximité géographique, enfin, qui dès l'Antiquité a placé l'Albanie sous le regard—et sur la route—des Italiens, tout cela créait une curiosité naturelle, sans doute, en même temps qu'un filon aussi glorieux que lucratif.[36]

Skanderbeg's Christianity and proximity to Western European spaces were defining factors in this creation and mediation of his image as a hero outside of Albania since he symbolises a rejection of Islam, Asia and Ottoman identity. Traces of this persist in his image as a protector of Albania and the civilised world in *Rilindja* art. But as we have seen, Skanderbeg's image also altered significantly within Albanian literature and culture by the twentieth century. He had become a folk symbol of resistance rather than a defender of Christianity against the invading Muslim hordes during the Albanian national awakening—although religion was not a defining feature of Albanian identity during the *Rilindja*, it is also worth noting that by the nineteenth century many Albanians

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[35] Rinaldina Russell, 'Margherita Sarrocchi and the Writing of the Scanderbeide', in *Scanderbeide: the heroic deeds of George Scanderbeg, King of Epirus*, ed. and trans. by Rinaldina Russell (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2006), pp. 1-44, p. 21.

[36] Alexandre Zotos, 'La figure de Scanderbeg dans les lettres françaises de la Renaissance à l'Age Classique', *Balkan Studies*, 37 (1996), 77-105 (pp. 79-80).

were Muslim after years of Ottoman rule—when Albania was looking to assert its own nationalist aspirations.

By the mid-twentieth century, Skanderbeg's standing as a national hero was firmly established. Under Hoxha, nationalist mythology played an important role in fostering unity; stories of ancient Illyria, the time of Skanderbeg and the *Rilindja* itself were promoted as significant moments in Albania's 'glorious past'.[37] These moments, and their heroes, were reproduced in art and literature during the communist period. Skanderbeg was depicted in the 1953 film *The Great Warrior Skanderbeg* [*Luftëtari i madh i Shqipërisë Skënderbeu*], a joint Soviet-Albanian coproduction which received the International Prize at the Cannes Film Festival. The film's Albanian title gives prominence to his national identity: *The Great Albanian* [*i Shqipërisë*] *Warrior Skanderbeg*. Animated in cinematic form, Skanderbeg was given a face in a modern artistic medium for the first time, outside of oral stories, literature and paintings—although it is also worth highlighting that a Georgian actor, Akaki Khorava, portrayed him. Fatos Lubonja argues how, in the film, Skanderbeg's connection with the Christian world is ignored, Venice is depicted as a threat, and the Turks are the force of evil,[38] in a way that shrinks the boundaries of his mythic image further down to his *Albanianness*, stripping him of his Western European connections. By the time of Hoxha's regime, Skanderbeg's associations with Christianity had been largely written out of his identity as a national hero and he was defined by his Albanian identity.

Kadare was also writing *Les Tambours de la pluie* during Hoxha's regime at a time when moments of historical rebellion against a world hostile to *Albanianness* were being written into the collective memory and made relevant to the twentieth-century geopolitical landscape. And real rebellion from within Albania's own borders against the state was quashed. Within the novel, Kadare approaches this uneasy artistic tension between structures of power as he shows how the creation

[37] Fatos Lubonja, 'Between a Virtual and a Real World', in *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, ed. by Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd Fischer (London: Hurst, 2002), pp. 91-103, p. 95.
[38] Lubonja, 'Between a Virtual and a Real World', p. 96.

of myths is bound up with questions of narrative authority and the—at times, absurd—circularity of writing history. We see the Ottomans and the besieged Albanians use their narrative perspectives to take control over the events of battle and the stories that come with them. The writer also shows that Albania's history of Ottoman occupation cannot be erased or viewed solely through the prism of rebellion, even when myths of heroism emerge as the dominant discourse around an event. History, in *Les Tambours de la pluie*, is in the eye of the beholder and the narrative form reflects this; the text's shifting perspectives highlight the subjectivity of history and the changeable nature of myth. The recording of historical events and the role of the chronicle feed into the next contextual layer explored here in this chapter.

Marin Barleti and the Chronicle

What purpose does a chronicle serve, and how can the identity of the chronicler influence this purpose? A chronicle can be factual or fictitious; it can be a faithful account of historical events written by an eyewitness or a distorted version asserting the ideological will of the chronicler—or a combination of the two. In *Les Tambours de la pluie*, Kadare uses the chronicle as an artistic medium within the narrative to show how the recording of events can become a way of owning history. Parts of the novel are recounted from the point of view of the Ottoman chronicler, Mevla Çelebi. Through Çelebi's perspective, we see how writing a chronicle involves creating a mythology around the battle that will shape how people who were not there will memorialise the events of the siege when he is told: 'Les chroniques sont bonnes pour les générations à venir, ou pour ces dames d'Edirne'[39] ['*Kronikat janë për brezat që vijnë ose për hanëmet e Edrenesë*'[40]]. The construction of this intratextual Ottoman chronicle gestures towards the future to show how art shapes the way in which history is remembered.

[39] *T* (F), p. 163.
[40] *T* (A), p. 124.

It is important to note the relationship between the potential creative power of the intratextual chronicle in *Les Tambours de la pluie* and the actual chronicle that influenced the novel. Alongside the lived reality of Hoxha's regime and the cultural inheritance of the *Rilindja*, Kadare's own depiction of the siege in *Les Tambours de la pluie was* informed by *The Siege of Shkodra* [*Rrethimi i Shkodrës*], a sixteenth-century chronicle by the historian and Catholic priest Marin Barleti.[41]

Barleti's chronicle is an immediate and visceral confrontation with the past. The chronicler lived through three sieges during the fifteenth century and his accounts of the sieges were based on events he witnessed first-hand. *The Siege of Shkodra* is particularly significant as it is one of the earliest extant works to emerge from Albania; although it was written in Latin, it is a foundational part of the nation's written literary heritage. As well as his experience of siege by the invading Ottomans, Barleti is known for his biography of Skanderbeg, the *History of the Life and Deeds of Skanderbeg, Prince of Epirus* (1508-1510), which gave rise to the figure's mythic image in Albania and abroad. So by exploring the events of a siege and the figure of Skanderbeg in *Les Tambours de la pluie,* Kadare highlights the palimpsestic nature of writing history as he borrows traces from earlier works and writes over them.

In his conversation with Alain Bosquet, Kadare outlines the influence that Barleti's chronicle had on his novel:

> Parmi ces spectres poussiéreux que l'Europe attendait d'accueillir comme les héros de l'époque se trouvait un prêtre, Marin Barletius, le premier biographe de Georges Castriote Skanderbeg. Il publia [ … ] son célèbre premier livre, *Le Siège de Shkoder*. L'ouvrage, rédigé en latin et imprimé dans de nombreuses capitales d'Europe, est l'un des témoignages les plus bouleversants de l'époque. Bien que, dans *Les Tambours de la pluie,* il ne soit fait état que du début des hostilités, lesquelles se poursuivirent pendant près de trente-cinq ans, l'ouvrage de Barletius, ce chant du cygne, a servi de fondement au mien. Il m'a fourni un des points de vue sur la tragédie, celui des assiégés.[42]

[41] The chronicle was originally published in Latin in 1504 under the title *De obsidione Scodrensi*. Marin Barleti was also known by the name Marinus Barletius.
[42] Kadare, *Dialogue avec Alain Bosquet,* p. 91.

The concept of the *spectre* invoked here is not emphasised but it is highly suggestive. The notion of a historical spectre returning through the centuries—as we have seen is the case with the figure of Skanderbeg in the formation of Albanian identity—encapsulates a concern with the writing of history and with the narrative authority implied by any writing of history. In fact, who owns the spectre of Skanderbeg? The dual narrative perspective in *Les Tambours de la pluie* highlights this question. We can develop this question further in light of Jacques Derrida's notion that Marx is a spectre haunting European consciousness: for Derrida the haunting presence of the spectral figure no longer belongs to any fixed or specific ideological or narrative authority. In the novel, with its intertextual play on both the sixteenth-century chronicle and on the *Rilindja* movement, Kadare seeks to inscribe his text within a collective memory that at the same time appears to flood it or to contaminate it. It is in this ambivalent alignment of the literary text with the collective temporality of legend that the novel explores the spectral, pervasive quality of the Skanderbeg myth. Asking what is a spectre, Derrida questions how this temporality goes beyond linear boundaries:

> What is the time and what is the history of a specter? Is there a present of the specter? Are its comings and goings according to the linear succession of a before and an after, between a present-past, a present-present, and a present-future, between a "real time" and a "deferred time"?[43]

Here, the present cannot be blocked off from what comes before or after it, and this temporal haunting works to shape the past and the future. Applying this mode of thought to the chronicle, we see narrative traces of Barleti's chronicle *haunt* Kadare's text (and *Rilindja* literary works that feature Skanderbeg), and we see the ways in which Barleti's chronicle, in turn, is *contaminated* by its representation in the twentieth-century novel. Together, these works exist on a continuum of Albanian art and history and constitute the mythic vision of collective struggle in the face of invasion.

[43] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 48.

Indeed, Barleti's chronicle and his biography of Skanderbeg had a great influence on the construction of Albanian identity. Robert Elsie writes that Barleti laid the foundations for the mythic image of Skanderbeg among Albanians in Albania and diaspora communities, 'an almost saintly veneration of the Albanian national hero as the symbol and quintessence of resistance to foreign domination'.[44] For Kadare, Barleti's *Siege of Shkodra* also captures the paradox of siege literature: it gives access to a particular kind of closed-off space, within the walls of the besieged space—and within the memory of the chronicler.

In *Les Tambours de la pluie*, Kadare too examines this relationship between the internal and external, between literature and memory. He recasts Skanderbeg in a way that not only sees the figure as a mythical protector of Albanian identity and as an enemy of the Ottomans, but also as a vessel onto which artists are able to imprint Albania's history symbolically. In rewriting Skanderbeg in this way, Kadare's text chimes with Éric Faye's observation that Skanderbeg's place in the Albanian literary imaginary is inescapable:

> Les grands intellectuels albanais ont rarement pu mener à bien une œuvre sans l'évoquer : Marin Barleti, Frang Bardhi, puis les figures de proue de la *Rilindja*, que ce soit le poète arberèche Hiéronyme de Rada ou Naïm Frashëri et son poème épique resté célèbre, *L'Histoire de Skanderbeg*.[45]

In *Les Tambours de la pluie*, this idea of Skanderbeg's inescapability is taken one step further. The Albanian hero is characterised by his absence; he exists, at once, as warrior, ghost and myth in Kadare's text. He is alluded to in both the Ottoman and Albanian passages as a formidable opponent and saviour, respectively, and his presence is hinted at through whispered rumours. To the Albanians, he is '*notre* Prince, Georges Castriote'[46] ['*princit* tone, *Gjergj Kastriotit*'[47]], and to the Ottomans, he is known simply by his Turkish mononym, Skanderbeg [*Skënderbeu*]. This lexical distinction highlights how Skanderbeg's image is created and mediated, in turn, by his

[44] Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Albania*, p. 35.
[45] Éric Faye, Preface to *Les tambours de la pluie*, in Ismail Kadare, *Œuvres : tome deuxième* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), p. 19.
[46] *T* (F), p. 22, my emphasis added.
[47] *T* (A), p. 4, my emphasis added.

subjects and his enemies; both the Albanians and Ottomans are able to define themselves through their relationship to him. There is also a suggestion here that Skanderbeg's dual identity in the text offers a way into its examination of history and the subjectivity of historical narratives. As Kadare draws attention to Skanderbeg within both narrative perspectives, he becomes one of the novel's organising centres around which Albanian and Ottoman loyalties are defined. As we have seen, his double mythologisation within the novel is consistent with and an extension of his complex extratextual status as a hero. Yet Skanderbeg's characterisation in the text can also be seen as a poetic depiction of how history itself is written. History in *Les Tambours de la pluie*, like Skanderbeg's image, is conflictual and contradictory, and it cannot be reduced to one overarching, definitive narrative.

## (Re-)Writing History

> La guerre prend fin, mais le chant qui l'exalte continue de se mouvoir de génération en génération. Il se meut à l'instar d'un nuage, d'un oiseau, d'un fantôme, comme tu voudras. Et il engendre une nouvelle guerre, car le monde est ainsi fait que toute chose se reproduit.[48]
>
> *Lufta mbaron, kënga vazhdon të lëvizë nga brezi në brez. Lëviz si mjegull, si zog, si hijë, merre si të duash. Ajo pjell përsëri luftë, sepse kjo botë është ndërtuar në një mënyrë të tillë, që çdo gjë pjell vetveten*.[49]

Ismail Kadare addresses the problem of writing and rewriting history in the novel. On a structural level, the way in which the events of the siege are portrayed doubly—and even repeated from the point of view of both the Ottomans and the Albanians—highlights the novel's focus on the circularity of history: history as event and history as retelling, the event being constituted *as* event only in the act of being told. By using the motif of writing history in this way, *Les Tambours de la pluie* ultimately lacks the neatness of a resolution. In place of a resolution, the novel explores how the process of recording history, or the poetic rendering of history, cannot really be controlled as textual and narrative history. Rather, history as narration and collective textual memory is

[48] *T* (F), pp. 170-171.
[49] *T* (A), p. 130.

something that can always bleed, again, and will never be settled. There is no final narration. No telling to end all retellings. In this way, history writing has a temporality and a structure of open-ended repetition similar to that of an unresolvable feud, or a system of vendetta. History writing carries forward its retelling like a system of debt, and it exists within a nexus of power, caught between the winner and the loser's narratives.

The novel examines how history is written, rewritten and amended by the victors. In turn, it also explores how identity, resistance and alternative narratives of history can be formed in the shadows, in the darkness and even through absence. This is exemplified in the depiction of Skanderbeg's night-time raid from the Albanian point of view: 'Il est minuit passé. Leur camp immense se convulse, halète comme si on le déchiquetait. Georges est là, en bas, parmi eux. Il les frappe, les harcèle comme lui seul sait le faire. La nuit est noire, nous ne voyons rien.'[50] ['*Ka kaluar mesnata. Logu i tyre i paskaj përpëlitet e gulçon sikur po e presin me gërshërë kahmos. Gjergji është atje poshtë, midis tyre. I grin e i çmend, ashtu si di ai. Nata është e zezë shkrumb e ne nuk shohim asgjë*'[51]]. Here, the staccato prose mimics Skanderbeg's rapid-fire attack on the Ottoman camp; it also conveys the Albanian chronicler's breathless excitement as he records the event, unseeing in the darkness. As well as evoking Skanderbeg's immediate and inescapable presence in the Ottoman camp, the phrase 'parmi eux' can be seen to recall his time as a soldier for the invaders; it is suggestive of his complex identity. However, as the final sentence reveals that the raid is not visible to those looking on, Skanderbeg also takes on a ghostly quality—the 'furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible'[52]—operating from the shadows and ultimately defined by absence.

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the novel's dual perspective gives both the invaders and the besieged a voice—a means of living beyond the siege (in artistic form within the chronicle)

[50] *T* (F), p. 256.
[51] *T* (A), p. 204.
[52] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 6.

and against the inevitable bias of historical narration and its victor's perspective. Looking to the past in *Les Tambours de la pluie*, Kadare explores this through the act of writing; he writes himself and his version of Albania's historical resistance into a Balkan artistic tradition. At the same time he approaches how the ownership of history and its heroes is contestable, always shifting. In this way, history becomes a space for conflictual narratives and exists as a secondary, symbolic and poetic, battlefield on which the Ottomans and Albanians must fight. How does he use the chronicle to depict this? Furthermore, how are existing myths of Skanderbeg and collective resistance symbolically rewritten, against the real-world backdrop of fear and censorship that came from Kadare's life under a dictatorship? Looking at the ways in which these concerns each interact with one another in *Les Tambours de la pluie* brings out a discussion of Kadare's poetic confrontation with, and his contribution to, the continuum of Albanian cultural mythology.

## Questions of Identity

The Albanian academic Enis Sulstarova puts forward the argument that there is almost no work of Kadare's that does not deal with the subject of Albania and Albanians, whose characters, Albanians and foreigners alike, do not speak about Albanian history and the fate of the Albanian people.[53] In *Les Tambours de la pluie*, Kadare conceptualises what it is to be Albanian and how it is an identity rooted in the experience of invasion and resistance. He uses both the Albanian and Ottoman narrative voices to do this. Through their viewpoint as outsiders, the Ottoman perspective recasts conceptions of Albanian national identity as the invaders look from outside the citadel towards the inside, and, in turn, look from the outside upon Albanian culture but with the subsequent purpose of dominating it as future occupiers. In this way, Kadare uses the dual narrative perspectives to frame questions of identity and the mutability of identity discourse grounded in the experience of conflict and invasion. There are three main points of intersection in the novel, in which questions of identity, narrative authority and mythopoetics come together. We

[53] Sulstarova, p. 134. Translation by Erica Weitzman in 'Specters of Narrative', p. 285.

can look at the text's focus on the castle, chronicle and the figure of Skanderbeg, and explore how each of these symbolic images interacts with one another as they form the organising centre of *Les Tambours de la pluie*.

The Castle

As one of the novel's organising centres, the Albanian fortress functions as the physical and symbolic meeting point between the besieged Albanians and the Ottoman invaders, as well as the past and the present. Since both the besieged and the invaders define themselves through their relationship to the castle, Kadare also plays with the multiple implications of the physical boundaries of the castle itself. Hence, the particular relationship between the interior as a protected space and the exterior as a site of conflict also comes to involve the novel's focus on narrative creation as the site where the meaning of history is decided. The intratextual chronicle thus reflects the stakes of history writing situated in the context of the physical boundary that is the castle. What is allowed into the castle and the chronicle tests the idea of the building and the narrative as protected spaces. For the chronicle, this means that the glorious Ottoman grand narrative to be promoted by the invaders after their victory, and repeated through the ages, is marred by the Albanians' resistance. And for the castle, and the Albanians within, contact with the exterior results in suffering, sacrifice and the inevitability of invasion in the future. Acknowledging this tension between the internal and the external also recalls, on a metatextual level, the immediate context into which the novel was published; Kadare wrote the novel from within Albania's strict borders. Anything beyond the nation's borders, for Enver Hoxha, signified threat.

The central tension between the internal and external that is intrinsic to siege literature plays out also in the structure of *Les Tambours de la pluie*. As Kadare focuses the novel's confrontation between the Ottomans and the Albanians around the castle, the dual narrative perspective reflects the physical boundaries drawn by the castle walls. Matteo Mandalà thus sees the castle walls as both a physical and symbolic boundary marker between the two distinct perspectives that make up

the novel's narrative architecture.[54] Kadare further explores the tension between the castle's interior and exterior by focusing on the prevailing mood within the fortress and outside of it as both sides' passions shift in line with their fortunes. At the end of the novel, the Albanians' good fortune acts as the counterbalance to the Ottomans' humiliation; the castle walls reflect this asymmetry as they delineate the boundaries between the besieged and the invaders—and between victory and defeat. Finally, Kadare exploits the tension between the internal and external as the novel stages questions of space and existential out-of-placeness. For the Ottomans, their confrontation with the castle structure makes their foreignness clear; its spatial configuration and their relationship to it recasts their conception of both invasion and victory and how these ideas are closely dependent on their identity.

For the Albanians, their physical placement within the castle walls is also bound up with their identity. Their selfhood becomes inextricable from their enclosure within the castle, and from the castle itself; indeed, the Albanians' solitude and sense of claustrophobia are so palpable that they take on a tangible quality that replicates the edifice's materiality: 'Le calme continue. Mais, comme tout calme où gît l'inconnu, il pèse.'[55] ['*Qetësia vazhdon. Por ajo është e lodhshme si çdo qetësi që fsheh të panjohurën*'[56]]. Alongside this centrality of the fortress's weighty materiality and its connection to the Albanians' existence, the importance of the castle structure is also visible outside of the main narration itself. The updated Albanian title, *Kështjella*, translates as 'the castle', which centres the edifice in a way that neither the French nor English titles do. In his foreword to Jusuf Vrioni's French translation of the text, Éric Faye observes the extratextual significance of the structure. Faye writes that the novel's Albanian title not only helps to situate the narrative within a Balkan literary tradition but also sees it as a means of placing the text within a broader European

[54] Matteo Mandalà, 'Kështjella e letërsisë dhe themelet e poetikës Kadareane', in Ismail Kadare, *Kështjella* (Tirana: Onufri, 2015), p. vii. Mandalà writes: 'Trojet e ndara nga muret u përgjigjen dy hapësirave narrative të mbyllura, që janë edhe dy elementet kryesore që përbëjnë arkitekurën e romanit' ('The spaces separated by the walls correspond to two closed narrative spaces, which are also the two central elements that make up the architecture of the novel').

[55] *T* (F), p. 61.

[56] *T* (A), p. 35.

literary framework that makes reference to the symbolic significance of castle structures generally—the title also nods towards Kafka's novel of the same name.[57] Because of this, Faye notes that the novel borrows from and contributes to an inheritance of literariness that is realised through the symbolism of the castle. This shows how Kadare's novel can be, at once, situated within an artistic tradition that embraces *Albanianness* and looks beyond Albania's borders. Éric Faye goes on to underscore the significance of the castle's materiality within the broader framework of Kadare's oeuvre. He writes that the title belongs to a Kadarean pattern that places great emphasis on the tangibility of stone, which is also made evident in *Chronique de la Ville de pierre* (1970), *Le Pont aux trois arches* [*Ura me tri harqe*] (1978), and *La Pyramide* [*Piramida*] (1992). Beyond their materiality, each of these titular stone structures possesses symbolic importance, and their tangibility ultimately provides a point of entry to their allegorical trappings. However, as Faye notes: 'Kadaré aime particulièrement donner à ses œuvres des titres évoquant des constructions puissantes, en pierre [ … ] Dans la mémoire collective, une citadelle renvoie à une très vieille tradition : la littérature de sièges'.[58] So just as the novel's title can be seen as a nod to world literature more widely, situating the novel within the context of siege literature is helpful as it provides a mode of entry to Kadare's enactments of rupture, transition and enclosure in the text.

In siege literature, the fall of the citadel marks a transitional moment in which two things occur: a nation dies and is reborn, and imperial power passes from the hands of the past into the hands of the future.[59] In *Les Tambours de la pluie*, the inevitable fall of the Albanian fortress remains unseen in the novel; it lies ahead in a future that is uncharted by the narrative. Yet Kadare's novel still examines the theme of transition between temporalities and spatialities as the fall of the citadel always remains potential. As the castle thus comes to reflect the topoi of transition and movement,

[57] Faye, Preface to *Les tambours de la pluie*, p. 17.
[58] Ibid., p. 18.
[59] Suzanne Akbari, 'Erasing the Body: History and Memory in Medieval Siege Poetry, in *Remembering the Crusades: Myth, Image, and Identity*, ed. by Nicholas Paul and Suzanne Yeager, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), pp. 146-73 (p. 149).

the Albanian narrative passages, on a structural level, rupture the text's main narration. They show how the power and movement of the invading army are impeded by the castle and the besieged within its walls. And, eventually, when the rains ensure an Albanian victory that is ultimately beyond the control of both the besieged and the invaders, the castle stands as a physical reminder of ruptured imperial Ottoman power. This is because, in contrast to the castle's permanence, the Ottoman army is aligned with movement. As the invaders enter Albanian space at the beginning of the novel, Kadare draws attention to the urgency of their movements:

> Au matin du 18 juin, à la pointe de l'aube, on entendit sonner le tocsin. La sentinelle de la tour Est annonça qu'un nuage jaunâtre était apparu dans le lointain. C'était la poussière de leurs chevaux.[60]
>
> *Në mëngjesin e 13 qershorit, ndaj të gdhirë, ra kambana e kishëzës. Roja e pirgut lindor kishte pikasur në largësi një si mjegull të verdhë. Ishte pluhuri i tyre*.[61]

Foregrounding the sensory impact of the Ottomans here anticipates the disturbance that their arrival will have on the Albanians. As Kadare draws attention to this granularity, which connotes speed and dynamism, the castle's stone structure, by contrast, is immovable. It blends in with the Albanian landscape and it becomes an extension of the hostile, jagged mountains that surround the Ottoman army as they enter into Albanian territory. As the narrative shifts to the Ottoman perspective, the invading soldiers grow visibly uncomfortable around and even afraid of their foreign surroundings. This vision of the threatening Albanian landscape, as we see it conveyed through the invaders' eyes, throws the image of encirclement into sharp relief once more: as the Ottomans surround the Albanians, they too find themselves surrounded by their unknown landscape. In the novel, this image of encirclement is taken a step further at the end of the narrative when the depiction of the defeated Ottomans leaving Albania has echoes of their arrival: '"Tiens", dit Aïsel en tendant le bras vers sa droite, voilà sur la montagne les petits villages que nous avons remarqués à l'aller'[62] ['"*Ja, ato katundet e vogla në pllajë, që i pamë kur erdhëm*", *tha Ajseli, duke*

[60] *T* (F), p. 23.
[61] *T* (A), p. 4.
[62] *T* (F), p. 342.

*treguar me dorë, diku nga e djathta*'[63]]. As the natural world encircles them, a sense of claustrophobia pervades the Ottoman passages and the novel as a self-contained whole. The image serves as a final reminder to the departing Ottomans that they cannot fully escape their enemy, in the same way that the Albanians will not escape them.

For the Albanians, the Ottomans also symbolise alterity and hostility. The castle walls become displaced boundary markers, which delineate a redrawn, temporary border between Europe and Asia. When they surround the citadel, the invading army represents the otherness of the Islamic world: 'A nos pieds s'étendait l'Asie avec son mysticisme et sa barbarie, fosse et ténèbres qui se préparaient à tous nous engloutir'[64] ['*Poshtë nesh ishte Azia me tërë mistikën dhe barbarinë e saj. Gropa dhe terri që bëhej gati të na thithte të gjithëve*'[65]]. The implication of all-consuming, monstrous greed in this image, made visible through the particular focus of the verb 'engloutir' ['*thithte*'], emphasises the Ottomans' foreignness and power as an insatiable imperial force—an echo of the Orientalist depictions of the Ottomans in Frashëri's writing and art from the *Rilindja*. This description perhaps also evokes, indirectly, the relationship between the text and Kadare's lived experience of Albania's bunkerisation under Enver Hoxha. Using the symbolic prisms of siege literature and historical conflict to depict Albania's isolation, the writer explores the symbolic resources of the citadel boundary, demarcating an inside from an outside, considered as closed realms determined by their relation to one another. Both the besieged and the invaders fall prey to fear and even paranoia. Here, Kadare's novel poetically represents what Peter Morgan sees as Albania's 'infectious history'[66]; *Les Tambours de la pluie* shows how Albania—even across temporal boundaries—and *Albanianness* taint those who come into contact with it. The connection between the siege and Hoxha's bunkerisation participates in this structure as the story of

[63] *T* (A), p. 280.
[64] *T* (F), p. 86.
[65] *T* (A), p. 55.
[66] Peter Morgan, 'Ismail Kadaré's *The Shadow*: Literature, Dissidence, and Albanian Identity', *East European Politics & Societies*, 22.2 (2008), 402-424 (p. 410).

encirclement and enclosure appears symbolically to gather the entire Albanian historical experience into one.

Symbols and allusions to the historical and mythical also have a bearing on the castle's organisation within the text. The structure remains unnamed throughout *Les Tambours de la pluie*, just as the Albanians within it remain anonymous. Although the castle has been read as Skanderbeg's fortress in Krujë, which was the site of his armed struggles against the Ottoman Empire, the structure also stands as a symbolic site of confrontation between different temporalities. Its namelessness allows it to stand in for Albania as a whole. This is made evident when Tursun Pasha, the leader of the invading army, first surveys the fortress. He focuses on two elements that are constitutive of a pre-Ottoman vision of *Albanianness*: 'Il chercha du regard la croix en haut de l'église de la citadelle. Puis la bannière redoutable, l'oiseau noir bicéphale dont il devina le dessin plus qu'il ne le distingua vraiment.'[67] ['*Një copë herë e kërkoi me sy kryqin mbi kishëzën e fortesës. Pastaj flamurin e frikshëm, zogun e zi dykrerësh, të cilin më shumë e mori me mend, sesa e shqoi vërtet*'[68]]. Both the double-headed eagle and the cross were signifiers of pre-Ottoman Albanian ethnic and religious identity. The double-headed eagle, in particular, continues to exist as a mythical marker of *Albanianness* because its association with Skanderbeg is inescapable. The flag is thought to have been originally raised by him in Krujë in 1443 in defiance of the Ottomans; its doubleness reflecting Skanderbeg's complex identity and his image as a hero. Reading *Les Tambours de la pluie* uncovers another mythic layer to the flag's doubleness. Like the fortress, the bicephalous eagle is symbolic of the rupture that cuts through the heart of the novel: it conveys the split between East and West, the internal and external, and the past and future.

[67] *T* (F), p. 25.
[68] *T* (A), p. 6.

The Banal and the Extraordinary

Although Kadare uses the castle to approach grand, overarching themes of national identity and myth, and questions of the internal and external, the fortress is also a point of convergence between the banal and the extraordinary. His writing often traverses the boundary space between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Here, in *Les Tambours de la pluie*, he uses the narrative to trace the quotidian details of siege and warfare more generally through the image of the castle. By doing this, the Ottoman passages undercut the creation of a glorious and absolute narrative. The intratextual Ottoman chronicle that is drafted and redrafted throughout the narrative serves to memorialise and elevate the invaders' experience of siege. Kadare uses Ottoman voices as a subtle means of dismantling their own narrative as they come into contact with their surroundings and the citadel. When the invading soldiers pass into Albania, Tursun Pasha observes how 'la vue de ces monts avait le don de rendre nerveux la plupart de ses officiers [ … ] L'armée avançait lentement, traînant maintenant avec elle, en sus de ses armes et équipements, l'ombre pesante des montagnes'[69] ['*Gjatë marshimit kishte vënë re se pamja e shkrepave ua ngucte nervat oficerëve* [ … ] *Ushtria, që lëvizte ngadalë, zvarriste tani, bashkë me armët dhe pajimet, edhe hijen e rëndë të maleve*'[70]]. Here, as explored above, the visceral and immediate fear of the invaders as they see the mountains on their march is juxtaposed with the permanence of the Albanian landscape. But on another level, the episode highlights the shifting nature of the Ottoman experience as it is eventually converted into a symbolic narrative, in which fear and weakness are edited out. This image is taken further when the Ottomans reach the ramparts of the Albanian citadel. Here, the soldiers are 'à demi morts de fatigue'[71] ['*gjysmë të vdekur nga lodhja*'[72]]; the Ottoman soldiers' human qualities are noted as they come into contact with the castle. By emphasising the soldiers' corporeality, the castle's ability to undo the work of the Ottoman chronicle is striking; once again,

[69] *T* (F), p. 28.
[70] *T* (A), p. 9.
[71] *T* (F), p. 24.
[72] *T* (A), p. 5.

the structure's materiality contrasts to the manipulable chronicle and the human qualities of the figures within the narrative.

In the opening chapter, the alignment of the Ottoman soldiers with the physical aspects of warfare is taken further: 'Avant d'être une multitude en marche, des drapeaux, du sang à verser, une victoire ou une défaite, une armée était un océan de pisse.'[73] ['*Një ushtri, përpara se të ishte marshim, flamurë, gjakderdhje, fitore ose humbje, ishte një det me shurrë*'[74]]. By listing the defining features of the military experience, the final invocation of corporeal excess subverts the overarching image of glory. But it is also possible to read control in this vision of bodily excess and spillage. As Tursun Pasha observes the ways in which a functional drainage system can determine the success of an invasion, his military prowess is made explicit. He is a figure with experience and knowledge of the intimate details of warfare. He understands that war does not create a glorious narrative; instead, it is a human experience where the banal and the extraordinary must intersect. This is further emphasised when he notes how 'l'affaiblissement d'une armée commençait non pas sur le champ de bataille, mais par de menus détails dont on ne soupçonnait pas l'importance, auxquels on ne songeait pas, comme, par exemple, la puanteur et la saleté'[75] ['*ligështimi i një ushtrie niste shpesh jo te sheshi i luftës, por në gjëra që s'ta merrte mendja, siç ishin, për shembull, era e keqe dhe ndotja*'[76]]. Tursun Pasha's physical presence is evident in this image of earthy corporeality; his awareness of battle and its banalities positions him as the fulcrum of the invaders' army. But his physical presence, as well as the focus on his interior world, contrasts with Kadare's depiction of Skanderbeg. As one of the text's main autodiegetic narrators, Tursun Pasha's internal and external presence in battle and in the Albanian landscape acts as a counterbalance to Skanderbeg's physical absence in the narrative.

[73] *T* (F), p. 27.
[74] *T* (A), p. 8.
[75] *T* (F), p. 27.
[76] *T* (A), p. 8.

The Castle and the Natural World

By privileging the internal Ottoman perspective, Kadare's focus on the invaders' experience of siege is clear. Yet the power of the invading army is also mediated through the perspective of the unseen and unnamed Albanian narrator as they observe the way in which the Ottoman army's vast swathes of tents and soldiers alter the landscape around the citadel completely:

> Leurs tentes blanches ont encerclé notre citadelle en formant autour une immense couronne. Le lendemain de leur arrivée, à l'aube, la plaine semblait couverte d'une épaisse couche de neige. On ne distinguait plus ni sol, ni verdure, ni pierres.[77]
>
> *Tendat e tyre të bardha e rrethuan kështjellën nga të katër anët, në formë kurore. Kur u gdhi mëngjesi i ditës tjetër, dukej sikur përreth kishte rënë dëborë e madhe. Nuk dukeshin as toka, as ngastrat e mbjella e as grunarët.*[78]

Likening the Ottoman camp to a blanket of snow, the Albanian chronicler also shows fear as the invaders' presence creates a sense of elemental rupture. Here, the snow simile also communicates a sense of isolation and claustrophobia, as though the Albanians are fighting against nature itself. This image is taken further as the Albanians cannot discern the difference between the earth and the stones that make up the landscape around the fortress. The presence of the Ottomans causes a breakage in the essential connection between the Albanians and their land, and they can no longer recognise their place within the landscape.

Throughout Kadare's novel, the Albanians are, in turn, connected with and cut off from the natural world in line with their shifting fortunes. Allusions to the rain, and to the spirits and fairies that the besieged see or hallucinate around the fortress, reflect their spiritual link to the land. Yet the Albanians are never able to connect *with* the natural world because of their enclosure within the castle. In a practical sense, they are thus cut off from the land that sustains them. And in a spiritual sense, the Albanians are unable to reconcile their placement and their fate with their surroundings. This confusion leads the narrator from within the walls to question where victory could come from:

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[77] *T* (F), p. 39.
[78] *T* (A), p. 17.

'on ne sait plus si l'issue de la bataille et le sort de chacun seront scellés sur cette terre noirâtre ou bien là-haut, dans les nuages'[79] ['*fati i luftës dhe i secilit prej nesh s'dihet ku do të vendoset, në token e zezë, apo lart në re*'[80]]. The natural world remains at the heart of this question as the Albanian narrator looks to both the heavens and the earth for answers.

However, despite the Ottoman army's advantages over the Albanians, the invaders ultimately lose the battle and fail to bring the Christian Albanians under Ottoman Muslim rule. In fact, it is the natural world that seems to work against the Ottomans as, in an apparent miracle, the rains come and bring an end to the siege. It is interesting to note, though, that the Ottomans' loss does not correspond to an absolute Albanian victory. For the Albanians, victory resembles the rain—it is unpredictable and ephemeral.

The Pressure of Future Sieges and Reminders of the Past

Although the Albanians' victory in the novel offers the besieged a fleeting moment of respite, the inexorable forward thrust of time dictates that the land will eventually fall to the Ottoman Empire. Suzanne Akbari argues that the novel's conclusion makes evident that both the pressure of history and the immediate pressure of the siege will continue into Albania's future while continuing to shape its past.[81] Indeed, the Ottoman army's attempt to occupy and lay claim to Albanian territory becomes part of a continuous sequence of invasions that have come before, and will inevitably come again in the future. This is emphasised in the first Albanian passage when the anonymous narrator invokes a previous Norman invasion attempt, which the Albanians were able to fight off:

> Une semaine plus tard, le sort ayant échu à notre forteresse de s'opposer la première à leur invasion, de la grande église de Shkodra nous fut apportée l'icône de la Vierge, celle qui, cent ans auparavant, avait donné aux défenseurs de Durrës le force de refouler les Normands.[82]

[79] *T* (F), pp. 62-63.
[80] *T* (A), p. 36.
[81] Akbari, 'Erasing the Body', p. 168.
[82] *T* (F), p. 22.

> *Një javë më pas, meqë kështjellës sonë i ra fati të pengonte e para dyndjen e tyre, nga kisha e madhe e Shkodrës sollën korën e Zonjës Shën Mëri, atë që dyqind vjet më parë i kishte ndihur mbrojtësit e Durrësit kundër normandëve.*[83]

The overt Christian iconography shows up a visible point of difference between the Albanians and the Muslim Ottomans. And by signalling the symbol's auspiciousness—the cross is viewed by the Albanians as a talisman—the narrative gestures towards the possibility of an Albanian victory or, rather, an Ottoman loss. But the juxtaposition of a past invasion with an impending one also illustrates how the totemic image of the cross represents an existing history of collective resistance to occupation. Its symbolic importance allows the distinction between space and time to momentarily collapse; even though the cross was used centuries before in a different place, and against another enemy, its symbolism still speaks to a collective Albanian history. For the besieged Albanians, the cross provides a tangible bond to a shared legacy of violence, invasion, and the balance between victory and loss. Looking beyond the novel's timeframe, Albania's eventual defeat to the Ottomans, as well as its absorption into the Ottoman Empire, highlights the symbol's starkness. It is a reminder of Albania's Christian past and the history of Islam's spread that, within the diegetic time horizon of the novel, is yet to come. In this way, the image of the cross ultimately serves as proof of the inevitability, and immediacy, of invasion.

By bringing the threat of invasion into sharp relief from the outset of the narrative, it is evident that the novel can be seen as a part of the continuous sequence of Albanian culture that utilises images of invasion and occupation as constitutive elements of a mythic *Albanianness*. As noted earlier in the chapter, writing into this mythic tradition of *Albanianness* allows Kadare to position himself within a literary culture that poetically explores the nation's fight to overcome external threats. In particular, Kadare's metaphorical depiction of Albania as a fortress, forced to withstand and weather attacks, can be seen to crystallise this view. In the novel, Albania is portrayed through the metonymic image of the fortress. However, it is worth noting that this image of the citadel standing

[83] *T* (A), p. 4.

alone is not a straightforwardly heroic or noble one. With Enver Hoxha's regime acting as one of the layers making up the contextual backdrop to the novel's creation and publication, Kadare employs imagery that aligns with traditional Albanian cultural productions and also gently subverts it. In this way, the citadel can be viewed as a symbol of Albania's profound isolation during the time of Enver Hoxha's 'bunkerisation' of the nation during the mid-twentieth century, as noted before.[84]

This vision of Albania as a nation set apart is, of course, reinforced through the text's structure. But the separate narratives also emphasise their textual spatial differences. As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, the Albanian sections are short and enigmatic. Their brevity reinforces the claustrophobia of siege, and their placement between each Ottoman chapter emphasises the motif of encirclement. David Bellos describes these Albanian passages that bracket the Ottoman sections as 'inter-chapters'.[85] Yet these vignettes from within the citadel can also be seen to resemble the 'poches littéraires'[86] that rupture the narrative of *Le Général de l'armée morte*, as we will see in Chapter Three. As with the 'poches littéraires', the Albanian passages in *Les Tambours de la pluie* are brief and fragmentary. But despite their brevity, the sections are significant as they serve as reminders of the Albanians' permanent and inescapable presence in their own story. Their enclosure within the castle walls means that the Ottomans are also unable to escape *them*.

Sites of Sacrifice: Structures in the Albanian Mythic Imaginary

Kadare's interest in the physical spaces where the Ottomans and Albanians meet is apparent in the novel's focalisation on the fortress. As with Kadare's other novels, the castle has, as noted above, considerable symbolic importance within the text and outside of it—within the Albanian imaginary. In particular, the extratextual significance of the fortress in *Les Tambours de la pluie*

[84] Fatos Lubonja, 'Between a Virtual and a Real World', p. 98.
[85] David Bellos, 'Afterword', p. 326.
[86] Éric Faye, Preface to *Le Général de l'armée morte*, in Ismail Kadare, *Œuvres : tome sixième* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), p. 16.

contrasts with the image of the bridge we will see in *Le Palais des rêves.* In *Le Palais des rêves,* the bridge symbolises the boundary-crossing nature of the Quprili family and name as the dynasty's influence is able to cut across different temporalities and spatialities. The bridge also suggests movement across temporalities and physical spaces as the Quprili's authority is transferred from Albania to the centre of an imperial power. As we will see, Kadare also uses the bridge structure as a poetic representation of the Balkan immurement legend. *In Le Palais des rêves,* Mark-Alem's characterisation as a figure without an interior world, impossibly caught between two sides, sees him embody the victim of immurement.

The themes of immurement and sacrifice are common in literary traditions across the Balkans, and they are recurring themes in Kadare's output beyond *Le Palais des rêves*. For example, it is the focus of *Le pont aux trois arches*, in which Kadare, like Ivo Andrić in *The Bridge on the Drina*, situates the Balkan immurement legend around the bridge structure. In Kadare's novel, the bridge suggests openness as two sides are able to communicate and trade with one another. But Kadare also focalises on the dark side of the structure as it endangers the local Albanian population, bringing the community into contact with imperial forces and capitalist enterprise.[87] Although the bridge allows openness, it also invites conquest and violence. As the Balkan legend demands, the bridge requires a sacrificial victim to ensure the structure's stability. In the novel, the sacrifice comes from Murrash Zenebisha and he enters into a contract of sacrifice that places more value on him when he is dead than alive; he is walled up in the structure. The bridge's legacy of violence—and its place at the heart of an Albanian economy of blood—is visible in both *Le pont aux trois arches* and *Le Palais des rêves.* These qualities of the bridge's internal structure that are suggestive of violence, sacrifice and an inescapable enclosure are made evident and taken further in the image of the castle in *Les Tambours de la pluie*. However, in *Les Tambours de la pluie,* we also see corporeal violence and sacrifice transposed to the *external*, to outside of the castle's walls.

[87] Aleksić, p. 56.

In *La violence et le sacré* (1972), René Girard discusses the foundational significance of sacrifice in society and its rituals. He notes that the interconnectedness between sacrifice and violence exists across cultures; communities are dependent on violence through sacrificial mechanisms. Girard notes that because of the nature of violence prevalent in humans, as individuals and communities, the impetus towards violence can linger on even when the target of violence has been removed. The relationship between residual anger and unfulfilled violent urges means that the perpetrator(s) will always seek and find a sacrificial victim. Because of this structure, Girard views most sacrificial victims as surrogates; sacrifice entails displacement or substitution. Through the act of displaced sacrifice, communities and individuals turn towards 'une victime relativement indifférente, une victime "sacrifiable"'[88] with 'une violence qui risqué de frapper des propres membres, ceux qu'elle entend à tout prix protéger.'[89] Human or animal sacrifices are made to reduce a violence intended for another. Girard goes on to assert that sacrifice can involve a whole community and can be a means of preserving that community:

> Le sacrifice, ici, a une fonction réelle et le problème de la substitution se pose au niveau de la collectivité entière. La victime n'est pas substituée à tel ou tel individu particulièrement menace, elle n'est pas offerte à tel ou tel individu particulièrement sanguinaire, elle est à la fois substituée et offerte à tous les membres de la société par tous les membres de la société. C'est la communauté entière que le sacrifice protège de *sa* propre violence, c'est la communauté entière qu'il détourne vers des victimes qui lui sont extérieures. Le sacrifice polarise sur la victime des germes de dissension partout répandus et il les dissipe en leur proposant un assouvissement partiel. [90]

This focus on sacrifice as a means of preserving or protecting the collective is significant; sacrifice can allow order to be maintained within a community. In *Le Palais des rêves,* we will see how Mark-Alem's role as the metaphorical immured victim, caught in an impossible position between his family and the state, offers both sides the opportunity to protect their power and status. Mark-Alem exists, in a sense, as a sacrificial victim twice over—he is offered up as a sacrificial victim by both his family and the state. Kadare's view of Mark-Alem as a metaphorically immured victim

[88] René Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1972), p. 17.
[89] Ibid., p. 17.
[90] Ibid., pp. 21-22, emphasis in the original.

is interesting because, traditionally, in Balkan folklore, the motif of sacrifice is aligned with the female body rather than the male one. The mechanisms of sacrifice and violence, as well as the social order of historic Balkan communities, mean that the female body as well comes to exist within this paradigm of substitution and displacement. Again, this is visible in the originary Albanian Rozafa myth, in which the wife of one of the stonemasons is immured within the castle walls, even though she was not otherwise involved in the construction of the edifice.[91] But in Kadare's texts we see this traditional vision of the sacrificed female body subverted. It is the male body that is configured through the prisms of immurement (enclosure), sacrifice and debt. In *Le Palais des rêves*, it is ultimately Mark-Alem's internal emptiness which alienates him; he is alienated from both his family and the state and, as a result, must occupy and exist within a liminal space between both sides.

Tatjana Aleksić argues that in Balkan cultures the immurement legend can be seen as a metaphor for bureaucratic or physical violation against, or the removal of, undesired bodies. Because of this, the sacrificed male body can still be read as other or feminine since the sacrificial victim exists outside of a unitary communal identity—a notion which would be based around a collective ideology.[92] For Mark-Alem, this means that his spiritual existence outside of the Palace of Dreams' bureaucratic hub and apart from his family's ethnic identity leads to his alienation. However, as we move back to *Les Tambours de la pluie*, we can see that the Ottoman soldiers also exist—both physically and spiritually—outside of a communal Albanian identity although they are closely yoked together with it.

[91] Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers recounts the legend in full, writing: 'In the legend three brothers are employed in the construction of the walls of a castle which, after being built during the day, mysteriously fall at night. The brothers are advised by a stranger that they should make a sacrifice of the wife who comes the next day with their food. They swear an oath of secrecy—none of them are to warn their wives. Only the younger brother is faithful to the oath—the others warn their wives—and it is his wife who comes and is sacrificed. Here the brothers who do not conform to their *besa*, manage to keep their wives while, because of their betrayal, the castle is built on the basis of their faithful brother's wife's sacrifice.' See Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, 'Narratives of Power: Capacities of Myth in Albania', in *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, p. 6.

[92] Aleksić, p. 17.

Aleksić goes on to write that the structures around which these narratives of sacrifice are framed come to be places where communities fall victim to greed and pettiness; these bridges and castles, as well as their sacrificial victims, are ultimately revealing of humanity's propensity for sabotage.[93] As the structures can be revealing of their original builders' greed, they dismantle the idea of an inclusive Balkan society. In *Les Tambours de la pluie*, Kadare does this through the characterisation of the Ottomans as they seek to destroy the castle. This is because the Ottomans are here depicted as destroyers of communities as they pursue imperial domination, and collective Ottoman identity is grounded in victory and conquest. Victory is then presented as an integral part of a faith system and has the same status and importance as Islam itself. In fact, victory is described in the novel as though it were a facet of the invaders' religion and hence as their divine right. Before the battle, the Ottoman Mufti informs Tursun Pasha: 'Grâces soient rendues â Allah ! Je viens de tomber sur le passage suivant : "La victoire accompagnera les soldats de l'Islam"'[94] ['"*Bismilah*" [ … ] *Në faqen që u hap ishte shkruar:"Fitorja është me ushtarët e Islamit*"[95]]. The image of victory being pre-written and predestined suggests an element of hubris as the Ottomans believe they are fated to win. For the invaders, everything exists as though the potential has already become actual; they exist both in the present and in the future vision of their victory. So it is their confrontation with the tangibility of the castle structure that ruptures the haziness of this dual temporality. The visceral immediacy of the Ottoman soldiers' suffering moves the invaders' conception of time away from the actual and back into the potential. The Ottoman body becomes the signifier of this ruptured temporality. It also comes to stand as a symbol of Ottoman suffering and sacrifice as the body exists outside of the castle and outside of a communal Albanian identity. By subverting the image of the sacrificed body from within the castle walls to without, Kadare considers how the Ottomans come to be stripped of the ideal, ideological and mythical trappings of a victory foretold. Victory reveals itself to be something which is ultimately out of reach for the invaders from the moment they scale the castle walls.

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[93] Ibid., p. 18.
[94] *T* (F), p. 95.
[95] *T* (A), p. 63.

The Suffering Body

The structure of the castle as a physical space brings out, in turn, the Ottomans' physicality. It is when the invaders attack the fortress—when their corporeality is juxtaposed with the tangible permanence of the edifice—that the narrative turns to the relationship between different aspects of the physical world. When the Ottomans attempt to breach the fortress walls, the physical reality of the attack contrasts to the image of masculine virility encoded in Tursun Pasha's view of the structure. The first wave of attack is, for the Ottomans, inglorious, bloody and humiliating. The Ottoman assault comes after a night of collective merriment in the invaders' camp; the hedonism made visible in scenes of physical excess and enjoyment before the attack underscores their physical presence: 'Un ronronnement s'élevait du camp bouillonnant de vie.'[96] ['*Fushimi ziente e gjëmonte*'[97]]. The narrative constructs a relationship of contrast between this tableau of vitality and the harrowing physical destruction that then comes from the Ottoman attack.

The novel explores the Ottoman camp on the night before the attack through the eyes of non-military figures who are aligned with the realm of poetry and culture rather than soldierly aggression and future bodily suffering. As the chronicler and the astrologer navigate the camp's tightly-packed crowds, they interact with a janissary, Tuz Okçan. While the janissary gives an individual face and voice to the mass of soldiers, his incongruous presence within a group of artists and scholars is suggestive of his underlying unknowability: he exists as a body rather than an individual with an interior, psychological world. This unknowability is emphasised when Mevla Çelebi admires his name: 'C'est un joli nom, un vrai nom de soldat.'[98] ['*Emër i bukur, krejt emër ushtari*'[99]]. The soldierly trappings of his name reflect his role within the collective Ottoman

[96] *T* (F), p. 80.
[97] *T* (A), p. 51.
[98] *T* (F), p. 72.
[99] *T* (A), p. 44.

military body rather than his individual identity. Tuz Okçan stands apart from the chronicler and the astrologer as he belongs to the physical realm rather than the world of artistic creation.

When the chronicler, discusses his art with other members of the Ottoman camp, the work exists across two different time frames. The chronicle exists in the present as a work of art in progress, defined by its potentiality. It also exists in the novel's projected diegetic future as a record of the past. The chronicle's mythic trappings contrast with the weighty materiality of the castle structure. The tangibility of the fortress is significant for the Ottomans, in particular, as it reinforces the invaders' corporeality. Hence, the castle becomes the site where stone and blood, as well as past and present, meet. In the text, the fortress connotes physical encirclement and enclosure, as well as existential alienation—from one's enemy, as well as one's past and future. We see this as the Ottomans attack the Albanian fortress and the unknowability of the soldiers is further emphasised. Apart from Tursun Pasha and other military leaders, the soldiers exist as a nameless collective, a mass, defined only by their rank and place within the invading army:

> Les compagnies d'eshkindjis s'ébranlèrent lentement et, dans l'attente de monter à l'assaut, occupèrent l'espace laissé vacant par les asapes. [ … ] Plus loin, les formations imposantes et graves des janissaires ne bougeaient pas encore.[100]
>
> *Taborët e eshkynxhinjve u zhvendosën ngadalë përpara dhe qëndruan në vendin që mbeti zbrazët pas zbaticës së azapëve.* [ … ] *Më tej, njësitet hijerënda të jeniçerëve nuk lëvizën nga vendi.*[101]

Pierre-Yves Boissau writes that Kadare's vision of the invaders 'insiste sur la force de frappe de l'ensemble de l'armée ottomane, qui relève du flot inendiguable de la Barbarie, du Chaos, opposé à la forme héroïque'.[102] By contrast, in the Albanian section, the first man killed by the Ottomans is described with admiration and respect; he is even named.[103] Strikingly, it is when the Ottomans

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[100] *T* (F), p. 95.
[101] *T* (A), p. 64.
[102] Pierre-Yves Boissau, 'Les enjeux de la présence homérique dans *Les Tambours de la pluie* d'Ismaïl Kadaré', *Gaia : revue interdisciplinaire sur la Grèce Archaïque*, 7 (2003), 533-546, (p. 535).
[103] 'Le premier à avoir croisé son épée avec le yatagan ottoman fut Gjon Bardheci, dont l'âme est montée rejoindre notre Sainte Vierge.' (pp. 110-111); ['*I pari që kryqëzoi shpatën e tij me jataganin osman ishte Gjon Bardheci, shpirti i të cilit shkoi pranë Zonjës së Lume*.' (p. 79)].

come into contact with the fortress, and with the Albanians inside, that this vision of their collectivity gives way to images of individual suffering. The Ottomans' confrontation with the tangibility of the stone edifice serves as a reminder of their corporeality. The scene of suffering on the castle walls also foregrounds the Ottomans' turn away from heroism and glory; it begins to dismantle the grand narrative that lies at the heart of the invaders' chronicle. In this way, Boissau's dismantling of the Ottoman 'forme héroïque' applies to the anonymous onslaught of the invaders' attack, but it also offers an interrogation into the chronicle as a medium—a poetic 'forme héroïque'—to convey the Ottomans' glory as suffering and loss cannot be edited out of the narrative completely.

The novel displaces the trope of bodily suffering that is common in Balkan literary traditions from within the structure to outside of it. For the Ottomans, the exterior walls of the fortress come to be loci of pain and death. Suzanne Akbari notes how Kadare's exploration of physical suffering in the novel subverts the conventions of siege literature as pain is usually represented within the walls of the citadel.[104] In *Les Tambours de la pluie*, we can observe the displacement of physical suffering from within the citadel's walls to the edifice's exterior—and from the Albanians to the Ottomans. This displacement can also be read as a subtle subversion of the immurement legend and the Rozafa myth, which looms large in the Albanian mythic imaginary. By sacrificing the Ottoman troops outside of the structure, their suffering ensures that the building's structural integrity is maintained for the Albanians within.

The image of the sacrificed Ottoman body is portrayed as foreign and strange, even in death. In the first wave of attacks against the fortress, the invading soldiers are defined in terms of their corporeal suffering. The novel describes the Ottoman attack—from the invaders' point of view—in stark sentences which reveal the urgency of the soldiers in their attempt to climb the walls of the castle. The castle itself becomes the enemy against which the Ottomans have to fight and the

[104] Akbari, 'Erasing the Body', p. 167.

repetition of the phrase ‘contre le mur’ in the invaders’ section emphasises the unwieldy stone face that the Ottomans must confront before they can gain access to the castle’s interior; it serves as a persistent reminder of the castle’s materiality, as well as the human frailty of the invaders’ bodies in contrast to the stone edifice. The castle walls block the invaders’ entry, and even as their instruments take on a monstrous quality when they try to scale the walls, the structure remains closed off:

> A l’endroit où devait se trouver le fossé, des échelles se balançaient, juchées sur les épaules des assaillants. Une première fut appuyée contre le mur. Elle était courte. Derrière en venait une autre, géante. Elle s’éleva lentement et, comme fascinée par la foule des attaquants, resta un moment toute droite, à la verticale, suspendue en l’air, avant de se poser contre le mur. [ … ] L’échelle géante se redressa comme le long cou mince de quelque monstre et s’appliqua une nouvelle fois contre le mur.[105]
>
> *Mbi atë vend, ku duhej të ishte groporja, po lëkundeshin mbi supet e ushtarëve shkallaret dhe veglat e tjera. Ja, shkalla e parë u mbështet te muri. Ishte e shkurtër. Prapa po vinte një tjetër, gjatoshe. Ajo u ngrit ngadalë, si e magjepsur, mbi mizërinë e sulmuesve, qëndroi një çast pezull në erë dhe pastaj u mbështet te muri.* [ … ] *Shkalla rrëshqiti në fillim anash dhe pastaj ra mbi turmën që gëlonte poshtë.*[106]

As we have seen, Kadare blends the banal and the absurd. Here, the tableau of differently-shaped ladders emphasises the invaders’ corporeality; it also symbolically reflects their role within the imperial project to climb higher, win the battle and ultimately expand the empire. When the Ottomans ultimately fail to capture the fortress in the first wave of the attack, Kadare underscores the invaders’ corporeal strangeness as their failure results in a catalogue of errors for the Ottomans. The bizarre image of a soldier with his hands cut off viscerally captures the physical suffering as the soldier is left hanging on the ladder, with the other soldiers climbing over him: ‘“Il a eu les mains coupées”, murmura l’intendant en chef en suivant des yeux la chute du corps dans le vide. Le second, plié en deux, ne parvint même pas à allonger les bras.’[107] [‘“*Ia prenë duart”, tha me zë të ulët kryeveqilharxhi, duke ndjekur me sy rrëzimin e trupit në hon. I dyti nuk arriti as të zgjaste*

[105] *T* (F), pp. 96-97.
[106] *T* (A), p. 65.
[107] *T* (F), p. 97.

*krahët, ngaqë mbeti i palosur më dysh*'[108]]. This absurd tableau of suffering also chimes with Tatjana Aleksić's vision of the sacrificed body; in their fragmented strangeness, the mutilated and tortured corpses recall atrocities that were committed in the name of imperial conquest and the impossible pursuit of communalism.[109] As the Ottoman corpses are described in terms of their disfiguring injuries, their foreignness is emphasised.

Following the first wave of attack against the castle, the Ottoman bodies stand as stark reminders of physical suffering. The disfigured Ottoman body stands as a symbol of the displacement of power from the centre of an imperial force towards the castle. In the process whereby physical suffering is transposed from within the walls towards the outside, the novel again plays with what can and cannot be seen. For Tursun Pasha, the unseen Albanians take on a monstrous, mythical quality as they are only visible within his imagination:

> "Vous allez voir maintenant de quel bois se chauffe le soldat ottoman !" Le pacha avait adressé ces mots à un être mi-humain, mi-aquilin, cet être bicéphale qui, dans ces moments d'abattement, incarnait à ses yeux l'Albanais.[110]
>
> *Tani ju do të shihni se ç'është ushtari osman. Tursun pashai ia drejtoi këto fjalë një qenieje gjysmënjerëzore, gjysmëshpendi dykrenor, që, në mendjen e tij, në çaste lodhjeje, sendërgjonte shqiptarin.*[111]

This mythical vision of the Albanians sees them take on and embody the iconographic trappings of *Albanianness*. But while the Albanians within the structure remain largely hidden and invisible and named only as 'les défenseurs'[112] ['*Kështjellarët*'[113]], the *azabs*, *eshkinxhis* and *dalkiliç* are each called forward by Tursun Pasha to attack the citadel. As each division fails in their attempt to capture the castle, their humiliation is projected onto the structure's ramparts. The Ottomans' attack becomes a macabre spectacle of corporeal suffering, and the wounded bodies of the soldiers represent, in microcosm, the invading army's movement from wholeness to fragmentation. Kadare

[108] *T* (A), p. 65.
[109] Aleksić, p. 18.
[110] *T* (F), p. 108.
[111] *T* (A), p. 75.
[112] *T* (F), p. 108.
[113] *T* (A), p. 75.

uses this corporeal imagery to show how the Ottomans' fate, and the success of their campaign, is expressed in the figure of the wounded body. In particular, the placement of the soldiers' corpses on the ladders signal the invading army's impossible position, caught between the castle's interior and exterior. The image of the ladder also calls up the impossibility of Tursun Pasha's position as he is doomed to fail or succeed in his mission to capture the castle and conquer Albania: to climb higher through the military ranks or fall means he is trapped either way. But Tursun Pasha and his army also occupy a liminal state suspended between the memories of previous Ottoman victories and the present iteration of a siege, in which their expectation of victory is turned on its head.

The absurd, macabre image of Ottoman corpses hanging from ladders balanced against the castle walls is further used to convey the immediacy of the invaders' suffering: 'À présent, des dizaines d'échelles garnies de grappes humaines plus ou moins denses étaient dressées. Sur certaines, des tués demeuraient accrochés dans des poses étranges.'[114] ['*Tani, gjatë gjithë mureve ishin vendosur me dhjetëra shkallë. Kacavarësit ngjanin si miza të zeza. Në disa prej tyre të vrarët përvireshin në skajimet më të çuditshme*'[115]]. The almost theatrical scene in which Ottoman suffering appears staged around the citadel walls is visible to the invaders and the besieged contrasts to the shadowy, claustrophobic depictions of suffering that take place away from the view of others in the novel. While waves of soldiers attack the castle walls, the reader learns of the secret Ottoman plan to dig their way beneath the citadel and enter from below. The tunnel's construction is shrouded in mystery and absurdity, even to Ottoman soldiers—it is hidden under a bakery oven—and its diggers are sent to work on it as a form of punishment. As the Ottomans resort to this subterfuge to gain access to the inside of the castle, the subterranean passage becomes yet another site of corporeal suffering that is, by contrast to the castle walls, hidden in the darkness.

Through the narrative's dual perspective, the use of dramatic irony alerts the reader to the Albanians' awareness of the tunnel. In the Albanian section before they collapse the tunnel onto

[114] *T* (F), p. 98.
[115] *T* (A), p. 66.

the Ottomans below, the unnamed narrator describes the insistent digging noise that is audible from inside the ramparts in dehumanised, animalistic terms: 'Ils creusent ou plutôt grignotent péniblement le sol. On dirait le bruit d'une bête se grattant jour et nuit dans les tréfonds de la terre.'[116] ['*Mihnin ose, më mirë, gërryenin fare lëndimthi. Sikur një kafshëz fërkohej ditë e natë në thellësi*'[117]]. The reader gains access to the closed off tunnel through the eyes of the astrologer, who is punished for his incorrect predictions about the outcome of the siege.

It is a suffocating and claustrophobic space, and the men inside it are even more constricted than the Albanians inside the castle. When the Albanians collapse the tunnel and the men inside are buried alive, Kadare hones in on the individuals within and gives voice to them from the darkness. It is striking that the men buried alive are individuals sent to dig the tunnel in the form of a punishment: alongside the astrologer, Tursun Pasha's body double is also sent to the tunnel because his shadowy existence implied a calling into question of the very principle of reality. In this way, these buried bodies are simultaneously undesired and other; they are sent to the tunnel as punishment since the positions they occupy within the invading army is rooted in the manipulation of truth and reality. They exist and die in the shadows. Yet the individuals buried within the tunnel ultimately become the reader's empathetic focus because they also exist and die *as* individuals in contrast to the faceless, nameless mass of soldiers that attacks the citadel walls.

Using the lexical fields of darkness and shadow, Kadare creates an underworld that is populated by these undesired Ottoman bodies. As the astrologer tries to occupy his thoughts, he considers how shadows and darkness lead on to death:

> Il se mit à songer à ce genre d'imprécations. La plupart évoquaient l'ombre et la boue : "Puisses-tu sentir la terre !" Ou : "Que ton ombre t'abandonne !" Leur ombre, elle les avait quittés sans même qu'on les eût maudits… Pour la première fois, il saisissait la signification profonde de cette expression. Je n'ai plus d'ombre, songea-t-il, donc je suis mort.[118]

[116] *T* (F), 156.
[117] *T* (A), p. 118.
[118] *T* (F), p. 191.

> *Për ta hequr mendjen, e çoi prapë te mallkimet. Shumica ishin me hije dhe me baltë. Të ardhtë era dhé. Ose: lënç hijen. Këtë të fundit e kishin lënë, ndërkaq, dhe pa nëmën e tij. Për here të parë e rroku gjer në fund kuptimin e mallkimit. Jam pa hije, mendoi, pra, i vdekur*.[119]

By being forced to confront the inevitability of a protracted, painful and inglorious death, the astrologer strips himself of the trappings of humanity and corporeality. The image of the buried men's collective shadow abandoning them evokes pathos in the reader as we gain access to the astrologer's thoughts. The men become sacrificial victims, but their sacrifice only serves to strengthen the Albanian castle; for the Ottomans, it is a sacrifice gone wrong.

Within this understanding of sacrifice, the death of Tursun Pasha's body double—his alternate—acts as a presage of the Ottoman military leader's own death: the fate of the double is tied to that of its master. This is made clear at the end of the novel when the tableau of Ottoman corporeal suffering appears to be complete and Tursun Pasha commits suicide. Although Tursun Pasha's death is both quiet and private, and, in a sense, an act of autonomy, we see how the motif of bodily suffering is unfinished and instead is extended to the future generation of Ottomans. At the beginning of the novel, the castle seen from without, through his eyes is a source of fevered excitement and foreboding. Breaching the fortress has the potential to elicit the same physical pleasure as a sexual conquest:

> Le pacha laissa échapper un soupir. Cela lui arrivait souvent quand il s'installait pour un temps devant une forteresse à prendre. C'était comme un réflexe suscité par la première impression, la plus profonde, avant qu'il ne s'habituât à elle, un peu comme à une femme.[120]

> *Tursun pashait iu shkëput një psherëtimë. Kështu i kishte ndodhur sa herë që kishte qëndruar shtang përpara fortesave që duhej të merrte. Ishte, me sa dukej, ahti i përshtypjes së parë, asaj të pagabueshmes, përpara se të mësohej me to, si me gratë*.[121]

[119] *T* (A), p. 148.
[120] *T* (F), p. 24.
[121] *T* (A), pp. 5-6.

As the invading army leaves the castle behind, one of the Pasha's concubines has a miscarriage: '"Il me semble que je me suis remise à saigner"'[122] ['"*Më duket se kam rrjedhje gjaku*"'[123]]. The euphemism suggests the woman's difficulty in articulating her loss as the unseen miscarried body becomes the only physical trace of Tursun Pasha. The Ottoman defeat is written in blood and the miscarriage becomes a striking corporeal reminder of Tursun Pasha's failure to capture the citadel; it signifies a lost future. Where the structure possessed a feminine quality when he first saw it, and the metaphor of the castle as a woman's body was something he desired to conquer, we see this dismantled at the end of the novel. After his suicide and the failure of the military campaign, the displacement of corporeal suffering to his concubine's body, as well as the causeless death and expulsion of his unborn child, shows how the feminine rejects him. And for the Albanians, insulated—no longer trapped—within the womblike citadel, defeat is an inevitability, but it remains distant as its potential for coming into being lies in the future.

## The Impossibly Indebted Figure

Privileging Tursun Pasha's point of view in the novel's Ottoman sections underscores his authority and his position as the head of the invading army. However, his position is precarious as it is tied to the fate of the siege. The failure of the siege ultimately leads to his suicide:

> Il imagina comment la poudre, en se dissolvant, allait troubler l'eau pour former comme un pan de ciel. Il y avait là du sommeil pour une nuit, peut-être deux. Il en reversa une nouvelle quantité. Pour mille nuits, songea-t-il, pour mille ans. [ … ] Au premier vertige, il s'appuya sur les coussins et ferma les yeux. Les pensées affluaient en désordre dans son esprit. Il eût souhaité évoquer quelque image sublime, mais ce lui était impossible. Voilà donc tout, Ougourlou Tursun Tundjaslan Sert Olgun pacha ! se dit-il. Pui, avant de demander à Dieu sa miséricorde, il repensa à sa vie en se demandant s'il était vraiment nécessaire de créer des noms aussi longs pour une existence aussi brève.[124]
>
> *E mori me mend se si, duke u tretur, pluhuri e mjegullonte ujët, si ta kthente në një copëz qiell. Kishte atje gjumë për një natë e ndoshta për dy. Ai derdhi përsëri zgjumth. Për një mijë net, mendoi, për një mijë vjet.* [ ... ] *Kur ndjeu turbullirën e parë, u mbështet mbi nënkresë dhe mbylli sytë. Mendimet , që i erdhën në çastet e fundit, nuk ishin shumë të*

[122] *T* (F), p. 346.
[123] *T* (A), p. 283.
[124] *T* (F), pp. 339-340.

> *lidhura. Ai deshi të mendonte diçka madhështore, por s'ishte e mundur. Kështu, pra, Ugurlu Tursun Tunxhasllan Sert Ollgun pasha, tha me vete. Pastaj, përpara se t'i lutej Zotit ta falte, mendoi diçka për jetën e tij dhe nëse ishte e nevojshme të krijoheshin emra kaq të gjatë për jetën e shkurtër njerëzore*.[125]

Here, the 'premier vertige' ['*turbullirën e parë*'] signals his fall from power; the adjective 'impossible' ['*s'ishte e mundur*'] mirrors the nature of his position since victory and the natural and metaphysical worlds are cut off from him. Instead, his fate is death and it is depicted in othered terms—the oblique reference to death as 'mille nuits' ['*një mijë net*'] is suggestive of the fantastical and even the use of his name in full reflects his difference. His suicide is an act of choice, but it is done in private, in secret, and he is unable to have a glorious death. The qualities of his character here—of precariousness, restricted agency, and a kind of negative form of existentialism—capture what I see as the features of Kadare's impossibly indebted figures. In each of the texts I examine, the protagonists share these features that define their existence within the narrative. In Tursun Pasha, we see a figure who understands the nature of his position at the top of the invading army. He also understands that he is not able to act autonomously, apart from in his own death, and that his own fortunes are restricted by the fate of the siege:

> Le temps n'était-il pas venu pour lui chausser ses pantoufles et de se retirer enfin dans sa paisible Anatolie ? De se retirer avant la chute… Il savait que c'était irréalisable. Non seulement il était encore jeune, mais, et c'était la raison essentielle, il avait atteint un point où tout sur place était impossible : il était voué soit à se hisser encore plus haut, soit à tomber.[126]

> *Mos kishte ardhur koha të vishte gjurmashkat e të tërhiqej, më në fund, në Anadollin e tij të qetë? Të tërhiqej përpara se të binte… E dinte se kjo ishte e pamundur. Jo vetëm se ishte ende i ri, por, kryesorja, se ngjitja e tij në shkallën ushtarake kishte arritur në një pike të tillë ku asgjë s'rrinte në vend : ose duhej të ngrihej më lart, ose të rrëzohej përgjithmonë.*[127]

The uncertainty of Tursun Pasha's trajectory that is emphasised by the elliptical statement is contrasted with the inevitable movement and growth of the Ottoman Empire itself: 'L'empire

[125] *T* (A), p. 277.
[126] *T* (F), p. 32.
[127] *T* (A), p. 12.

s'étendait de jour en jour.'[128] ['*Perandoria zgjerohej çdo ditë*'[129]]. His position at the apex of the invading army is unsustainable and, as the novel's impossibly indebted individual, he is doomed if he fails *or* succeeds.

Tursun Pasha's status as the novel's impossibly indebted figure underscores his corporeality and vulnerability. We see this mediated through his presence in the Ottoman camp (a site of bodily excess), intimate moments with his concubines, his place within the hostile foreign landscape and finally his suicide. This focus on his physical presence in the narrative is different to the depiction of Skanderbeg in *Les Tambours de la pluie*, who, as we have seen, is defined by his absence, his movements in the shadows or the words of others. Skanderbeg's representation in the novel as an unseen figure beyond the siege and outside of the corporeal limits that restrict the Ottomans can be read as a continuation of his extratextual image. His complex, enduring presence within the collective imaginary has shaped a particular Albanian mythology of endurance itself, which we see conceptualised in the novel's middle chapter:

> Il s'efforce de créer une seconde Albanie, hors de portée de qui que ce soit, insaisissable en quelque sorte. Tant et si bien que le jour où cette Albanie-ci, la réelle, tombera, l'autre, la fantomatique, son ombre, continuera d'errer parmi les cieux [ … ] il veut nous contraindre à combattre son ombre. A vaincre pour ainsi dire une apparition, l'image même de sa déroute. Mais peut-on vaincre une défaite, un échec ?[130]
>
> *Ai po rreket të krijojë një Shqipëri të dytë, të parrokshme prej askujt, si të thuash, të aspakët. Kështu që, kur kjo Shqipëri e njëmendtë të bjerë, ajo tjetra, fantazma, hija e saj, të endet nëpër qiell* [ ... ] *"Ai do të na detyrojë të luftojmë me hijen e tij* [ ... ] *Të thyejmë, si të thuash, shajninë, humbjen e tij. Po a thyhet një humbjë, një thyerje?"*[131]

[128] *T* (F), p. 32.
[129] *T* (A), p. 12.
[130] *T* (F), p. 182.
[131] *T* (A), pp. 139-140.

## Conclusion

> Nous avons cru leur donner la mort alors que de nos propres mains nous les rendions immortels.[132]
>
> *Ne kemi kujtuar se u kemi dhënë vdekjen, në kohën që me duart tona u kemi dhënë pavdekësinë*.[133]

An examination of Kadare's *Les Tambours de la pluie* through the contextual layers that interact with and have a bearing on the novel draws out its engagement with Albanian history and how questions of authority and artistic resistance have shaped it. The castle in the novel becomes the space where these questions play out since it is the physical and symbolic site where the Ottomans and Albanians, internal and external, and past and present meet. The relationship between the interior as a protected space and the exterior as a site of violence and conflict also brings out the novel's exploration of narrative creation. History and its memorialisation in art (the chronicle) are decided in relation to the castle; what is written in the intratextual chronicle and what is allowed into the castle test the idea of the structure as a closed-off space and the site where history is decided. The claustrophobic sense of enclosure the narrative space of the castle affords the text is reflected in the structure where the events of the siege play out doubly—from the point of view of the Ottomans and the Albanians and as history is depicted as event and retelling. In this way, history has an open-ended repetition that resembles a system of debt that cannot be settled.

We can read traces of the lived reality of Albania during the twentieth century, the legacy of *Rilindja* art and the nationalist aspirations it promoted, and the historical recording of events *in Les Tambours de la pluie*. Each of these layers are, in turn, contaminated by their representation in the novel. The figure of Skanderbeg is present in each of these layers and he haunts Kadare's narrative; he is unseen and mediated through the stories and memories of others that he takes on a mythic identity that signifies resistance. The concept of creating myths opens up a closer examination of the links between identity and narrative, which will be explored in the next chapter.

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[132] *T* (F), p. 313.
[133] *T* (A), p. 254.

## Chapter Two: Agency In-Between

> Il vous faut découvrir celui qui a ramené la jeune femme, l'imposteur, l'amant ou l'aventurier. [ … ] Remuer ciel et terre jusqu'à ce que vous le trouviez ! Et si vous ne le trouvez pas, il faudra que vous le créiez ![1]
>
> *Të gjendet sjellësi i gruas së re, mashtruesi, dashnori apo aventurieri.* [ *…* ] *Të kthehet bota përmbys, gjersa të kapet. Dhe, në qoftë se s'gjendet, të krijohet.* [2]

Turning from Kadare's 'période impériale' towards the pre-Ottoman vision of a feudal, medieval Albania he depicts in his novel of 1980 *Qui a ramené Doruntine ?* [*Kush e solli Doruntinën*][3], this chapter seeks to explore further how the writer conceptualises debt in his works. Through a close reading of the text, this chapter considers Kadare's depiction of debt in *Doruntine*. It looks at the ways in which the novel symbolically relates debt to existential questions of duty and autonomy within an Albanian socio-cultural context, keeping in play allusions to the author's biography and his lived experience in the twentieth century as well as references to his nation's past. The novel does so in order to reflect a continuum of mythic struggle that is represented in Albanian art, particularly in the period since the *Rilindja*. Debt in *Doruntine* appears, like in *Les Tambours de la pluie*, as a condition of the impossibly indebted Kadarean hero, whose negative existentialism means that he is honour-bound to act against his own desires and his own judgement. Like *Les Tambours de la pluie*, *Doruntine*, too, can further be read as an allegorical representation of Enver Hoxha's regime and Albania's legacy of invasion more broadly as the writer once again draws from his experience of life within a dictatorship and looks to his nation's history to examine narratives of power and draw on the mythopoetic resources of myth. The two texts share these thematic areas of exploration and thus add to the internal consistency of Kadare's works, but the

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[1] *D* (F), p. 308.
[2] *D* (A), pp. 84-85.
[3] Like *Les Tambours de la pluie*, *Qui a ramené Doruntine ?* has been published under different titles. The title of Jusuf Vrioni's French translation is a literal translation of the Albanian original and was published by Fayard in 1986. Jon Rothschild's English translation—translated from Vrioni's French—was published in 1988 under the title *Doruntine*. After Kadare revised the text in 1993, David Bellos inserted the additions made by the Albanian author in the 2010 reissue of Rothschild's translation. For this reissued edition, the novel was renamed *The Ghost Rider* with Kadare's permission. In this chapter, I refer to the novel as *Doruntine*.

way in which these themes are explored—and in particular the way debt is treated—is different in *Doruntine*.

The novel's points of difference are visible in its structure, prose and thematic composition. *Les Tambours de la pluie* is structured in a way that reflects the novel's thematic concern with encirclement and narrative authority; it is claustrophobic in its interiority. *Doruntine*, by contrast, can be read as a work of postmodern detective fiction with an unresolvable feud at its heart. The novel conforms to the conventions of the mystery genre only to dismantle them, for *Doruntine* is a detective story without a crime. This internal tension is reflected in Éric Faye's description of the novel's enigmatic nature; within Kadare's output, Faye regards *Doruntine* as 'son livre à la fois le plus innocent et le plus politique'.[4] Through the texts' structural differences, we can observe a shift away from the clarity of Kadare's prose in *Les Tambours de la pluie*, with its visceral descriptions of battle and ruminations on the Albanian condition, towards a hazy, slippery narrative in *Doruntine* that allows the author to test the boundary between truth, myth and identity.

Myth is the organising centre of *Doruntine*. Kadare takes inspiration from the ballad of Constantine and Doruntine. It is a story known wherever Albanian is spoken, from within the country's borders outwards to Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and the Arbëresh community in southern Italy, whose version of the tale informed Kadare's retelling.[5] Poetically reimagining Balkan cultural history in this way is a recurring feature within the writer's works. We saw in the previous chapter how Kadare problematises this very concern. He uses the creation of the intratextual chronicle to play with the concept of temporality within *Les Tambours de la pluie*, as writing the chronicle involves looking to the future in order to determine how the past will be remembered. He does so both as a piece of contextualised historical testimony and as a discrete work of art. Writing in contrast to Hoxha's propaganda machine, which selectively syncretised

[4] Éric Faye, Preface to *Qui a ramené Doruntine ?*, in Ismail Kadare, *Œuvres : tome premier* (Paris: Fayard, 1993), p. 247.
[5] Robert Elsie, *A Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture* (London: Hurst & Company, 2001), p. 74.

Albanian history to construct a mythic vision of the nation centred on the dictator's image, we see Kadare also examine this very creative process in *Le Pont aux trois arches* [*Ura me tri harqe*] (1978), one of his most well-known texts. There he draws on oral traditions to create a complex, multi-layered, self-referential written work that interrogates questions of myth and its function within a dictatorial regime as the narrative implicitly poses the question: what artistic purpose can myths serve? In her reading of *Le Pont aux trois arches*, Tatjana Aleksić approaches this question as she examines the ways in which Kadare 'denudes the operation of the very apparatus of myth [ … ] He utilizes the very discourse that he is apparently trying to deconstruct when he fashions the Albania of the nationalist imaginary in an attempt to disclose the modus operandi of all mythical thinking'.[6] Through its depiction of myth and its social functions, Aleksić argues that the text offers a way of criticising the dissemination of stories—'official fictions'[7]—that allow systems of power like Hoxha's regime to perpetuate themselves.

In *Doruntine*, however, Kadare's focus on the process of diegetically bringing a myth *into* existence sets it apart. He does not write about a story that comes from the top downwards to be disseminated among the people as a means of control. Instead, the writer focuses on a myth that begins within a community and then takes on a life of its own and thereby becomes transgressive both in terms of its content and through the way that it can no longer be controlled by a central, established authority. *Doruntine* looks at the unpredictable, organic nature of myth when it emerges from within a nexus of competing powers; it shows myth as a folk medium that simultaneously brings people together and tears them apart.

By depicting the creation of a myth within the narrative of *Doruntine* itself, Kadare's novel also self-reflexively investigates the relationship between Balkan history and its representation in fiction, or rather its conversion *into* fiction. We see this idea of investigation as it is revealed to the reader through the novel's structure. Kadare rewrites—or overwrites—the ballad of Constantine

[6] Aleksić, p. 68.
[7] Ibid., p. 68.

and Doruntine as a mystery. In this way, he moves the narrative beyond a straightforward reproduction of a well-known legend and instead uses the conceit of investigation to depict the mythopoetic process and drill further down into it, asking: how is a myth brought into being? The writer addresses this question as he illustrates the difference between passively using myth and the active process of *being* mythopoetic. In the novel, we see this as the characters Constantine and Doruntine lose their connection to physical reality and become distorted, mythologised versions of themselves onto which new identities and meanings are projected through the stories and memories of others. These versions of Constantine and Doruntine are constitutive of a new, mythic reality that is replicated and shared within the narrative through oral media that demand collective participation.

Contextualising *Doruntine*: The Ballad, the Brother and the *Besa*

Konstantin, maudit sois-tu,
Te rappelles-tu ta *bessa*
Ou bien est-elle enterrée avec toi ?[8]

*Kostandin, të ardhtë gjëma,*
*Ku e ke besën që më dhe,*
*Besa jote nën dhé*[9]

Debt can be read as a social force that fosters alienation, an out-of-placeness, as it limits one's autonomous relation to the past and to the self.[10] *Doruntine's* original title speaks to the out-of-placeness that can come from being indebted to another. The interrogative pronoun *qui* [*kush*]—*Who brought Doruntine back?*—draws attention to the novel's concern with identity as a work of detective fiction; it sets Doruntine alongside a mysterious other in a way that disables her selfhood and leaves her beholden to another. An Albanian reader would seek to answer the title's question by identifying Doruntine's brother, Constantine, as the person responsible for her return because their story and their names are bound up with one another and their ballad is widely known within Albanian-speaking communities. The title, then, raises extratextual questions of

[8] *D* (F), p. 294. This stanza is from the funeral lamentations performed at Doruntine's burial site.
[9] *D* (A), p. 69.
[10] Gourgouris, 'Xenia', p. 524.

subjective identity and commitment as it asks the reader to identify themselves in relation to the myth—whether they can answer the question depends on their proximity to a code of *Albanianness*. When taken as a whole, though, the question of the title can be read through the prism of debt as it implicitly suggests that a debt has indeed been repaid. Hence the character's return implies that an act of restoration has taken place: who brought Doruntine back *to where she belongs*—her family home, her community—to Albania? Over the course of the novel, Kadare explores the repercussions of this question in order to show that the honouring of a debt cannot offer a neat and unambiguous resolution because, as Stathis Gourgouris argues, 'one's very self is irreparably alienated while in debt [ … ] no indebted person can ever be free'.[11] Indeed, the novel's concern with debt shows how it can residually retain the power to disable one's relationship to history and the self even after it has been honoured, beyond the time of being in debt.

The narrative structure of *Doruntine* is itself out of place, and the time is as if 'out of joint'.[12] Kadare does not retell the story of the eponymous character's journey; the novel begins *in medias res*, after Doruntine has already arrived at her family home. In traditional iterations of the ballad of Constantine and Doruntine, the inviolable nature of Constantine's promise creates a conflict between the boundary of life and death; the oath Constantine swears makes possible his return from the dead. Although there are different versions of the ballad, it has a common narrative thrust that focuses on this resurrection motif; the ballad follows the story of Doruntine, who is famed for her beauty and is the pride of her family (in the novel they are the Vranaj) and of her community. When she is old enough to marry, her brother, Constantine, instructs her to wed a man from outside the community; in Kadare's version, he is a Bohemian nobleman. Although their mother is against the marriage since Doruntine would be far from her home, Constantine gives her his word, his *besa*, that he will bring his sister home whenever she wishes. Doruntine moves away to her new husband's home after the wedding celebrations; in *Doruntine*, she leaves for a small city in central Europe. Soon after she leaves, all of her brothers, including Constantine, die. Some of them die in

[11] Ibid., p. 524.
[12] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 20.

battle, and others die of the plague. After their deaths, their mother visits the cemetery where they are buried and curses Constantine at his graveside for abandoning his promise of bringing Doruntine home. Her invocation of his broken *besa* causes Constantine to rise from the grave, and, riding on his gravestone-turned-horse, he crosses half of Europe to retrieve his sister from her marital home and bring her back to Albania. There both mother and daughter die from the shock of her return and Constantine's resurrection.

Here in *Doruntine,* the mystery centres on the possibility of a boundary-crossing resurrection taking place. Doruntine's return precipitates the novel's tragedy as she and her mother die side by side to complete their family's 'cycle des morts'[13] ['*qerthullin e vdekjes*'[14]]. Through the motif of circularity the novel evokes this idea of return; the return of Doruntine means a return *to* the grave. The Vranaj family are memorialised through this uroboric relationship between return and death since their story is repeated within their community. This circularity also reveals how debt can be read as an unresolvable feud. Traces of the *besa* and of Constantine's own return continue to re-emerge and they are also reproduced within the community through conflicting, fragmentary intratextual media: funeral lamentations, private letters, local gossip, and religious sermons. As the living versions of Doruntine, Constantine and the other members of the Vranaj family give way in death to mythical doubles that become the property of the community, the reader sees how Constantine's debt cannot be honoured in full as it is instead inherited by each new mythical iteration of the siblings.

Recasting Doruntine and Constantine as mythic figures within the narrative creates a sense of disorientation that calls the nature of truth into question. We see this in the first chapter as Doruntine is unable to speak after her journey. When the novel's protagonist, Captain Stres, visits her to find out who brought her home, Doruntine cannot verbally recount how she returned; Stres, as the detective, must instead read meaning in her expressions to piece together her version of the

[13] *D* (F), p. 291.
[14] *D* (A), p. 64.

events: 'Il sentit les larmes sourdre en lui-même avant de les voir perler dans ses yeux à elle. C'étaient des larmes pas comme les autres, mi-visibles, mi-impalpables [ … ] Que m'arrive-t-il donc encore ? semblait dire à présent son regard.'[15] ['*Lotët, përpara se t'i shihte tek ajo, i ndjeu brenda vetes. Ishin ca lot tjetërlloj, gjysmë të dukshëm, gjysmë të prekshëm* [ … ] *Ç'më gjeti kështu, dukej sikur thoshin tani sytë e saj*'[16]]. As Stres takes on the emotions of Doruntine here, he also imposes his own reading of her expressions onto her while she remains silent. The use of the verb 'sembler' ['*dukej*'] reinforces how his interpretation is based on appearance rather than a genuine insight into Doruntine's interior world considered as an autonomous realm of being. The repeated prefix 'mi-' (in the Albanian, this is the repeated formative '*gjysmë*') also reflects Doruntine's separation from her selfhood. It is suggestive of her movement away from the physical towards a mythical realm; she becomes less visible and tangible.

This episode sets in motion Doruntine's alienation from her own story, and her own subjectivity, while the community around her creates another mythical, palimpsestic Doruntine onto which they can overwrite their version of her story. This process is repeated for Constantine, too. His thoughts and desires are communicated through the words of others who memorialise him and through the different meanings he holds for them. To his friends, he is remembered as a leader and a paragon of honour with messianic qualities:

> Nul n'avait été plus affecté que ces quatres jeunes gens par la mort de Konstantin. Ils voyaient en lui plus qu'un frère, et maintenant encore, trois ans après sa mort, il était si présent dans leurs propos et leurs pensées que beaucoup de gens, mi-sérieusement, mi plaisaintant, les surnommaient les "disciples de Konstantin".[17]
>
> *Katër shokët, ata që ishin trishtuar më tepër se kushdo nga vdekja e Kostandinit, që e kishin pasur atë më tepër se vëlla, që edhe tani pas tre vjetësh nuk e hiqnin nga goja dhe nga mendimet, aq sa kishte shumë njerëz, që qysh tani i quanin "dishepujt e Kostandinit"*.[18]

In contrast to the Christ-like position he held within his friendship group, to his mother, Constantine is characterised as a destabilising force within the family unit due to his incestuous

[15] *D* (F) p. 261.
[16] *D* (A), p. 31.
[17] *D* (F), p. 379.
[18] *D* (A), p. 164.

desire for Doruntine. Finally, in the eyes of the funeral mourners who continue to sing about him and mythologise him after his death, he is an endless source of artistic inspiration, defined by his word of honour (*besa*).

Honouring a debt does not mean, then, that it is overcome. The fact that Doruntine and Constantine become new mythical versions of themselves that are mediated through the words and memories of others shows how debt has the capacity to endure beyond its source and original timeframe because the time of being in debt and the time of being relieved of a debt both demand communal involvement. A debt requires knowledge and acknowledgement. It is recognised and codified when it is contracted between more than one person—and when it is uttered or written down. In *Doruntine*, Constantine's debt is common knowledge within the community; everyone knows about the oath he swore to his mother: 'vous le savez sans doute comme tout le monde, monsieur Stres, Konstantin avait donné à sa mère sa *bessa*'[19] ['*siç mund ta dini, zoti Stres, atë që di gjithë bota, Kostandini i kishte dhënë besën*'[20]]. While the story of Doruntine and Constantine is shared with others, Constantine's oath is repeated and becomes a product *of* the community; its endurance even after Constantine having honoured it—and after the deaths of Doruntine and her mother—ensures that others will continue to reproduce it. This communal involvement is made clear at the end of the novel when Captain Stres reveals how everyone is implicated in Doruntine's return as Constantine's oath, his *besa,* could only emerge from a community that understands and gives meaning to debt and its relationship to morality: 'Chacun de nous a sa part dans ce voyage, car la *bessa* de Konstantin, ce qui a ramené Doruntine, a germé ici parmi nous.'[21] ['*Secili nga ne ka pjesën e vet në këtë rrugëtim, sepse besa e Kostandinit, ajo që e solli Doruntinën, ka mbirë këtu, midis nesh*'[22]]. As debt involves the community in this way and extends beyond Constantine, his sister and his mother, it also assumes a transformative, excessive power that cannot be controlled by the rule of law or religious doctrine. The *besa* is a part of a set of folk laws that is given

[19] *D* (F), p. 287.
[20] *D* (A), p. 59.
[21] *D* (F), p. 397.
[22] *D* (A), p. 184.

meaning by the community and its excessive importance here comes to imply that it has the capacity to spill out beyond the boundaries of life and death, duty and transgression and become inescapable—no indebted person *and* the community from which the debt emerges can ever, again, be free. These inescapable traces of debt are made clear at the end of the novel when a new Doruntine becomes the focus of the community. The lexis of the supernatural and the clear parallel between the young woman in her wedding dress and a shrouded revenant signal the tragic implacability of a debt that cannot be overcome and that is doomed to return:

> Presque tout le village l'accompagnera depuis l'église, comme jadis la malheureuse Doruntine, et, à voir, la jeune mariée si belle et vaporeuse dans son voile blanc, nombre de gens se demandèrent sûrement si, par une nuit sans lune, un fantôme n'irait pas la ramener jusqu'au seuil de sa maison.[23]
>
> *Që nga kisha gjer te udhëkryqi i madh e përcolli pothuajse krejt katundi, si dikur Doruntinën e gjorë, dhe, tek e panë nusen ashtu të bukur e mjegullore pas vellos së bardhë, me siguri, shumë njerëz mendonin se ç'fantazmë do ta sillte vallë ndonjë natë të errët gjer te pragu i shtëpisë*.[24]

Debt is reproduced. History is repeated. Kadare creates a community that is caught within this unresolvable feud and cannot move forward. It turns inward on itself towards the *inside* of a family, the *inside* of a community, the *inside* of a myth.

## Constantine and Doruntine in Kadare's works

The novel's focus on the *inside* of a myth requires the myth itself to be contextualised within Kadare's output as a whole. We must, then, first look outward to the role of Constantine and Doruntine in the writer's artistic imagination as he returns to particular themes, images and significant figures within the architecture of his works to create an internally consistent oeuvre. The figure of Constantine is a symbolic feature that the writer uses to conceptualise the idea of return itself—Constantine signifies a return from the netherworld to *Albanianness* and to a cultural inheritance of national mythmaking into which Kadare, as the extratextual writer and artist, can write himself. The development of Constantine's mythic image within Albanian culture is an

[23] *D* (F), p. 402.
[24] *D* (A), p. 190.

ongoing process, and it has been for centuries. Constantine's story has been retold, amended and propagated across different ballads and regions in a way that has pushed him to become the embodiment of a set of contradictions that capture different conflicting facets of Albania. He emerges from a space of internal tensions within Albanian identity, between East and West, Christianity and Islam, tradition and modernity, honour and transgression, in such a way that he has been read as a 'symbol of the profound ambivalences in Albanian culture'.[25] These contradictions are visible in Constantine's characterisation in *Doruntine* as he is always mediated by others; he exists, at once, as spectre and mortal, brother and lover, self and other.

*Doruntine* was first published ten years after *Les Tambours de la pluie*—and twelve years after the great success Kadare received for *Le Général de l'armée morte.* By 1980, his career and his standing as an artist in Albania had changed markedly. Following the publication of his poem *Les pachas rouges* [*Pashallarët e kuq*] (1975), which was viewed by Hoxha's government as directly hostile to the regime, Kadare's writerly freedom was curbed and he was banned from publishing novels. *Doruntine*, then, first appeared in a collection of works *Sang-froid* [*Gjakftohtësia*], alongside *Avril brisé* [*Prilli i thyer*]. Both *Doruntine* and *Avril brisé* share the common theme of debt as Kadare examines the rites that shape communities; in *Avril brisé*, he uses the motif of blood feuds [*gjakmarrje*] to explore the vendetta logic that haunts the Albanian collective cultural psyche and grants it a tragic structure. Written in a period of artistic repression, these works display another formal parallel because Kadare, across these texts, creates a zone of overlap between communal rites, identity and myth to create 'une autre Albanie, éternelle, envoûtante, face à la stérilité et à l'aridité de l'Albanie communiste'.[26] Constantine crosses over between this eternal Albania as a unifying figure around whom the collective can define themselves and Hoxha's world as a boundary-crossing individual. Kadare acknowledges this tension and uses the figure of Constantine as a symbolic means of reckoning artistically with the dictator's promotion of a heroic,

[25] Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, p. 299.
[26] Kadare, *Dialogue avec Alain Bosquet*, p. 62.

ethnonationalist identity in his image; Constantine then comes to serve as both a confirmation of and a correction to Hoxha's conception of Albanian identity.

There are aspects to the version of Constantine, evoked in *Doruntine*, that resemble elements of *Rilindja* art, valorising Skanderbeg. The novel depicts a pre-Ottoman, pre-Skanderbeg society from which Constantine emerges as the embodiment of post-Skanderbeg, Romantic ideals of *Albanianness*. Indeed, Constantine's connection to the theme of return aligns with Skanderbeg's mythic image as a figure who struggled for, and found his way back to an Albanian identity. In the narrative of *Doruntine*, Constantine's friends regard him as a similarly heroic, even messianic, figure. But he also takes on the role of a prophet—beyond the grave and through the words of others—for *Albanianness*: 'Elle [l'Albanie] entend conserver son image éternelle [ … ] C'est pour apporter ce message à l'Albanie et au reste du monde que Konstantin est sorti de sa tombe.'[27] ['*Ai* [Arbri] *do të ruajë fytyrën e vet të amshuar.* [ … ] *Këtë kumt u ngrit për t'i sjellë Arbrit dhe gjithë njerëzve, nga fundi i gropës ku qe shtrirë, Kostandini*'[28]]. He is motivated by a message, a cause, and he becomes a symbolic conduit for this message in death. The image of the ruptured tomb in this passage suggests that this kind of temporal disturbance beyond Constantine's biographical time of existence is in itself a form of eternality; from the grave, he makes possible an eternal existence that can be replicated for *Albanianness*. Yet, Constantine is also a figure defined by tensions—his Albanian name *Kostandini* even bears an oblique resemblance to the word *tensioni*—and the way in which he is portrayed in *Doruntine* highlights his contradictory nature. He is not morally pure or wholly good.

Constantine in *Le Crépuscule des dieux de la steppe*

A reading of Constantine's complex identity in *Le Crépuscule des dieux de la steppe* [*Muzgu i perëndive të stepës*] (1962-1978)[29], makes explicit a symbolic thread that connects him to the text's

[27] *D* (F), p. 399.
[28] *D* (A), p. 187.
[29] In Albania, the novel was published in instalments between 1962 and 1978. Jusuf Vrioni's 1981 French translation marked the first time *Le Crépuscule des dieux de la steppe* was published in full.

narrator. *Le Crépuscule*[30] is a semi-autobiographical work, which follows a writer studying in Moscow—just like Kadare himself studied at the Gorky Institute in the late 1950s. By the end of the text, when he must honour his promise to leave the Soviet Union and return to Albania, the narrator begins to lose his connection to his selfhood and he takes on the physical trappings of the dead man returned from the grave:

> "Pourquoi as-tu des traces de terre sur tes cheveux ? ", je ne m'en serais pas étonné. C'est une promesse que je lui ai faite, me répétais-je ; je lui ai donné ma parole l'été passé, et peut-être même beaucoup plus tôt, il y a mille ans.[31]
>
> *"Përse i ke flokët me baltë?", nuk do të më vinte aspak çudi. Unë asaj ia kam premtuar këtë gjë, thosha me vete me ngathtësi, ia kisha dhënë fjalën qysh në verën e shkuar, madje edhe më herët, qysh para një mijë vjetësh.*[32]

The narrator's return to Albania, at a time when the country was growing more isolated, resembles Constantine's return to the netherworld. Extratextual geopolitical relations between Albania and the Soviet Union are shrunk and made to seem intimate. The symbolism of return and forbidden love, in this case between Kadare and a Soviet woman, Lida Snegina, plays out in the form of the narrator being bound by his word to leave behind the vibrancy and life of Moscow and return to the darkness of his homeland, reconfigured as the realm of the dead. The way in which the narrator's promise exists across different times—since it exists both as a personal word of honour that he made at a fixed point in time and beyond this time in another unknown archaic time—sets it up as a mythical and timeless continuum of duty over agency. Even when Kadare's narrator and Constantine find their way back to Albania and to *Albanianness*, they cannot overcome this condition.

The traces of mud visible in the narrator's hair forces the mythical realm into physical reality. In *Doruntine*, Kadare also uses the image of the muddied individual to bring an earthy immediacy to the motif of resurrection as it again forces the mythic—the impossible—into contact with material reality. Although Doruntine and many others believe Constantine rose from the dead to retrieve

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[30] From here, I refer to the text as *Le Crépuscule*.
[31] Ismail Kadare, *Le Crépuscule des dieux de la steppe*, in *Œuvres : Tome sixième*, trans. by Jusuf Vrioni (Paris: Fayard, 1998), pp. 610-611.
[32] Ismail Kadare, *Muzgu i perëndive të stepës* (Tirana: Onufri, 2012), p. 196.

her, the novel abides by the conventions of detective fiction. Mud offers a way of obscuring identity that heightens the mystery; it functions as both a disguise and confirmation of Constantine's return from the dead: 'En cours de route, collée au cavalier, elle a fort bien remarqué que ses cheveux étaient non seulement couverts de poussière, mais aussi de boue à peine séchée, et que de son corps émanait une odeur de terre mouillée.'[33] ['*Gjatë ecjes, duke qenë fare pranë shtegtarit, ajo ka vënë re fare mirë se leshrat e tij ishin më tepër se me pluhur, ato ishin gjithë baltë dhe nga supet i vinte një erë dheu të lagësht*'[34]]. Focusing on the sensory here brings together reality and the mythic. The juxtaposition of 'séchée' and 'mouillée' ['*të lagësht*'] draws out the experience of contrast in the passage. The repeated invocation of earthiness in the nouns 'boue' ['*pluhur*'], 'poussière' ['*baltë*'] and 'terre' ['*dheu*'] quite literally grounds the passage in the physical world. Yet, at the same time, the boundary-crossing conception of resurrection signifies a metaphysical rupture at odds with the corporeal.

The grave in *Le Crépuscule* is a metaphorical, unseen space—Albania as this netherworld exists far away from the vibrant metropolis of Moscow—but it has the capacity to impinge on the real world in a contained way. It is visible in the traces of dirt on the narrator's hair that signal that it is time for him to return home. Reading this passage at the end of *Le Crépuscule*, Peter Morgan considers the significance of the young artist's decision to return to Albania and how it can be linked to the negative existentialism of the *besa*; Kadare's narrator, bound by his word, must choose his homeland, his artistic repression, and even the prospect of death, over exile, freedom and life.[35] The symbolic association between Albania and the netherworld crystallises in the final lines of the novel as the narrator contemplates his return to 'cette contrée d'où personne n'est jamais revenu.'[36] ['*prej nga nuk ishte kthyer kurrë asnjeri*'[37]]. Here, return is final. In contrast to this image of the grave in *Le Crépuscule*, in *Doruntine* it is messy, multisensory and a place of

[33] *D* (F), p. 264.
[34] *D* (A), p. 34.
[35] Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, p. 268.
[36] Kadare, *Le Crépuscule des dieux de la steppe*, p. 613.
[37] Kadare, *Muzgu i perëndive të stepës*, p. 198.

(re-)generation as well as return. It disrupts the real world in ways beyond the physical since Constantine and Doruntine's graves are the places where new narratives are generated and from which they spread. As well as a symbolic site to mark the end of biological, lived time, the grave becomes a place of creation. Following Doruntine's death, professional mourners perform at the family's graves and, through the verses they sing, form a bridge between the living and the dead that is recognised and reproduced by the community: 'Jusqu'à il y a deux jours, les chants étaient encore dépouillés, mais, depuis hier soir, et surtout aujourd'hui, ils épousent la forme d'une légende aux contours bien précis.'[38] ['*Gjer pardje vajet ishin ende të thjeshta, kurse që mbrëmë e sidomos sot, ato po marrin formën e një balade*'[39]]. The lamentations at the graves are more than ritualised expressions of grief—they convey the beginning of a new mythic time in the afterlives of Constantine and Doruntine.

Constantine's complexity is brought out further in these funeral lamentations. Each new verse foregrounds a different aspect of the man to recast him in the eyes of the community; he is the bearer of a *besa*, faithful son, revenant and taboo-breaker.[40] Although his return is made possible by his mother's invocation of his unfulfilled *besa*, Constantine's incestuous desire for Doruntine is revealed through Captain Stres's investigation and this transgressive impulse serves as another motivation for his return from the dead. The incest motif is visible in older versions of the ballad of Doruntine and Constantine. And in his essay *Eschyle, ou le grand perdant* [*Eskili ky humbës i madh*] (1995), Kadare argues that the ballad speaks to an experience of fraternal sexual anxiety that has been articulated in folklore and literature across Europe for centuries. He cites a line from the Norse *Edda*, in which the transgressive impulse has been acted upon, as an example of incest as an artistic concern: 'Tu as engendré un fils avec ta sœur'[41] ['*Me motrën tënde bëre ti një djalë*'[42]]. The transgressive emotional response of the brother in each of the different iterations of the ballad in

[38] *D* (F), p. 297.
[39] *D* (A), p. 71.
[40] Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, pp. 185-186.
[41] Kadare, *Eschyle*, p. 65.
[42] Kadare, *Eskili*, p. 65.

Albania and beyond is significant; the strength of the brother's incestuous desire for his sister and the unease that comes from it creates a link that goes beyond culture and is instead something primordial and uncontrollable: 'cette inquiétude qui, durant des époques entières, dut troubler et hanter la conscience des hommes, ceux des pays des glaces comme ceux des pays chauds.'[43] ['*ketë trazuar e vënë në ankth mendjen e njeriut, që nga popujt që jetonin pranë akullnajave e gjer në viset e nxehta*'[44]]. The lexis of discontent here is suggestive of a lack of agency as the incestuous impulse goes against judgement and logic. In the Albanian ballad, and as the reader sees in *Doruntine*, Constantine is already characterised by his negative existentialism—his promise is a renunciation of choice and a signifier of his lack of agency. Constantine, then, is bound doubly by his desire for his sister and his *besa*. This double bind situates the ballad within an Albanian context of duty and negative choice that allows Constantine's story to go beyond an articulation of fraternal anxiety.

Constantine and the Lenore Motif

Although Kadare writes about an experience of transgressive, intrafamilial desire that is visible in folklore and literature across Europe and across ages, he takes issue with Gottfried August Bürger's Romantic ballad *Lenore* (1773). The work follows a spectral rider, a figure of death embodied, who carries the titular woman on horseback during a macabre nocturnal journey. Bürger's poem had a considerable influence on Romanticism, as noted by John G. Robertson in his work from the early twentieth century, *A History of German Literature*. Of *Lenore*, Robertson writes: 'The eerie tramp of the ghostly horse which carries Lenore to her doom re-echoed in every literature; [ … ] it helped materially to call the Romantic movement to life in Europe'.[45] Kadare's criticism of Bürger's work is reflected in his fiction and outside of it. In *Le Crépuscule*, Kadare's narrator accuses the poet of stealing the tale from the Balkans in an impassioned speech to his

[43] Kadare, *Eschyle*, p. 65.
[44] Kadare, *Eskili*, p. 64.
[45] John G. Robertson, *A History of German Literature* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam, 1902), pp. 304-305.

girlfriend; he takes pride in what he sees as the tale's Balkan origins—even in the face of its moral tensions. We have seen how, in that novel, the narrator's return to Albania at the end of the text evokes fear as it means a return to artistic repression. In contrast, the ballad is depicted as the narrator's cultural inheritance; it is a significant point of origin for Balkan artistic expression:

> Je lui exposai que la péninsule balkanique, quoique plus ou moins attaquée et maudite par tout un chacun, jusque par les Esquimaux, n'en était pas moins, même si ça les défrisait, la terre natale de la grande poésie, qu'on y trouvait de nombreuses légendes et ballades d'une incomparable beauté et que c'était précisément de l'une d'entre elles, de celle du Mort qui sort de sa tombe pour respecter sa parole, que s'était inspiré Bürger dans sa *Léonore*, encore qu'il l'eût fait de manière assez lamentable.[46]
>
> *I thashë se Gadishulli Ballkanik, ndonëse ishte bërë zakon të shahej e të mallkohej nga të gjithë, madje edhe nga eskimezët, donin apo s'donin ata, ishte trualli i moçem i poezisë së madhe. Atje kishte gjer vonë gojëdhëna me një bukuri të rrallë dhe pikërisht njërën prej tyre, baladën e ngritjes së të vdekurit nga varri për të mbajtur fjalën e dhënë, ka shfrytëzuar Byrgeri për* "Lenoren Lied"-ën *e tij, ndonëse e ka bërë për faqe të zezë.*[47]

In the revelatory monologue, Kadare's narrator reveals a deep reverence for Albania's cultural output—showing beauty can emerge from the netherworld just as the dead man can rise from the grave. The contrast in tone used to describe the richness of Balkan literature and Bürger's 'lamentable' poem speaks to a broader concern of Kadare's narrator: while Bürger's poem was recognised as a significant work in the Western literary canon, Albanian literature has not been memorialised in the same way. Kadare's narrator acts as a screen for Kadare here as he articulates this concern in his essay *Eschyle, ou le grand perdant*: 'les hommes qui vivaient sur les differents territoires de la Péninsule [ … ] restèrent en marge de la littérature cultivée. La raison en est à la fois fort simple et capitale : ces peuples n'eurent pas d'écrivains.'[48] ['*njerëzit e gadishullit* [ … ] *ato mbetën jashtë letërsisë së kultivuar. Dhe arsyeja për këtë ishte sa dramatike, aq dhe e thjeshtë: këta popuj s'patën shkrimtarë*'[49]].

Kadare takes his criticism of Bürger's poem further in his interview with Alain Bosquet, in which he takes issue with its lyrical 'sécheresse'[50] and the way in which it formalises an oral tale in a way

[46] Kadare, *Le Crépuscule des dieux de la steppe*, pp. 445-446.
[47] Kadare, *Muzgu i perëndive të stepës*, pp. 31-32.
[48] Kadare, *Eschyle*, p. 66.
[49] Kadare, *Eskili*, p. 65.
[50] Kadare, *Dialogue avec Alain Bosquet*, p. 135.

that diminishes its communal origins. He also reveals how his first reading of Bürger's *Lenore* influenced his future writing: 'Il est possible que ce soit dès cette époque qu'ait vaguement pris corps en moi le premier désir de réécrire un jour cette ballade'.[51] It is striking that Kadare's focus on the ballad and its characters' macabre journey in his works can be read, in part, as a response to a German version of the tale. In light of this context, the motifs of return and restoration evident in *Doruntine* take on a further layer of extratextual significance beyond writing symbolically under Hoxha's regime. As Kadare's novel brings the woman and the mysterious rider back to the Balkans, Doruntine returns home twice over—within the narrative and through its retelling. The confluence between historical Albanian culture and Kadare's art here allows the writer to insert himself *into* a Balkan literary space. Writing *into* a tradition of sacred rites, vendetta logic and blood feud, Kadare is able to continue—and contribute to—an existing national mythology, and by using challenging, experimental narrative forms (the detective story of *Doruntine*) he also asserts a modern authorial identity. *Doruntine*, then, can also be read as a reclamation of artistic selfhood and cultural identity; it allows Kadare to position himself as the writer of his nation's mythic history.

## The Role of Debt in *Doruntine*

Writing into a tradition of vendetta logic and blood feud, we see how the representation of debt as a social practice in *Doruntine* is founded on the archaic Albanian honour system of proto-legal tribal customs, the *kanun*. The *kanun* dates from the medieval period, and it was used as a rigid code of honour to maintain order between feuding clans and within communities in Albania. Knowledge of the *kanun*—and the practice of its code—persisted when Albania was part of the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the country's northern mountainous region. Running parallel to centralised structures of power in this way meant the *kanun*, as an interior-facing, clan-based code of law, was able to exist at odds with authority to become an important facet of rebellion within the

[51] Ibid., pp. 135-136.

Albanian imaginary, as well as the crystallisation of a particular Albanian absurdity in Kadare's eyes: a 'Véritable encyclopédie de la grandeur et de la déraison, il est tout aussi logique qu'illogique, tragique que grotesque'[52] ['*Një enciklopedi e vërtetë e madhështisë dhe e marrëzisë, ai është sa i logkijshëm, aq dhe i palogjikshëm, sa tragjik, aq dhe grotesk*'[53]]. Even today, it retains a significant socio-cultural role in the Albanian imagination. Its reach across every aspect of life and its inviolable rules have ensured its enduring presence in the collective imaginary; the *kanun* in fact purports to set out a complete moral and customary framework to guide social interactions within a community, from birth to death.

Within the *kanun*, Peter Morgan notes, lie the 'petrified remains of the Homeric social code based on vengeance, vendetta, and *besa*, the core values of the warrior society'.[54] This vision of a warrior society and its legacy of rebellion and tribalism was opposed by Hoxha's dictatorship. At the time of Kadare's writing, the regime had outlawed the honour code; it was seen as a symbol of subversion and resistance, at odds with Hoxha's promotion of the image of a cohesive, communist nation. However, even Hoxha's regime could not escape the influence of the *kanun* as the state's understanding of justice was implicitly informed by the code. The punishment and execution of dissidents was therefore itself seen as a form of *gjakmarrje*—blood-taking.

## The *Kanun* and *Besa* as Modes of Rebellion

Writing the *kanun* into *Doruntine* and writing within a broader social context of suppression, the novel portrays the code within the text as an expression of rebellion against political authority. It presents the *kanun* as an important re-emergent social practice that cannot be contained, and it uses allusions to myth and nature to convey its inevitable survival. In one passage, the *kanun's* burgeoning influence is likened to the growth of a flower: 'Elle était encore bien rare. Délicate,

[52] Kadare, *Eschyle*, p. 113.
[53] Kadare, *Eskili*, p. 106.
[54] Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, p. 291.

telle une fleur sauvage ayant besoin d'être entourée de soins, ses contours étaient encore mal définis.'[55] ['*Ishte ende e rrallë. Sapo kishte mugulluar, ndaj ishte trillane, si një lule e egër, që kishte nevojë për selitje*'[56]]. And in another, the novel uses the language of rebirth to compare the *kanun* to a phoenix:

> Après un long sommeil, le Canon, allez savoir pourquoi, semblait vouloir renaître de ses cendres. En dépit des mises en garde sévères et réitérées du prince, déclarant seules valables les lois de l'État, à l'exclusion de celles du Coutumier, dans les limites de la principauté les cas de justice personnelle ne cessaient de se multiplier.[57]
>
> *Pas një përgjumjeje të gjatë, kushedi pse, Kodi i moçëm po ringjallej. Me gjithë kërcënimet e njëpasnjëshme të princit se në principatë njiheshin vetëm ligjet shtetërore dhe jo ato të Kanonit, rastet e vetëgjyqësisë sa vente, shtoheshin.*[58]

Borrowing these images from nature and myth to describe the *kanun* reflects the way in which it is embedded within all aspects of Albanian culture. The metaphor of growth connects it to the tangible and the earthy; this is a reminder that the *kanun* covers all aspects of life, including the material. It also signals the code's subversive power as the flower's fragility is juxtaposed with the adjective 'sauvage' to suggest an elemental inexorability. The metaphor of rebirth here also calls up the theme of return and can be read as a symbolic nod towards the *Rilindja* movement and the endurance of a dissident identity in the face of centralised control; Albanian identity *can* be regained. The verb 'renaître' draws a link between the *kanun* and Constantine as both re-emerge in new forms. The narrative insistently returns to this connection throughout the text as Constantine becomes the embodiment of Albanian identity re-found. Using the socio-cultural as a mode of resistance against central authority is reflected in the novel's turn away from the battlefield—the site of conflict in *Les Tambours de la pluie*—toward the inside of a community. Words and shared stories become the channels through which power is challenged. And the *kanun*, as an oral code, demands communal involvement for it to be understood and honoured; that is why its most significant element is the promise, the word of honour: the *besa*.

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[55] *D* (F), p. 382.
[56] *D* (A), p. 167.
[57] *D* (F), p. 337.
[58] *D* (A), p. 116.

The *Besa*

Understanding the *besa* and its role in the novel calls up two layers of contextualisation to examine. Firstly, it must be looked at through the prism of a culture that places great value on honour and duty—the culture that gave birth to the *kanun.* Secondly, the *besa* can be read as a performative utterance; fulfilling a *besa* is the performance of honour itself. Robert Elsie stresses the importance of the *besa* in Albanian culture as he writes that historically it was 'regarded as sacred, and its violation was unthinkable'. [59] The *besa* encapsulates the vendetta logic central to the post-*kanun* understanding of duty and debt that continues to guide social interactions and practices implicitly. To be faithful and loyal is to fulfil one's *besa*. Its significance as a judgement of honour has been absorbed into the collective psyche in a way that makes it visible even at a quotidian, nominal level; it is the root of many common Albanian words and given names.

A *besa* could be made between families to ensure a ceasefire in their blood feud, or it could be a promise made between individuals, although the simplicity of a promise belies the *besa's* absolute authority. Within the internal mythology of Kadare's works, using the *besa* as a statement of honour symbolises the facticity of ethnonational identity and belonging.[60] In *Doruntine,* Kadare uses it to connote archaic, sacral rites; it is a sacred and unbreakable vow and an assertion of honour for the one who utters it. The writer uses the *besa* as a conceit to test the limits of individual agency, familial relationships, religious authority and the search for truth. Although the *besa* begins as an individual's word of honour, in the plot of *Doruntine* it precipitates the tragic lot of the titular character and her family. In the aftermath of the tragedy, the story of Doruntine's return to Albania becomes public property; the story spills out into the local community for others to share, expand and retell. In this way, the reader is able to participate in the rites of the local community and bear witness to the role of the *kanun* in organising collective action. The reader's participation in Doruntine's funeral, reading the poetic lamentations of the mourners, draws out

[59] Elsie, *A Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture*, p. 35.
[60] Peter Morgan, 'Ismail Kadaré's *The Shadow*', p. 409.

this communality. The *besa* itself becomes part of this ritualised mourning and the way in which the dead are mourned in these lamentations as the mourners must '"pleurer dedans la loi"'[61] ['*"të qash me ligje"*'[62]]. Their lamentations emphasise, at once, the impermanence of life and the survival of the ancient code of law as they enact it orally.

As part of a system of debt, vengeance and justice are intertwined through the *besa* since it dictates that no crime can go unpunished and no debt can remain unpaid. The suggestion of a broken *besa*, an unpaid debt, is itself extreme and transgressive; the *besa* emerges from this economic register and exceeds it to create an economy of blood. Within this economy of blood, the *besa* is the primary currency. In his conversation with Alain Bosquet, Kadare uses the lexical field of payment to mobilise the notion of debt and conceptualise it within an Albanian economy of blood, 'Son principe fondamental est l' "égalité du sang", autrement dit l' "égalité des hommes". Le sang n'est jamais perdu. Le sang se paie. Le sang de chacun a le même prix, celui des gens des castes supérieures comme celui des couches inférieures, celui du prince comme celui de l'homme du commun'.[63]

Hence, the *besa* is the cornerstone of the *kanun* and this transactional approach to morality and justice. It also became a foundational element of Albanian cultural identity as it was used as a medium for the internalisation and mythologisation of the nation's state-building process. It was used in this way as a ritual device to bring together disparate clans and make possible conciliation and solidary action within the national movement; the history of the *besa* is in fact the history of shifting powers making use of mythology to construct a cohesive Albanian identity.[64] Kadare depicts the *besa* as an alternative authority in *Doruntine*. It is an authority that has the capacity to create and transform identity as it emerges from—and in opposition to—the authority of the

[61] *D* (F), p. 297.
[62] *D* (A), p. 71.
[63] Kadare, *Dialogue avec Alain Bosquet*, p. 107.
[64] Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, 'Narratives of Power: Capacities of Myth in Albania', in *Abanian Identities: Myth and History*, ed. by Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd J. Fischer (Hurst: London, 2002), pp. 3-25 (p. 6).

existing feudal system and the Church. This version of the *besa* is the fulcrum of the Romantic conception of honour to which Constantine subscribes:

> Ils répondaient que dans ce monde-là, les institutions en vigueur seraient remplacées par d'autres, invisibles, immatérielles, qui n'auraient cependant rien de chimérique ni d'idyllique, plutôt sombres et tragiques, et qui auraient donc tout autant de poids, sinon plus, que les premières. Seulement, elles seraient intérieures à l'homme, non pas comme un remords ou quelque sentiment analogue, mais comme quelque chose de bien défini, un idéal, une foi, un ordre connu et accepté de tous, mais qui se réaliserait à l'intérieur de chacun et ne serait cependant pas secret, mais révélé à tout le monde, comme si l'homme avait une poitrine transparente et que sa grandeur ou sa détresse, ses douleurs, son drame, ses décisions ou ses doutes fussent visibles à tous.[65]
>
> *Ata përgjigjeshin se në një botë të tillë institucionet do të zëvendësoheshin nga institucione të tjera, të padukshme, të paprekshme, por jo si diçka ëndërruese, fushë me lule e të tilla, por të zymta e tragjike, pra, po aq me peshë si të parat, në mos më tepër. Vetëm se këto do të jenë brenda njeriut, jo si një vrasje ndërgjegjeje apo diçka e këtij lloji, por një gjë e përcaktuar mirë, një ide, një bindje, një urdhër i pranuar e i njohur prej të gjithëve, por i kryer prej secilit sipas vullnetit të vet. Pra, ishte diçka brenda njeriut, por jo e fshehtë, po e ditur prej të gjithëve, njëlloj sikur gjoksi i njeriut të ishte i tejdukshëm, dhe brenga, drama, vendimi apo lëkundjet e tij, madhështia apo mjerimi i tij, të shiheshin prej të gjithëve.*[66]

The *besa* is depicted here as a belief system that exceeds organised religion. It codifies the tragic Albanian spirit, foregrounding its self-destructive impulses and rigid understanding of possibility and impossibility. The phrase 'ce monde-là' ['*një botë të tillë*'] suggests it has the transformative capacity to create a new reality that goes beyond established authority and instead takes on a sublime, transcendental dimension—a new world. The writer thereby forges a connection between the affective interior world of the individual and the wider community to create an institution founded on an inescapable conception of ancestral obligation. This is reinforced through the image of the internal, psychological realm visibly spilling out as it gives moral form to the intangible; belief and its expression then make possible a new communal and moral world: 'un monde où régnerait la *bessa*'[67] ['*një botë* me besë'[68]]. The passage is claustrophobic as the sentence length mimics the inescapability of Constantine's all-encompassing system of moral debt and his idealised vision of how the world could be; each subordinate clause, and the final alliterative list

[65] *D* (F), p. 381.
[66] *D* (A), pp. 166-167.
[67] *D* (F), p. 384. Emphasis in the original.
[68] *D* (A), p. 169. Emphasis in the original.

(in the French text), pulls the reader further into a knotty tangle as the *besa*, ultimately, in its widest implications, becomes the medium for the reorganisation of a new Albania.

The construction of this new Albania and, by extension, a new Albanian identity that is at odds with existing institutions can be read as a metaphor for Hoxha's Albania. This is of course ambivalent since, as we saw, the folk logic of honour opposes the explicit and formal rules of state and Church. One could then think that a reference to this folk morality would be a source of resistance in relation to a dictatorship that seeks to assert the power of the state over society. I will come back to this later in this chapter in a discussion of the scholar Tatjana Aleksić. However, at the same time it was part of the legitimising ideology of the Hoxha regime to instrumentalise folk morality and especially its honour code, in order to promote its own conception of obligation and of what is *due*. In its rewriting of folk tradition and in its writing up against the ideological machine of the Hoxa regime, Kadare's oeuvre in fact maintains and reinforces this kind of ambivalence.

It is part of the context that *Doruntine* is written into that Hoxha actively manipulated Albanian history and mythology, cultivating a mythic vision of the nation around his own manufactured image as liberator, protector and hero, and he used allusions to carefully selected historical figures to support his claims.[69] The creation of Hoxha's Albania also involved turning inwards away from the rest of the world in a spirit of isolationism. This separation from the outside world is echoed in *Doruntine* when Constantine's credo is revealed to Captain Stres: Constantine and his followers believe Albania must turn inwards to ensure its survival. The group supports the creation of new institutions founded on the *besa*; in this way, the code becomes the basis for rationalising their actions so that they can now be seen as the continuation of an archaic conception of identity and obligation. By narratively putting into circulation an established collective understanding of honour

[69] M. J. Alex Standish, 'Enver Hoxha's Role in the Development of Socialist Albanian Myths', in *Abanian Identities: Myth and History*, ed. by Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd J. Fischer (Hurst: London, 2002), pp. 115-125 (p. 121).

and debt as an allegory for Hoxha's political isolation, the novel offers a subtle symbolic mode of critique. It situates the dictatorship *within* its own symbolic economy of blood in order to reflect how collective identity and folk morality were weaponised by the regime and how, on a practical level, institutions and social practices were rewritten and transformed in Hoxha's image.

When Captain Stres meets Constantine's group of followers, they present their vision of an isolated Albania to the detective: 'Bref, l'Albanie devait modifier ses lois, ses administrations, ses prisons, ses tribunaux et tout le reste, les façonner de telle sorte qu'elle pût les détacher du monde extérieur [ … ] Elle se devait absolument de le faire si elle ne voulait pas être rayée de la face du monde.'[70] ['*Me një fjalë, Arbri duhej të ndryshonte ligjet e veta, zyrat, burgjet, gjyqet e gjithçka tjetër, t'i bënte të tilla, në mënyrë që të mund t'i merrte ato nga bota e jashtme* [ … ] *Ai duhej ta bënte këtë, ndryshe do të fshihej nga faqja e dheut*'[71]]. The use of 'Arbri' in the Albanian version—a contracted form of the nation's historical name *Arbëria*—is significant here since it calls up a particular version of the past. Evoking history in this way shows that even as part of the vision for a new Albania traces of the past remain irrevocably present. This nominal resurrection also draws a firm association between Albania and Constantine. Constantine, too, is of the past. He is the dead man, written into myth to signify the impossibility of overcoming Albanian identity conceived as an ancestral condition. He is absorbed into it; his *besa* is a reminder of *his* honour and thus of *his Albanianness* and signifies a subjective turn inwards.

Can Constantine, then, be read as a symbolic avatar for Hoxha in *Doruntine*? Although Constantine is portrayed as the leader of his group and an authority figure within his family, he is voiceless throughout the novel. Like Skanderbeg in *Les Tambours de la pluie*, he is the visible invisible[72] that is mediated through the words and memories of others. His thoughts are articulated through his friends' words, and his transgressive, incestuous desire for his sister is conveyed

[70] *D* (F), pp. 384-385.
[71] *D* (A), p. 170.
[72] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 6.

through his mother's letters. The *besa* is a pledge of personal honour, but Constantine's vow is also a response to his dishonourable, incestuous feelings for Doruntine. And although he assumes the role of a dissident in that he rebels against the norms of society within the novel and tries to make his own ancestral vision of Albania real, he is ultimately unable to break from his past, even in death. He cannot overcome his debt even when it is fulfilled as it becomes a part of him. After his death, Constantine is memorialised in mythic form, and his *besa* is portrayed as a weighty, tangible entity. At Doruntine's funeral, the professional mourners perform ballads about Constantine—addressing him directly—as they invoke his *besa* and ask him if it was buried with him. With this intradiegetic metatextual device, the novel inscribes into its own fabric the machinery of ideology. This speaks to the fundamental ambivalence evoked earlier: the folk morality of the *besa* is a constituent element within the Albanian identity that Kadare's novels write from and towards, yet at the same time this moral system and its logic of obligation becomes absorbed within the contemporaneous, political Albanian identity as a layer within its self-legitimising ideology. The conflicting aspects of the character of Constantine and his characterisation in the novel are revealing of a complex figure who cannot unambiguously be read. Kadare uses Constantine recursively in his works to reflect the figure's complex mythic image; he is, at once, brother and lover, man and spectre, and self and other. Constantine is also associated with the themes of personal honour and transgression, and his *besa* reflects this tension.

## I Give You My Word: The Performative *Besa*

The *besa* occupies an important place within the Albanian imaginary as an assertion of honour. However, at its core, the *besa* is also a particular kind of speech act; it involves the vocalisation of a promise between two or more people and can be read as examples that J. L. Austin would describe as performative utterances. Austin argues that utterances are performative when the subject *does* more than *says*, indicating that 'the issuing of the utterance is the performance of an

action'.[73] Writing in 1946, before the publication of *How to Do Things with Words,* in which he sets out the theory of speech acts and examines the difference between different types of performative utterances and constative ones, Austin analyses the expression 'I promise': 'when I say 'I promise', a new plunge is taken: I have not merely announced my intention, but, by using this formula (performing this ritual), I have bound myself to others, and staked my reputation, in a new way.'[74] Within this understanding, there the uncertainty arises that a person stating 'I promise' is not a guarantee that the person will keep their word. However, to consider this in an Albanian context, in which the *besa* is an absolute and inviolable pledge, saying 'I promise' or 'I give you my *besa*' is a meaningful social exchange that involves performing the action of having honour or *doing* honour. In this way, the phrases 'I promise' ['*premtoj*'] and 'I give you my word' ['*ju jap besën*'] can be read as performative utterances that depend for their 'success' on the cohesive community that forms the context of the utterance.

To give one's *besa*, then, is to *do* honour, to be honourable. Is Constantine's *besa* an articulation, by the same token, of his honourable nature? As we have seen in the novel, Constantine embodies the conflicts that exist within Albanian identity, and his word of honour exists in the nexus of these conflicts; this is made clear when Captain Stres visits Constantine's group of friends and poses the question: 'Alors qu'est-ce que la *bessa*, selon vous, ou plutôt selon lui, Konstantin ?'[75] ['*Pra, ç'është besa, sipas jush ose, më mire, sipas atij, Kostandinit?*' [76]]. In response, one of Constantine's friends—one of his 'disciples'[77] ['*dishepujt*'[78]]—states that the *besa* intersects with his understanding of *Albanianness* as an elemental, internal condition of existence: 'Cela se fond dans ses conceptions générales. On aurait du mal à comprendre la façon dont il la concevait sans la rattacher à ses autres convictions.'[79] ['*Kjo është e lidhur me mendimet e tjera të tij. Është e vështirë*

[73] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 6.
[74] J. L. Austin, 'Other Minds', in *Philosphical Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 99.
[75] *D* (F), p. 379.
[76] *D* (A), p. 164.
[77] *D* (F), p. 379.
[78] *D* (A), p. 164.
[79] *D* (F), p. 380.

*të kuptohet pa ato*'[80]]. As his friend answers on his behalf, the episode foregrounds Constantine's existential absence and his lack of subjectivity (as he is alienated from himself by the debt he took upon himself); he has no voice and exists in the past tense within traces of their memory. Because he already exists in the past in the narrative, the reader does not bear witness to him giving his *besa* to his mother. His debt is instead mediated through the memory of his friends when Stres asks about their leader and through the funeral lamentations of the professional mourners.

For Constantine, it would seem the *besa* is not just about *doing* honour but also about *using* honour since his promise also acts as a screen for his transgressive desire for his sister. His incestuous impulse is omitted from his friends' understanding of the *besa* and Constantine's belief in the sublime, transcendental power of *Albanianness*. This analysis of Constantine's *besa* is consonant with Artan Fuga's critique of the Rozafa immurement legend.[81] As we saw in the previous chapter, in that story, it is the brother who keeps his word who is, in a sense, punished as his wife is immured in the castle walls to secure its stability. And the brothers who break their promise ensure the survival of their wives. For Fuga, this aspect of the myth encapsulates the dilemmas of Albanian ambiguities as the allegorical message of the story is that amorality (in this case, breaking one's *besa*) can secure familial solidity whereas the proper contractual relationship can be followed by familial destruction and communal solidity. In *Doruntine*, Constantine's *besa* moves between a communally understood expression of honour and an individual drive to satiate a transgressive desire.

Indeed, Doruntine and her mother are shielded from harm until Lady Vranaj curses Constantine at his graveside, implicating them in the fulfilment of his promise from beyond the grave. As the invocation of the unfulfilled *besa* causes him to rise from the dead, his resurrection signals rupture;

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[80] *D* (A), p. 165.

[81] Artan Fuga's analysis of the Rozafa myth was presented as a paper in the 1999 conference *The Role of Myth in History and Development in Albania*, and it was is incorporated into Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers's chapter, 'Narratives of Power: Capacities of Myth in Albania', in *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, p. 6.

it signifies a disturbed gravesite and it also gives rise to a ruptured family unit. By returning his sister to the family home, away from her marital home, Constantine honours his *besa*, but by carrying out the proper contractual relationship, he also ensures that the Vranaj bloodline ends.

Since the novel begins after Constantine's death, the *besa* he swears to his mother is omitted from the narrative; the reader does not share the experience of him giving his word in the immediacy of the present indicative. In this way, the absence of his *besa* calls his honour into question as he does not speak the words that are expressly tied to the performance of honour. When his *besa* becomes the subject of the professional mourners' funeral ballads, the women pose him rhetorical questions at his graveside about the *besa* and memory: 'Te rappelles-tu ta *bessa* / Ou bien est-elle enterrée avec toi ?'[82] ['*Ku e ke besën që më dhe, / Besa jote nën dhé*'[83]]. Similarly, the cemetery watchman's recollection of Constantine's grave and the disturbance that took place at his graveside before Doruntine returned home brings together images of debt and rupture. This recollection also brings memory into contact with the physical, spatial organisation of Constantine's grave. Where his unfulfilled debt signals his absence and out-of-placeness, the organisation of Constantine's grave as a physical space is a means of highlighting the inescapability of his indebtedness. In this way, Constantine's grave functions as a weighty and material reminder of his debt rather than a place of remembrance. This is reinforced during Lady Vranaj's customary visit to the graves of her nine sons: 'Elle a allumé un cierge sur chaque tombe, mais sur celle de Konstantin, elle en a allumé deux.'[84] ['*Ajo ndezi nga një qiri mbi çdo varr, kurse mbi varrin e Kostandinit ndezi dy qirinj*'[85]]. Although the placing of candles at her sons' gravesides may seem like an innocuous act, the way in which Lady Vranaj singles out Constantine's grave subtly signals its transgressive nature.

The question, 'What does the *besa* mean to you?' introduces the importance of interpretation in relation to debt. Does the *besa* and, by implication, debt, have different meanings according to

[82] *D* (F), p. 294.
[83] *D* (A), p. 69.
[84] *D* (F), p. 286.
[85] *D* (A), p. 58.

different individuals even though it involves a communal understanding of honour? And does the nature of debt alter according to the indebted individual's conception of their obligation? Constantine's indebtedness is presented through the prism of the *besa* and the trappings of honour, duty and *Albanianness* that the *besa* implies and implicates him. In his investigation, Stres aims to get to the heart of Constantine's understanding of the *besa* by asking the dead man's friends about the power the *kanun*, and its rigid code of honour, held over Constantine. This line of questioning leads to a collapse of the distinction between the man and his debt; the *besa* comes to be an essential part of Constantine, an extension of him. But Stres's questioning also spotlights Constantine's absence, his fundamental out-of-placeness, that his debt and death cause while his friends are left to speculate about debt on his behalf. So how does death reconfigure the notion of Constantine's indebtedness? His grave becomes the focus and locus of his debt; he is able to communicate his debt and overcome his indebtedness through the grave. The grave also comes to reinforce symbolically the rupture that Constantine's debt generates. We have seen that Lady Vranaj signals the disruptive nature of Constantine's act. In another instance, when at the family grave she proceeds to single him out and to curse him.

She curses Constantine in his grave for failing to fulfil his debt and bring Doruntine back to the family home. She begins her curse by questioning her son in a way that is later echoed by the funeral mourners in their lamentations: 'Konstantin, as-tu oublié la promesse que tu m'as faite de me ramener Doruntine [ … ] Maintenant que me voici restée complètement seule sur cette terre, puisque tu as toi-même ravalé ta promesse, puisse la terre ne jamais t'absorber !'[86] ['*Kostandin, ku e ke fjalën që më dhe se do të ma sjellësh Doruntinën sa herë të kem nevojë për të?* […] *Tani që mbeta qyqe mbi dhé dhe pranë s'kam askënd, ty, që e trete besën, dheu mos të trettë*'[87]]. Lady Vranaj's line of questioning is not simply rhetorical; it is designed to elicit a response from Constantine. By invoking the *besa* at his graveside—as well as his failure to fulfil it—she seeks a reply from Constantine. In her curse and direct interrogation of a kind at his grave, Lady Vranaj

[86] *D* (F), p. 287.
[87] *D* (A), p. 59.

thus takes the power of speech acts, their perlocutionary force and their dependence on a context, to another level. She speaks a language of honour and obligation that cuts across the boundary of life and death, and it is this suggestion of failure—and its implicit dismantling of Constantine's honour—that ultimately impels him to rise from the grave. This episode also shows how Constantine's indebtedness is nested within the domestic economy of kinship, of familial duty, and by failing to fulfil his debt, the dead man exists outside of the time and space of the family structure.

Captain Stres and Constantine

The image of rupture spills out to Captain Stres as he, too, becomes implicated in Constantine's *besa* and his resurrection. And over the course of the novel, the boundary between Stres and Constantine becomes increasingly blurred. Of this relationship, Kadare even writes of the novel's reception in *Invitation à l'atelier de l'écrivain* and how some readers believed Stres—not Constantine—was responsible for Doruntine's return:

> J'ai été le premier tourmenté par toutes ces questions posées par des lecteurs (souvent aussi par des critiques) sur le point de savoir qui avait vraiment ramené Doruntine, la lointaine épousée aux dires de qui c'est son frère mort qui est venu la chercher. [ … ] Le personnage qui, bien qu'agissant dans l'ombre, s'y est le plus identifié n'est autre que Stres, celui-là même qui dirige l'enquête. Est-ce un hasard, si, au début du roman, il est absent pendant près d'une quinzaine de jours (durée du voyage de Doruntine) et ne fait ensuite pas même allusion à cette absence, comme s'il en avait perdu jusqu'au souvenir ?[88]

Stres's status as the novel's impossibly indebted figure comes from his role in the investigation into Doruntine's return: he is tasked by the region's religious authorities to find the man responsible for her homecoming or to create him. By shouldering the burden of the search, Stres comes to embody the narrative's internal tensions as he is caught between external authority and personal honour. His initial refusal to believe in Constantine's resurrection sets him on a path to revelation and self-reflection that culminates in a moment of *anagnorisis* in the graveyard where Constantine is buried. Stres's mission to find the person responsible for Doruntine's return is also

[88] Ismail Kadare, *Invitation à l'atelier de l'écrivain*, trans. by Jusuf Vrioni (Paris: Fayard, 1991), p. 43.

laced with a mild sense of paranoia; at one point, he even questions whether he himself brought back the woman. This self-interrogation reflects Captain Stres's evolution as a narrator, and his identity grows ever more complex and layered. Indeed, as the narrative builds from Stres's internal *anagnorisis* towards a public revelation, we see the boundary between Stres and Constantine become more nebulous. He begins to bridge the space in-between that both men occupy, merging the self and other as Constantine's journey from death to reanimation and Stres's growing understanding of it as reality symbolises both the necessity and the impossibility of overcoming debt.

Stres, like Constantine, feels a transgressive desire for Doruntine that goes against his marital vows. His obvious desire for the Vranaj woman sets him at odds with his own wife, who grows increasingly frustrated whenever Doruntine's name is mentioned. As Stres's investigation deepens, and he gains access to Constantine's friends and the personal artefacts of Lady Vranaj, he grows closer to the man for whom he is looking. When he shares an intimate moment with his wife, the line between him and Constantine and between her and Doruntine become blurred. The invocation of coldness in the scene brings to mind death and the snow on the ground when he visits the Vranaj graveyard. It is almost as though there is a moment of displacement between the two men as Stres comes to embody not only the novel's internal tensions, but also the man himself.

In the graveyard, a site of rupture and resurrection, Stres experiences a moment of insight that ruptures his own understanding of Doruntine's return and forces him to believe in Constantine's rise from the grave:

> Subitement, l'histoire de Doruntine lui parut on ne peut plus simple, d'une extrême clarté. [ … ] Ils avaient tendu à se rejoindre pour s'unir dans la vie et dans la mort dans un état tenant à la fois de la vie et de la mort, tour à tour dominé par l'une et par l'autre. Ils avaient tenté d'enfreindre les lois qui lient ensemble les êtres vivants pour les empêcher de repasser de la mort à la vie, il s'étaient donc efforcés de briser les lois de la mort, d'atteindre à l'inaccessible, de se réunir à nouveau [ … ] En fin de compte, c'était une histoire qui était plus ou moins advenue à n'importe qui, dans n'importe quel pays, à n'importe quelle époque. Il n'est personne, en effet, qui n'ait rêvé de voir quelqu'un venir de loin, des terres de l'au-delà, rester un moment en sa compagnie et chevaucher avec lui

> sur le même cheval ; il n'est personne en ce monde que n'habite quelque regret à propos d'un disparu.[89]
>
> *Dhe, befas, historia e Doruntinës iu duk e thjeshtë dhe e qartë, sa s'kishte ku të vente më.* [ … ] *Kishin synuar drejt njëri-tjetrit, për t'u bashkuar në gjallje e në vdekje, në një jetëvdekje apo vdekjejetë të përzier. Qenë përpjekur të shkelnin ligjet që i mbanin të mbërthyera qeniet e gjalla, për të mos kaluar nga vdekja në jetë, pra, ishin orvatur të thyenin ligjet e vdekjes, të arrinin të pamundurën, të bashkoheshin prapë* [ … ] *ne fund të fundit, kjo ishte një histori që i kishte ndodhur, pak a shumë, gjithkujt, në çdo vend dhe në çdo kohë. Sepse për gjithkënd gjithmonë ka pasur një njeri për të cilin është ëndërruar të vijë nga larg, nga trojet e tejjetshme, të rrijë një copë herë me të, të udhëtojë mbi të njëjtin kalë, sepse gjithkush në këtë botë ka pasur një peng të mbetur për dikë që nuk është më në jetë.*[90]

The suggestion here that the story could happen anywhere and at any time speaks to the extratextual layers that interface with the story of Constantine and Doruntine—of the resurrection motif in Bürger's *Lenore* and the fraternal anxiety across folk literary traditions. The emotional stakes of the story are universal, but the conditions of Constantine's return from the dead are a part of an Albanian folk morality of debt and its power. In the scene, Stres's understanding of the true nature of Doruntine's return comes in a moment of internal, private reflection; it is a briefly liberatory moment for the impossibly indebted figure, which seems to exist outside of the space and time of the novel.

In the passage, the motif of resurrection, the role of the familial and communal, and the conflict between life and death expose conflict as a broader theme in the novel. On a micro level, we see it in Stres's characterisation as the impossibly indebted figure, whose judgement and duty are in tension with one another. And on a macro level, we see it play out between the religious power of the Church as an institution and the wider community as they accept the nature of Doruntine's return and disseminate the story of Constantine's resurrection. The communal sharing of the story creates a new reality that directly challenges the authority of the Church. This larger arc of conflict speaks to the ambivalent place of the *kanun* and of folk morality in *Doruntine* that I referred to before.

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[89] *D* (F), pp. 347-348.
[90] *D* (A), pp. 127-128.

The view of the *kanun's* constitutive role in the community aligns with Tatjana Aleksić analysis of community building within the Balkans. She notes how the engagement of communities in practices that run counter to the establishment is based around an archaic understanding of what brings people together:

> In contrast to civil society, whose visible form is the organised state apparatus, community commands allegiance and imposes itself as the ultimate referent of its members' duty and affection. Its appeal is emotional and visceral, although administratively it is mainly unregulated. However, communal interference or competition with the administrative apparatus is more a rule than an exception, and in many cases community exists as a parallel institution to the legally sanctioned bodies of civil society, whose laws are not infrequently overridden by much more ancient and rooted communal traditions.[91]

We see the use of letters and reports in the novel function as signifiers of a bureaucratic apparatus of central authority; these private material objects contrast to the communal nature of the oral ballads.

Material and oral media

Doruntine's version of her return is communicated elliptically in the novel. We see it mediated through her wordless communication with Stres as he reads in her expression answers to his questions. It is also conveyed in the material form of a letter from Stres to the region's prince in which he summarises Doruntine's story. Of this, Stres writes: 'J'ai tenté de m'entretenir avec Doruntine et ce que je suis parvenu à recueillir auprès d'elle, dans son trouble, se résume à peu près à ceci'[92] ['*U përpoqa të merrem vesh me Doruntinën dhe ajo që tregoi midis turbullirës, ishte pak a shumë kjo*'[93]].

By producing a summary of events which is 'à peu près'[94] ['*pak a shumë*'[95]] a faithful retelling of Doruntine's account, Stres acknowledges that his letter distances Doruntine from her story.

[91] Aleksić, p. 11.
[92] *D* (F), p. 263.
[93] *D* (A), p. 32.
[94] *D* (F), p. 263.
[95] *D* (A), p. 32.

Although we are privy to the intimacy of the epistolary pact between Stres and the prince, the conversation between Stres and Doruntine is elided in the first chapter. We may now say that, the transferral of authorial power and ownership from Doruntine to Stres sets the mythopoetic process into motion. The reader does not bear witness to the events of Doruntine's return in the same way that she does. Instead, her story is mediated through Stres and through his point of view—he offers a narrative perspective that, before his *anagnorisis*, questions the veracity of her story. He seeks to dismantle the supernatural elements of her homecoming.

In Stres's letter, he emphasises the gaps in Doruntine's story, or perhaps in her memory: 'le voyage fut long, bien qu'elle n'ait pas été en mesure d'en préciser la durée. Elle dit qu'elle avait seulement gardé le souvenir d'une nuit interminable'[96] ['*udhëtimi vazhdoi gjatë, ndonëse ajo nuk ishte në gjendje të saktësonte kohën* [ … ] *Tha se mbante mend vetëm një natë, që s'kishte të sosur*'[97]], and 'Il est intéressant de souligner ici qu'elle ne se rapelle pas avoir voyagé de jour.'[98] ['*Këtu është me interes të vërehet se ajo s'mban mend të ketë udhetuar ditën*'[99]]. This culminates in Stres outlining:

> De ce fait, dans l'esprit de Doruntine qui était harassée, pour ne pas parler de son état moral, peut-être les dix ou quinze jours du trajet (le temps que l'on met généralement pour faire le voyage de Bohême) se sont-ils ainsi réduits à une longue et interminable chevauchée nocturne.[100]
>
> *Kjo ka bërë që në mendjen e Doruntinës, e cila ka qenë, veç të tjerash, mjaft e lodhur dhe e tronditur, dhjetë ose pesëmbëdhjetë ditët dhe netët e udhëtimit (sa ç'është përafërsisht largësia e Bohemisë), të shndërrohen në një natë të gjatë e të paskaj rendjeje.*[101]

The parenthetical statement in the letter communicates the gaps in Doruntine's memory and materially show Stres inserting himself into the letter as he intervenes with pieces of contextual information. By positioning himself as the spokesperson of Doruntine's story, and by questioning

[96] *D* (F), 264.
[97] *D* (A), p. 34.
[98] *D* (F), p. 264.
[99] *D* (A), p. 34.
[100] *D* (F), p. 264.
[101] *D* (A), p. 34.

the suggestion of Constantine's resurrection, Stres ultimately undermines the authenticity of Doruntine's version of events.

Stres's letter spotlights his narration of Doruntine's story; it also establishes the importance of the letter as a medium, and its double *énonciation*, throughout the novel. We see letters give access to the thoughts and perspectives—or a version of the thoughts and perspectives—of characters who are absent or deceased. Following the deaths of Doruntine and her mother, Stres's deputy examines the contents of the Vranaj family archives and discovers the epistles sent between Lady Vranaj and another regional authority, Count Thopia. These letters hint at Constantine's transgressive, incestuous desire for his sister. In this way, the letter is a medium through which deceased characters can convey new, and alarming, information. The letter's materiality allows it to become a physical manifestation of hearsay and gossip in the community; it communicates a version of reality. In particular, Lady Vranaj's letters can be seen as transgressive as they cross the line between life and death. When Stres's deputy relays their content, he gives voice to Lady Vranaj from beyond the grave: 'La vieille dame l'évoque dans ses lettres'[102] ['*Zonja plakë e përmend në letrat e veta*'[103]]. Here, Stres's aide breaks open the boundary of death, and its finality, with his use of the present tense 'évoque'.

Doruntine, too, disrupts the boundary between life and death as the note she left her husband is used as a piece of evidence to determine the truth of her journey home. It is brought to Albania by the relatives of her husband (he remains unseen in the novel). The note is 'truffés de fautes'[104] ['*plot gabime*'[105]] and to Stres's eyes: 'Le texte, en langue étrangère, était incomprehensible.'[106] ['*Fjalët ishin të pakuptueshme, në gjuhë të huaj*'[107]]. It is significant that the only written explanation given by Doruntine is riddled with errors as it reinforces her inability to communicate

[102] *D* (F), p. 327.
[103] *D* (A), p. 104.
[104] *D* (F), p. 324.
[105] *D* (A), p. 101.
[106] *D* (F), p. 324.
[107] *D* (A), p. 100.

her story. However, it is significant that, to Stres, the only recognisable word in the letter is the name 'Cöstanthin', although it is not written in Albanian. The letter is clumsily written—another way in which its materiality is emphasised:

> Stres avait écarquillé les yeux sur ces grosses lettres qui semblaient calligraphiées d'une main maladroite [ … ] Un mot, le dernier, avait été biffé.[108]
>
> *Stresi i kishte shqyer sytë mbi ato shkronja të mëdha, të shkruara si prej një dore të pastërvitur* [ … ] *Njëra prej tyre, e fundit, ishte e shuar.*[109]

In order for Stres to understand the letter's content, a monk translates the words for him. Once again, the layers of mediation through which Doruntine's words must travel reinforces her inability to take ownership over her narrative. Her message—the only physical artefact written by her hand—is incomprehensible, and its meaning has to be conveyed by another person.

At the end of the novel, Stres writes another letter to the prince's chancellery. These two letters bracket the narrative—the first introduces the problem of Doruntine's mysterious return and the second offers a resolution. But the second letter also offers a narrowed-down version of events. On the surface, the letter states that the issues surrounding Doruntine's homecoming have been resolved: an itinerant seller of icons confesses to having brought her home. In this instance, the letter's *double énonciation* is particularly revealing. Stres informs the prince that the man responsible for Doruntine's return is being held in complete isolation. To the reader, the letter's most important element is that which is missing. After finishing the letter, Stres notes to himself: 'Sur la torture qu'il avait commencé à faire infliger au prisonnier, en bas, au sous-sol, Stres ne dit mot. Il referma soigneusement l'enveloppe'[110] ['*Për torturën, që porsa kishte nisur poshtë, nën këmbet e tij, Stresi nuk shkroi asnjë fjalë. E mbylli letrën me kujdes*'[111]]. The seller of icons is put to torture for a second time after his confession since Stres knows he is lying about bringing Doruntine home: he is the scapegoat—'created' by the establishment—to quell the rumours of

[108] *D* (F), p. 324.
[109] *D* (A), p. 100.
[110] *D* (F), p. 371.
[111] *D* (A), p. 156.

Constantine's resurrection. In this way, the letter's materiality is not a guarantee of its content's truth.

Kadare presents truth instead as a process of unfolding in the text of *Doruntine*. Truth is mediated through unspoken words and revealed in fragments second-hand through letters. Constantine's incestuous feelings for his sister are taboo, and their transgressive nature is revealed through letters between Lady Vranaj and Count Thopia. Stres himself is unable to voice these feelings. Instead, his deputy reveals them to him. Truth transpires through gaps left within representation. To perceive the truth thus requires a process of sifting, distinguishing between the unknown and the unknowable. Doruntine's journey back to her home is also recounted through her letter riddled with orthographical and grammatical errors. This suggests that the truth is difficult to put into words and that there is a blockage between words and the truth.

The revelation of Stres's findings, and what is revealed otherwise in material media, is made public when he reveals the truth of Doruntine's return in front of an audience. There is a theatrical quality to the public announcement when stands are erected for people to come and listen to Stres's wrapping up of the mystery. At the end of the novel, the scene calls up another of Kadare's works, the twenty-first-century novella *La fille d'Agamemnon* [*Vajza e Agamemnonit*] (2003). In that text, based on the Greek tragedy, Kadare's narrator attends the annual May Day Parade during which the fate of his lover mirrors that of Iphigenia as her father seeks a higher social standing within a repressive regime. In *Doruntine*, the revelation scene also resembles a tragic story since Captain Stres implicates everyone in the community in the mystery. There is a symmetry here with the opening chapter as, before the revelation, Stres is in bed just like he was at the beginning of the novel. But we see a subtle difference between the two moments. At the beginning of the novel Stres is wrenched from sleep by the knocking at the door—signalling the beginning of his search for the truth and a quest for identification: who is knocking leads to the question of who brought Doruntine back. Following his moment of clarity in the graveyard, Stres is at peace, and this is reflected in his long sleep that we discover when he wakes up: 'Un peu plus tard, quand il se

réveilla, il faisait déjà bien jour.'[112] ['*Kur u ndërmend prapë, dita kishte gdhirë vërtet*'[113]]. In the Albanian version here we see the use of *vërtet* (truth), which sets the tone for Stres's moment of revelation at the public ceremony.

The construction of the stands in the novel mirrors a scene that takes place in *La fille d'Agamemnon*, and it reflects that the narrative is building up to a significant moment: 'C'est dans la cour intérieure du Vieux Monastère, assez vaste pour accueillir quelque deux mille personnes, qu'on avait décidé de tenir la grande assemblée. Plusieurs jours durant, des charpentiers travaillèrent à dresser à l'intention des invités des tribunes en planches, couvertes de bâches pour le cas où il pleuvrait, ainsi qu'une estrade où Stres était censé prendre la parole.'[114] ['*Për shkak të oborrit të brendshëm, që ishte aq i gjerë sa mund të nxinte rreth një mijë veta, Manastri i Vjetër qe caktuar si vendi ku do të bëhej mbledhja e madhe. Ditë me radhë zdrukthëtarët kishin punuar për të ngritur ca treme prej druri për të ftuarit, të mbuluara me tenda, në rast se do të binte shi, si edhe një foltore, prej nga do te fliste Stresi*'[115]]. We see Stres develop from a protagonist who communicates via the written word—in letters and reports—that reflect his role as the novel's detective to a figure that understands the communal importance of orality. Where the written medium is official, bureaucratic and controllable, the oral is not. At the end of the novel, he reveals his findings in a public spectacle that has the trappings of the theatrical. In revealing Constantine's resurrection, his speech echoes the performance of the choric funeral mourners at the Vranaj graves.

The use of artistic forms in the novel shows their creative, productive place within the community because Kadare uses narrative forms to interrogate how myths are generated internally within the community; they move from within the community outwards. When Doruntine and her mother die, their funeral becomes an organising centre around which new stories are created and disseminated.

[112] *D* (F), p. 387.
[113] *D* (A), p. 173.
[114] *D* (F), p. 389.
[115] *D* (A), p. 175.

The transformative power of the myth is foregrounded in the funeral tableau as the event is seen as unusual and boundary-crossing:

> Depuis des temps immémoriaux, les événements se répartissaient en deux groupes : ceux qui rassemblaient et ceux qui séparaient. [ ... ] On eut tôt fait de comprendre que cet enterrement relevait des deux catégories à la fois.[116]
>
> *Qysh nga kohë që s'mbaheshin mend, ngjarjet ndaheshin dy llojesh: në ato që i mbështillnin njerëzit e në ato që i ndanin.* [ ... ] *U ndie menjëherë që ky varrim i përkiste njëherësh të dy llojeve*.[117]

Here, the event is presented as extraordinary. It is its extraordinary nature which allows the funeral to become a site of myth-making. Like Constantine's grave, Doruntine's burial site is not a final resting place. Instead, it is a place where new narratives are created and spread, where new Doruntines are born. As a site of creation rather than death, Doruntine's grave becomes a site of rupture, where expectations are turned on their head. The motif of rupture is further emphasised through the lexical field of birth, as the personification of the stories of Doruntine and her mother allow them to take on a life of their own: 'Comme toute agitation intérieure qui, après avoir douloureusement couvé, finit par monter au jour, les bruits courant sur Doruntine croissaient, enflaient, déformés dans les sens les plus imprévus.'[118] [*'Si çdo turbullirë e brendshme, që pas shtërzimit buiste përjashta, dufi për Doruntinën gufmonte, bymehej e ndërronte formë në kahjet më të papritura*'[119]]. The motif of birth introduces the image of physical rupture to the poetry of the professional mourners' lamentations. The image of birth stands out in stark contrast against the backdrop of death, funerary rites and ritual mourning.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of the novel, Doruntine and Lady Vranaj lie dying in their once-grand family home. The personification of the edifice underscores its dilapidation and tiredness: 'La maison qui avait était jadis l'une des plus vastes et importantes de la principauté, exhalait désormais le deuil et

[116] *D* (F), p. 293.
[117] *D* (A), p. 67.
[118] *D* (F), p. 293.
[119] *D* (A), pp. 67-68.

l'abandon.'[120] ['*Shtëpia, që kishte qenë dikur nga më të mëdhatë e principatës, derë e parë bujare, nga ato që ishin të çelëta për këdo e ku, siç i thoshin fjalës, hante i verbëti e i shkepëti, rrezatonte tani që larg braktisjen dhe zinë*'[121]]. The house's transformation from majesty to disrepair introduces the notion of a downward movement, from one state to another; the Vranaj house takes on the air of a mausoleum rather than a lively family home.

The novel depends in its language on this register of materiality—in letters, in blood and in the earth—even when the significance of orality is emphasised. We have, in fact, seen the importance of materiality in the novel throughout this chapter epitomised in the physical location of the grave, which materialises the impossibility for Constantine to undo his fate. We may then say by way of conclusion that the materiality—or materialisation—of desire, death and community in the novel constitute the poetic means by which Kadare can draw a boundary between his own mythopoetics of debt and the ideological instrumentalisation of folk morality by the Hoxha regime. The grave as a physical location and symbol will be further explored in the next chapter.

[120] *D* (F), p. 257.
[121] *D* (A), p. 26.

## Chapter Three: Political Trauma and the Grave

> L'armée était là, en bas, hors du temps, figée, calcifiée, recouverte de terre. Il avait pour mission de la faire se relever de terre. Et cette tâche lui faisait peur. C'était une mission contre nature, qui devait recéler quelque chose d'aveugle, de sourd, d'absurde. Qui devait porter en soi des conséquences imprévisibles.[1]

> *Ushtria ishte atje poshtë, jashtë kohës, e ngrirë, e kalcifikuar, e mbuluar me dhé. Ai kishte marrë detyrën ta ngrinte nga balta këtë ushtri. Ngritja e saj i shkaktonte frikë. Ishte një mision i panatyrshëm, ku do të kishte shumë verbëri, shurdhim dhe mosgjë. Pasojat mund të ishin të papritura.*[2]

This chapter focuses on the novel *Le Général de l'armée morte* [*Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur*] (1963). It examines how layers of debt are written into the narrative fabric of the novel. On the surface, the novel's prose is spare; it challenges the reader to look beyond its simplicity and, like the eponymous General, unearth what lies hidden beneath the surface. Through a close reading of the novel, this chapter aims to do precisely that. It will start by following attentively what appears on the surface of the narrative: the trajectory of its protagonist and its extradiegetic political context. The General is the text's protagonist, an unnamed Italian known only by his military rank, who is tasked with travelling to and around Albania in order to locate and exhume the bones of the soldiers who died and were buried away from their homeland during the Italian occupation of the Balkan nation in the Second World War. As an outsider venturing into Albania, the General follows in the footsteps of Tursun Pasha and the Ottomans of *Les Tambours de la pluie*. Hence, hostility remains a defining feature of the landscape and the people in the mind of the foreign visitor. Moving from west to east in the twentieth century, rather than from east to west on the Via Egnatia as the Pasha's troops did in *Les Tambours de la pluie*, the General's experience of post-Ottoman Albania resembles the stark vision of mysticism and barbarism embodied by that invading army. Albania, seen here through western eyes, is dark, confusing and strange—a nod perhaps to its assimilation of elements of Ottoman culture after centuries of occupation as well as a demonstration of what the outsider sees as an innate, elemental Albanian hostility that is made

[1] *G* (F), p. 174.
[2] *G* (A), p. 18.

evident in its 'cimes effilées'[3] ['*majat e tyre të mprehta*'[4]] and 'déchiquetées'[5] ['*e pjerrët*'[6]] and the 'psychose de guerre'[7] ['[*për*] *psikikën e luftës*'[8]] of its people. Setting the novel in the twentieth century, Kadare's text can be read then as a symbolic exploration of post-Ottoman, post-war Albania itself, in which reminders of centuries of occupation remain both in the physical landscape of the country and within the Albanian psyche; the nation's history of struggle against outside influence and invasion is brought into sharp relief as the General assumes the role of a modern type of invader, armed with datasets and nylon bags, an invader whose job it is to dig up the land and the traces of the past that lie buried there.

Like Tursun Pasha and Captain Stres in *Doruntine*, the General plays the role of the impossibly indebted Kadarean figure, a man who is bound by duty to return the deceased soldiers' remains to Italy. As we have seen, one of the essential aspects of this heroic paradigm in Kadare's oeuvre is the way in which the impossibly indebted figure must work from within a disorientating and claustrophobic space that gradually alienates him from his selfhood. Albania is inhospitable and characterised by an inescapable sameness that fosters this alienation. Although the General and his crew go from place to place in a way that gives the impression of progress, the mission itself appears absurdly monotonous and, it would seem, futile and necessarily incomplete: its repetitive nature moves the narrative in circles rather than forward and, as past and present overlap, the story seems to collapse in on itself to create a suffocating sense of disorientation. Kadare uses the lexis of labour to ground this disorientation in the physical world, even when the General begins to lose touch with his surroundings. The monotony of the mission is conveyed through the routine of digging, cleaning, measuring and packing each set of remains, with only the heights of the dead men as a means to differentiate them from one another. Within this landscape of claustrophobic sameness—of manual labour, seemingly endless lists of soldiers to tick off, and a series of grey,

[3] *G* (F), p. 174.
[4] *G* (A), p. 18.
[5] *G* (F), p. 174.
[6] *G* (A), p. 13.
[7] *G* (F), p. 296.
[8] *G* (A), p. 146.

unwelcoming places—an atmosphere of death reigns, and the dynamic nature of myth that we saw in *Doruntine* seems far away. In *Doruntine*, the themes of death and return (from the grave) are generative; they create new identities for Constantine and Doruntine and new mythologies within the community. Here, in *Le Général*, myth is 'emptied out, disenchanted, sucked dry'.[9] The use of the third person in the novel also creates a distance between the General and the reader. Kadare's protagonist is alone in shouldering the burden of his duty; he becomes haunted by his imagined interactions with the dead men. *Doruntine* examines the generative potential of Constantine's transgressive return from the dead; *Le Général* is a novel about living with the ghosts of the past.

Different configurations of debt emerge in the novel. As the impossibly indebted figure, the General represents the individualised vision of personal debt we have seen Kadare write into his novels, in which his conception of a negative existentialism constrains characters to act according to their duty. The General is bound by this duty, like Captain Stres and Tursun Pasha, to carry out the task he has been given. The lexis of moral debt and faith recur in relation to the General and his own self-understanding and conception of his duty. He views the return of the dead men's remains to Italy and mothers who have been waiting over twenty years for their sons to come home as a sacred task; although it is a burden, it is ultimately a noble one in his eyes. At the beginning of the novel he is ironically described as a messianic figure, bringing the lexical field of religion into contact with debt in a way that emphasises what the General sees as the honour of the mission: 'Les corps de dizaines de milliers de soldats enfouis sous terre attendaient depuis tant d'années sa venue, et voilà qu'il était enfin arrivé, nouveau Messie, abondamment pourvu de cartes, de listes, d'indications infaillibles pour les tirer de la fange et les rendre à leurs familles.'[10] ['*Trupat e dhjetëra-mijëra ushtarëve, të futur në tokë, kishin pritur kaq vjet ardhjen e tij dhe ja, ai kishte ardhur që t'i ngrinte ata nga balta dhe t'ua kthente prindërve dhe të dashurve. Ai kishte ardhur si një Krisht i ri, i pajisur me harta, lista dhe shënime të pagabueshme*'[11]]. The tragic lot that awaits

[9] Weitzman, 'Specters of Narrative', pp. 295-296.
[10] *G* (F), p. 178.
[11] *G* (A), p. 22.

the General is not death or disappearance, as it is for Tursun Pasha and Captain Stres. It is the realisation that despite the 'infaillibles' data ['*të pagabueshme*'], he cannot save them all.

Alongside the General's personal debt, Kadare brings in the broader concern of a collective, national debt. The repatriation of the dead men is a restitutive act. Restoring the men to their families serves an ideological and spiritual purpose based on their perceived spatial affinity with Italy and their filial duty: the soldiers belong in, and *to*, their motherland. The restoration is also a means of righting a wrong—it allows those who have a stake in the past to control it and overcome it. To the Italian military, which sends the General on his mission, the act of bringing back the dead men seeks to undo their defeat and allows the men to be buried as heroes instead. And home is an important symbolic place. In one instance, an Albanian farmer digs up a soldier buried on his land so that he can be buried in Italy: 'Je me suis dit qu'il valait mieux que le malheureux repose chez lui.'[12] ['*Le të prehet, i gjori, në vend të tij, thashë me vete*'[13]]. Reading from an Albanian perspective, though, Peter Morgan argues that Kadare uses history in the novel to contend with the time of Hoxha's regime, which he sees as being 'so over-determined by the traumas of history that it cannot live with the past, but must bury it, refusing to accept or come to terms with its history'.[14] This conclusion focuses on the symbolic significance of burial as a way of erasing history, but I argue that the novel uses excavation as a means of controlling the past—for both the Italians and Albanians. (Re-)Burial in the novel is always potential; it exists in another time in the future, when the men can be mourned properly in their (supposed) rightful place.

Kadare contrasts this version of a collective, national debt with the elemental, archaic understanding of Albanian debt that is encoded within the nation's culture and social practices. The General believes he can complete his mission—and, as a result, that a debt can be overcome—through the rigid structure of manual labour, organisation and bureaucracy. The lists of

[12] *G* (F), p. 261.
[13] *G* (A), p. 108.
[14] Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, p. 70.

the soldiers' names become signifiers of this structure; they represent the need to organise both the past and the landscape in which it can be located. The precision of the lists as they condense each individual soldier into a dataset is predictable and orderly, and these lists are used to assure the family members of the dead men that they will be returned: 'Les listes dressées par le ministère de la Guerre sont très précises.'[15] ['*listat e përpiluara nga Ministeria e Luftës janë të përpikta*'[16]]. As he recites this phrase like a script to each family member in a way that is as emotionless and mechanical as the data contained within the lists themselves, it is clear that the General trusts the information provided by the war ministry. It is only when the General and his lists come up against the reality of an unpredictable Albanian terrain and of its people that he encounters problems. This is Albania written in miniature: uncontrollable, wild, ancient. It is presented as a place where debt is written in blood and cannot be overcome. And it comes to appear in the course of the story as a place of destabilisation for the foreign protagonist.

Each of these layers is revealing of Kadare's concern with the past and its mark on the present—and future. The novel's post-war 1960s setting aligns with his time of writing, when Hoxha's grip on Albania had tightened and the country had grown increasingly isolated from the outside world. Kadare shows how Albania, at the juncture between east and west, shares ties and an immediate past with Europe; the legacy of Italy's fascist military campaign on Albanian soil has parallels with the internal threat of Hoxha's regime. He writes *Le Général* through the eyes of the alienated outsider, who cannot overcome his own debt but, through carrying out his mission, seeks to fulfil the collective debt of his homeland by bringing the dead men home. Imagining debt in this multilayered way shows up contradictions and tensions that will be explored here: how acts of mourning and of localising the dead ontologise the deceased men and their remains but separate the General further from his selfhood; how the return of the dead men to Italy also brings out the return to a time of invasion and occupation in Albania's history; and how Kadare problematises the

[15] *G* (F), p. 203.
[16] *G* (A), p. 48.

conflicts, both real and imagined, internal and external, that define national identity and the myths that emerge to haunt it.

Reading the Character of the General

> De milliers de mères attendaient les dépouilles de leurs fils. Et c'était lui qui allait les leur rapporter. Il ferait tout ce qui était en son pouvoir pour s'acquitter dignement de cette tâche sacrée. Aucun de ses compatriotes ne devait être oublié, aucun ne devait être abandonné dans cette terre étrangère. Oh ! c'était là une noble mission ! [17]
>
> *Mijëra nëna në vendin e tij prisnin eshtrat e bijve të tyre. E, pra, ai do t'ua shpinte. Ai do ta kryente mirë detyrën e tij madhore e të shenjtë. Nuk do të kursente asgjë. Asnjë i vrarë nuk duhej të harrohej, asnjë të mos mbetej në dhé të huaj. O, ky ishte një mision i lartë!* [18]

Religion and ancient conceptions of heroism guide the General on his mission to find and identify the dead soldiers. Indeed, even the repeated use of the word 'mission' ['*mision*'] is suggestive of a spiritual calling, as though the General's task were a vocation rather than the orders of the Italian War Ministry. He is also accompanied on his mission by a taciturn Catholic priest, who was stationed in Albania during the Second World War and here serves as a translator for the locals and workers tasked with digging up the dead. While the banal trappings of bureaucracy define the everyday reality of this task, made up of 'ces listes quasi interminables'[19] ['*lista të gjata*'[20]], the General identifies his role with the dead men's return and thus views his mission as righteous and worthy—as though he were a messianic figure or a mythical hero in a Homeric epic. Within his understanding of the mission's importance is the implicit and ultimately ironic suggestion that it is a rescue mission; it is an opportunity for the General to return the men to their homeland after being left to die in an inhospitable, unknowable place by their wartime leaders.

The novel articulates the General's sense of responsibility and his conception of the mission's sacredness through a lexical field of moral debt that runs through the narrative; the General sees himself as the dead soldiers' protector: 'C'était lui qui porterait à ces mères éplorées les ossements

[17] *G* (F), pp. 174-175.
[18] *G* (A), p. 19.
[19] *G* (F), p. 302.
[20] *G* (A), p. 119.

de leurs enfants que des officiers incapables n'avaient su conduire habilement au combat.'[21] ['*Ai do t'u çonte nënave eshtrat e bijve të tyre, që gjeneralët e paaftë nuk ditën t'i udhëhiqnin në luftë*'[22]]. Here, calling the men 'enfants' ['*bijve*'] and juxtaposing them with the image of their weeping mothers positions the General as a fatherlike defender of the family—the nation; he wants to *repatriate* them. Through this infantilisation of the men, the General by the same token deindividualises them. He symbolically condenses them into a unitary whole that he believes their commanding officers failed to protect. As he sets himself in opposition to the military commanders who came before him and failed by leading the men to their deaths, we can read here in the General's understanding of the mission the power he feels he has over the men and over history; by returning them home, the dead soldiers can be recast into heroes under his helm. In this way, the General considers his task of finding and returning their remains as the fulfilment of a debt to the men themselves, their families and their shared homeland.

Although it is the General's task to return every set of remains, Kadare draws attention to the individual identity of Colonel Z. He was the commander of the Blue Battalion—the punishment unit. Like the General, he is known only by his military rank and the initial of his name; he is a mysterious figure and the initial could stand for zero[23], making him the cipher for a political class to which the success of the mission is beholden but which exists outside of its time and space. His importance highlights the pressure from Italian authorities to complete the mission and the implicit threat of reprisal if the General does not. Indeed, the General's success is also intertwined with the recovery of the mysterious Colonel Z. Erica Weitzman points this out as she observes that although the General must bring the remains of all of the men home, Colonel Z can be viewed as the primary object of the General's quest, since the high status of Colonel Z's family functions as a reminder of the 'larger political and social stakes of the mission'.[24] The primacy of Colonel Z is reinforced by his place on the list of the dead men: 'Le nom du colonel Z. y figurait en tête, puis

[21] *G* (F), p. 177.
[22] *G* (A), p. 21.
[23] The word is the same in Albanian.
[24] Weitzman, 'Specters of Narrative', p. 284.

venaient, dans l'ordre alphabétique, les noms des autres tués, officiers, sous-officiers et soldats, classés par compagnies et sections.'[25] ['*Në krye të listës ishte koloneli Z. Pastaj emrat e ushtarëve, radhitur sipas alfabetit, të ndarë në kompani dhe toga*'[26]]. And looking at the set of data attached to Colonel Z, the General remarks that he must be the tallest soldier on their lists. He also looms over the mission. His family back in Italy have constructed an ornate tomb that shows up the disconnection between the Colonel's burial place in Albania, where he was killed, and his burial place in Italy, where he will be memorialised as a son, husband and hero. As the General learns, Colonel Z's role as the leader of the Blue Battalion made him responsible for the deaths of some of the men on his lists. This implicitly creates an added layer to the General's obsession with Colonel Z as he retraces his steps and shares a perverse asymmetrical relationship with him: he must find the remains of the men killed by one of their own, not the enemy.

Dismantling the Epic

At the beginning of the novel, the General has a clear understanding of the mission's importance and his place within it. Through his perspective, the reader sees how he views the task as sacred and imagines it through a vocabulary of nobility and authority. Before the mission officially begins and he sits with the Priest and Albanian delegates in his hotel in Tirana, he experiences a moment of clarity about his own authority: 'Il eut soudain le sentiment de sa proper puissance.'[27] ['*Befas e ndjeu veten tepër të fuqishëm*'[28]]. However, the novel's third-person narration also puts distance between the General and the reader, and this ultimately undermines the protagonist's self-understood power. In the wider context of the novel's plot and narrative structure, the General's moment of realisation is undercut by dramatic irony because Kadare does not write *Le Général* as a straightforward, authoritative epic tale of heroism and patriotism. In its language and spare prose, the novel subverts generic conventions in order thereby to create a parody of an epic that is banal

[25] *G* (F), p. 199.
[26] *G* (A), p. 44.
[27] *G* (F), p. 178.
[28] *G* (A), p. 22.

and tonally flat. The novel's title also reflects this subversive quality; its focus on the General's high military rank is ironic since it reveals the brittle, even illusory, nature of his power. Indeed, the adjective 'morte' ['*së vdekur*'] ultimately undermines the General's authority: he is in control of an army that exists in the past tense. By depicting bureaucracy and repetition instead of bravery and adventure—and by placing defeat at its centre—the novel offers only the bare bones, the skeleton, of an epic. And in the General, Kadare creates a protagonist who performs the duties of a bureaucrat rather than those of a military leader. He is not able to carry out manoeuvres or test his tactical abilities against an opponent in battle; his mission is stripped of the rituals of warfare. The dead men are also stripped of their lived realities as individuals and reduced to datasets detailing the coordinates of their remains and the measurements of their bones.

The disjuncture at the beginning of the work, where the General's conception of the mission is set in opposition to its repetitive reality, draws out the portrait of him as the impossibly indebted figure. He is bound by his orders to carry out a task that gradually dismantles his perception of reality and his place in it. We can apply Stathis Gourgouris's explanation of debt's capacity to destabilise and alienate oneself to draw out the conditions of the General's indebtedness:

> Debt takes place under inherited conditions even if it is not directly inherited at birth. These structural parameters of debt and indebtedness play heavily along the axis of self/other or proper/alien, where alienation is in fact imposed as a condition of incarcerating the self in a permanent incapacity.[29]

Ordered to carry out his mission by the military, the legacy of the Second World War and of Italy's defeat in that war are the General's inherited conditions from which he cannot escape and that he cannot overcome. In this sense the mission itself becomes circular—incarcerating. His characterisation as the indebted individual also comes, in part, from within, and it shifts as he realises that the task is not the noble mission of his imagination, although he does not lose sight of its worthiness over the course of his journey. The novel describes how the General becomes

[29] Gourgouris, 'Xenia', p. 527.

increasingly haunted by the weight of his 'tâche sacrée'[30] ['*detyrën e tij madhore e të shenjtë*'[31]]; the lexis of faith becomes a burden.

He learns of the dead men's interior lives, through fragmentary narratives and unearthed diaries buried alongside their remains. This separates him further from his own life. Through these fragments, he learns that many of the soldiers were deserters or cowards who had been executed by the Italian army's 'unités punitives'[32] ['*ndëshkimorët*'[33]]. There are hints of unease already in the first chapter when he first travels to Albania and considers the gravity of his task. The scale of the Albanian mountains, conveying the immutable hostility of the natural world where the men died, is juxtaposed with the diffuseness of the men's remains as they are scattered across the vast landscape. In contrast to the physical reality of the jagged mountains, the men exist at this point only in the abstract; they remain potential rather than real individuals, having interior lives and stories to tell. During his journey by plane into Albania, the General is aware of the dead men's presence—fusing them together into a unitary whole—but he ultimately emphasises the vagueness of their location: 'L'armée était là'[34] ['*Ushtria ishte atje*'[35]]. His physical separation from them and his inability to perceive them sensorily keeps the dead men in the realm of the abstract and indeterminate 'là'. However, the adjectives 'figée', 'calcifiée' and 'recouverte de terre'[36] ['*e ngrirë*', '*e kalcifikuar*' and '*e mbuluar me dhe*'[37]] anticipate the physical reality of the men's remains in the future time when they will be found—a signal towards what Katherine Verdery describes as the *thereness* of dead bodies.[38] The materiality of corporeal remains also makes the past immediately present, and here the use of the past participle brings the time of the past conflict up to date. The *thereness* of dead bodies is an important part of '*localizing* a claim'[39] over an area

[30] *G* (F), p. 175.
[31] *G* (A), p. 19.
[32] *G* (F), p. 262.
[33] *G* (A), p. 109.
[34] *G* (F), p. 174.
[35] *G* (A), p. 18.
[36] *G* (F), p. 174.
[37] *G* (A), p. 18.
[38] Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 27.
[39] Ibid., p. 28.

of land and, in *Le Général*, over the past. In Kadare's novel, the bodies' *thereness* begins as an *over-thereness*, in that their burial in Albania is shadowy, distant and foreign. The excavation of the dead Italian soldiers on Albanian soil is an attempt to rectify this spatial wrongness. However, it also forces the past conflict to play out again in miniature as the General and his men lay claim to bodies and the land in which they are buried.

The Grave as Site of Narrative Rupture

When the mission begins, it is ironically documented with military precision, as though it were an offensive being launched rather than a group digging up the war dead: 'L'exhumation de l'armée commença le 29 octobre à quatorze heures'[40] ['*Zhvarrimi i ushtrisë filloi më 29 tetor, në orën 14.00*'[41]]. And as the first grave is opened, the story of the buried soldier spills out to rupture the narrative. Unearthing the remains of the dead men also reveals their individual lives, their stories and fears; they are no longer the deindividualised mass of the General's imagination. Instead, he recalls the narratives relayed by the former soldiers who visited him before the mission that now return to him with the exhumation of the first set of remains. The narrative moves between the novel's present and the exhumation process to the past and the original burial process. The memory of the dead man is mediated through a fragmentary vignette, told in the first person by the friend who buried him. Yet, it is unclear whether that is the soldier being exhumed or another. This uncertainty creates a sense of dislocation between the two different times of the interment and exhumation processes that draws out an openness to and closure from the protagonist's own history.

Past and present are connected by a vocabulary of urgency that is paradoxically manifest in a situation of opposition: while the workers frantically dig to locate the remains, the text is interspersed with the narrative fragment of the soldier's friend, who attempts to bury the dead man

[40] *G* (F), p. 179.
[41] *G* (A), p. 24.

alone and without ceremony as deeply as possible so his body cannot be found. In the present, this sense of urgency is emphasised as the General watches the team of Albanian workers search for bones:

> La pioche frappait maintenant le sol avec un bruit étouffé qui semblait jaillir des entrailles de la terre. Le général tressaillit soudain, tous les sens en alerte. Et si l'on ne trouvait rien, là, au fond ? Si les cartes n'étaient pas exactes et qu'on fût obligé de creuser en deux, trois, dix endroits différents pour retrouver un seul soldat ![42]
>
> *Tingulli i goditjes së hekurit tani vinte i thellë, si nga fundi i dheut, dhe, befas gjenerali ndjeu një ankth në gjithë qenien e tij. Po sikur ushtari të mos gjendet? mendoi. Po sikur hartat të mos jenë të sakta dhe të detyrohemi të gërmojmë në dy vende, në tre, në dhjetë, për të gjetur një skelet?*[43]

The temporal markers 'maintenant' ['*tani*'] and 'soudain' ['*befas*'] underscore the urgency of the search and the General's response to it as he hopes to find the remains as quickly as possible. There is also a striking asymmetry at play here since the formality of the general's search is contrasted with the soldier's rudimentary burial: 'Je décrochai le poignard qu'il portait à son ceinturon et me mis à creuser avec les deux mains à la fois. Je voulais que la fosse fût très profonde, car telle avait été sa volonté.'[44] ['*Ia hoqa dhe atij kamën nga brezi dhe nisa të gërmoja me të dyja duart përnjëherësh. Doja t'i bëja një gropë të thellë, sepse kështu kishte qenë dëshira e tij*'[45]]. The sensory immediacy of the dead soldier's friend digging his grave, which is made more intimate by the use of the first-person narration, contrasts with the General's physical and emotional distance from the dead man in his role of observer. The General's order to exhume the remains is set in direct opposition to the will of the dead soldier. But this disconnection between the will of the dead soldier and the thrust of the mission is only uncovered through the exhumation process, as the General's memory and the past blend into a disorientating whole; the physical act of digging up the soldier's remains unearths a memory of the soldier himself—or an entirely different man. The fragmentary narrative ends with the friend giving his word to the buried man: 'Ne crains

[42] *G* (F), p. 182.
[43] *G* (A), p. 26.
[44] *G* (F), p. 183.
[45] *G* (A), p. 28.

rien, on ne te retrouvera pas'.[46] ['*mos u tremb, nuk do të të gjejnë dot*'[47]]. This promise is juxtaposed with the present time of the mission when the remains are found and disinfected by the workers—a symbolic act that wipes the dead man of his individual identity and his choice of resting place and instead reduces him to the barest of bones. Whether he is the man from the memory fragment or not, the exhumation of this first set of remains is a symbolic moment in the mission as it sets in motion a connection between the General and the dead men. As their stories rupture the forward movement of the narrative, they bring the General into contact with the past in a way that loosens his grip on the present.

These brief fragments create a series of ruptures in the narrative progression; like the depiction of the first set of remains being disinterred, we see some of these vignettes emerge as bodies are recovered from their graves in a way that underscores the relationship between the intangibility of memory and the materiality of the bones. The fragments are unpredictable; in places, they are presented in italic font and interspersed throughout the text. In others, they take the form of longer 'chapitres sans numéro' ['*krerët pa numër*'], which exist as unnumbered in-between spaces within the narrative structure. In *Invitation à l'atelier,* Kadare writes how, in *Le Général*, he wanted to render empty spaces and loss to create a 'roman à trous'.[48] These 'trous' are written into the text at a structural level and, as moments of narrative rupture, are revealing of the spaces between the mythical and the historical, the real and the imagined—that is, the gap between the mission as a mode of uncovering the past, creating the heroic and displaying the General's changing conception of the mission. Éric Faye describes the narrative fragments as 'poches littéraires'[49]; as the General's mission becomes more disorientating and labyrinthine, these fragments have the same function for the reader. They destabilise the narrative form by merging past and present. Some of the narrative fragments are written from the General's point of view, but these ruptures have no

[46] *G* (F), p. 184.
[47] *G* (A), p. 28.
[48] Kadare, *Invitation à l'atelier de l'écrivain*, p. 138.
[49] Éric Faye, Preface to *Le Général de l'armée morte*, in Ismail Kadare, *Œuvres : tome sixième* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), p. 166.

real bearing on the fate of the mission. Erica Weitzman argues that they function as 'a no-place and no-time'[50] within the novel's narrative continuity since they exist outside the arc of the mission itself, even when told from the General's perspective. Yet these fragments provide a kind of narrative exhumation; even though they do not influence the success of the mission or move the story further along the narrative arc, they allow the writer to dig deeper and unearth more for the reader.

In the narrative fragments told from the General's perspective, the reader gains direct access to his unfiltered thoughts. He addresses them directly, without the distance of a third-person narration. These passages give the General the opportunity to dream and break free—momentarily—from his impossibly indebted condition. He imagines himself leading his army of the dead to victory against historical figures such as Caesar, Charlemagne, Napoleon and in modern battles in Korea and Vietnam: 'Il gagna même nombre de batailles que l'Histoire tient pour perdues'[51] ['*Fitoi disa beteja që historia i quante të humbura*'[52]].

Writing about the writing process itself in one of the 'chapitres sans numéro', the General's voice could also be read as Kadare's own, creating a disorientating, metatextual layered interaction between the extradiegetic writer, protagonist and reader:

> Que pourrais-je t'écrire d'autre ? Tout le reste relève d'une chronique monotone. De la pluie, de la boue et des listes, des procès-verbaux, toute sortes de statistiques et de supputations, toute une technologie sinistre. Sauf que, ces derniers temps, il m'arrive quelque chose d'étrange : dès que j'aperçois quelqu'un, machinalement je me mets à lui ôter ses cheveux, puis ses joues, ses yeux, comme quelque chose de superfétatoire, quelque chose qui m'empêche même de pénétrer son être profond, et je me représente sa tête rien que comme un crâne avec des dents (seuls accessoires pérennes). Tu me comprends ? J'ai l'impression d'être entré au royaume du Calcium ![53]
>
> *Ç'të shkruaj tjetër? Gjithçka tjetër është një kronikë monotone. Shi dhe baltë dhe lista, procesverbale, gjithfarë shifrash e hamendjesh, një teknologji e tërë e zymtë. Veç kësaj, kohët e fundit po më ndodh diçka e habitshme. Porsa shoh një njeri, menjëherë, padashur,*

[50] Weitzman, 'Specters of Narrative', p. 294.
[51] *G* (F), p. 294.
[52] *G* (A), p. 142.
[53] *G* (F), p. 227.

> *filloj t'i heq në fillim flokët, pastaj mollëzat, faqet, sytë, si diçka të panevojshme, madje që më pengon të depërtoj në thelbin e tij; dhe e përfytyroj këtë njeri pa to, vetëm me kafkën dhe dhëmbët (të vetmet gjëra të qëndrueshme në fytyrë). Më kupton? Më duket sikur kam hyrë në mbretërinë e kalciumit.* [54]

Closeness between the subject—the General or Kadare as the writer—and the reader is established through the repetition of personal pronouns 'je', 'me' ['*më*'], and 'tu' ['*të*']. The brief passage is confessional and dialogic, which fosters an intimacy that is absent from the main body of the novel's narration and its flat, detached prose, because here it is about a turn inwards towards the corporeal and inside of the narrator's self. This movement inwards is visible in the French version as the phrase 'être entré' resembles 'enterré' and is suggestive of a burial having taken place. The mechanical trappings of the mission are juxtaposed with this turn inwards where the subject contrasts the two lists associated with the system of digging up the dead bodies and the unconscious act of stripping living ones down to their bones. The beginning of the first list highlights the physical presence of the natural world and moves towards the intangible. This reflects in microcosm the progression of the General's journey and his understanding of it within the novel—it becomes 'une technologie sinistre' ['*një teknologji e tërë e zymtë*']. The passage culminates with the rhetorical question 'Tu me comprends ?' ['*Më kupton?*'], the confessional tone of the passage reads as a direct plea to the reader for understanding in order to make sense of his place within the 'royaume du Calcium' ['*mbretërinë e kalciumit*'], as though this inexorable movement inwards demands contact with the outside to escape; but whether this outside is located outside of this realm of bones, the mission in Albania or even the text itself is unclear. Is this the General's plea? Or are they the words of Kadare, the writer, inserting himself into this claustrophobic universe of his creation? The ambiguity of the narrator's identity is reflected back to him through the unidentifiable extratextual reader, whom the narrator cannot strip bare of skin and flesh; there is comfort in the unknowable and invisible.

[54] *G* (A), p. 73.

The concept of reflection within the novel is conveyed further through the General's relationship to others; he has a double in a German Lieutenant-General, who is leading a mission to exhume the remains of Germany's war dead. And the General's connection to Colonel Z becomes more complex as the dead man proves elusive. Just as the boundary between Captain Stres's identity and Constantine's grows more porous after Stres's moment of *anagnorisis* at Constantine's grave in *Doruntine*, the connection between the General and Colonel Z alters, as the General's understanding of his mission changes, to become a perverse umbilical connection; he must locate many of the men the Colonel's battalion executed. In a sense, the General's search for Colonel Z is a symbolic journey into understanding his own mortality and the growing awareness that only the passing of time separates him from the remains that he exhumes. Alongside the General's connection to the German Lieutenant-General and the symbolic link with Colonel Z, Kadare draws out asymmetrical connections between the novel's ancillary characters across different geographical spaces and the past and present.

The Use of Doubles and Asymmetrical Relationships

The novel sets up relationships between figures in the novel to bring out their shared experience or tension. The General's relationship to others exemplifies this in miniature—he is in conflict with Colonel Z despite their connection: 'je ne suis pas l'ami du colonel Z., et qu'en tant que militaire, j'abhorre sa mémoire !'[55] ['*nuk jam miku i kolonelit Z. dhe se unë si ushtarak e përbuz kujtimin e tij*'[56]]. And he shares the experience of locating and exhuming the remains of the dead with his German double. The German Lieutenant-General is in Albania to carry out the same repatriation mission for German soldiers killed during the Second World War. This narrative doubling evokes the theme of repetition that keeps the narrative moving in disorientating circles. The doubling of the men and their missions even culminates with the German digging up the remains of Italian

[55] *G* (F), pp. 372-373.
[56] *G* (A), p. 226.

soldiers and shipping them back to Germany as though they were his own men, although it is unclear whether this was deliberate or purely accidental.

When the Italian General first learns of the identical German mission, he discusses it with the priest, who observes how Albania has been, throughout history, a place hostile to foreigners and where, over centuries, occupiers have been killed. Any of them could return to carry out a similar mission: 'Les Turcs pourraient bien venir eux aussi un jour rechercher les leurs'[57] ['*Edhe turqit mund të vijnë ndonjë ditë*'[58]]. The General and his German counterpart are thus part of a history of conflict on Albanian soil; they are given voices and so they must engage with the legacy of war—and of fascism—in their own countries' histories. Although Italy and Germany seem far away from Albania's grey, inhospitable mountains, the Balkan country is a place where its shared past of violence is such an established part of the cultural landscape that traces of this past intersect with the everyday and the banal. Hence, the reader learns that many of the dead German soldiers are buried under a football stadium, and that the remains of an Italian soldier are only found when a calf shed is knocked down. The banal also brings together the General and the Lieutenant-General. Their mission is weighed down by history and the need to find all of the men on their lists, but as both men see themselves mirrored in the other, they are also able to understand the absurdity of the task they must each carry out. In one instance, their conversation is laced with morbid humour:

> Quelle marque de désinfectant employez-vous pour traiter les restes ? demanda le civil.
> — Universal 62.
> — C'est un produit efficace.[59]
>
> *Çfarë pastruesi përdorni ju për eshtrat ? - pyeti civili.*
> *- "Universal-62."*
> *- Dezinfektant i mirë.*[60]

[57] *G* (F), p. 220.
[58] *G* (A), p. 66.
[59] *G* (F), pp. 223-224.
[60] *G* (A), p. 69.

The symbolic invocation of disinfectant also signals a need to cleanse traces of the past and sanitise a legacy of violence and death. However, the way in which the past retains the capacity to inflict violence suggests that this need is incompatible with reality for as long as material reminders of conflict remain hidden. We see this when the dead men are excavated, and their graves as sites of buried violence take on an unpredictable and potent ability to cause destruction; in one instance, the Albanian foreman overseeing the mission's physical labour dies of an infection. The suggestion of an invisible, destructive force lying buried for decades underscores the enduring violent legacy of war that cannot easily be wiped clean. The move from latent, literally buried, signifiers of conflict to explicit expressions of military force is made clear at the end of the novel when the General and his German double witness the Albanian army rehearsing ahead of the country's Liberation Day [*Dita e Çlirimit*] celebrations:

> Comme les carrés s'approchaient du pont, ils distinguèrent les froids reflets des casques et des baïonnettes mouillés, les longues colonnes de soldats, les officiers sabre au clair, les espaces vides entre les compagnies et les bataillons.[61]
>
> *Kur katrorët iu afruan urës, ata dalluan shkëlqimin e ftohtë të helmetave, rreshtat e ushtarëve dhe shpatat e zhveshura të oficerëve. Hapat e rëndë dukej sikur tronditnin dheun me britmat e shkurta të oficerëve midis*.[62]

The scene marks the first time in the text that the General witnesses a live group of soldiers carrying out their manoeuvres. It can also be read as an implicit examination of the context in which the novel was written and serves as a presage of future struggle; Albania is, after all, a place where occupation and conflict are repeated. But the ornaments of warfare here seem to belong to the past: the cold gleam of the skull-like helmets; the wet bayonets—as though covered in blood; the drawn swords; and the empty spaces that call up images of the grave. After the parade, the General has to make sure with his German counterpart that what he saw was real and not another imagined encounter. The celebrations—a creation by Hoxha's government during the 1950s—commemorate Albania's liberation during the Second World War. While both peacetime officers watch together, they

[61] *G* (F), p. 417.
[62] *G* (A), pp. 271-272.

encounter a reminder of their countries' defeats, their fascist pasts, and Albania's own movement towards repression under an authoritarian regime.

Peter Morgan argues that both the General and his German double represent life in contrast to Albania's role as a land that belongs to the past and to death: 'Like the West German general he later meets on a similar mission, he is a figure of *eros'*.[63] However, this chapter's reading of the General and his role as the impossibly indebted figure trapped within a circular narrative is not compatible with this generative characterisation that sees him driven by a Freudian life instinct. Instead, in the General, Kadare reworks the conception of archaic debt that we have seen within the Albanian imaginary to show how the novel's protagonist is trapped by an unresolvable debt; the mission of his German double holds a mirror up to its circular movement. In Albanian, the word for blood feud, *gjakmarrje*, literally translates as blood-taking. This concept of taking something to which one has a rightful claim in order to fulfil a debt reveals that the General's mission is a striking reconfiguration of this. It is not life-giving. It is already steeped in death; it is *bone-taking* [*ashtmarrje*].

Colonel Z and the Unnamed Soldier from the Diary

Within the novel's circular narrative, the search for Colonel Z guides the General; he is a 'fixed point in the chaos of history'[64] and a half-name in the lists of dead soldiers who remain largely anonymous. Colonel Z's individual identity is flattened into a set of measurements and dental records that melds with the rest of the nameless men: 'C'était la "liste des disparus", et le nom du colonel Z. y figurait encore en tête. "Un mètre quatre-vingt-deux, première incisive droite en or", lut le général'[65] ['*Përsëri iu ndalën sytë te "Lista e të humburve", në krye të së cilës ishte prapë emri i kolonelit Z. Koloneli Z., një e tetëdhjetë e dy, dhëmbi i parë i djathtë prej floriri, lexoi gjenerali*'[66]]. However, he retains the capacity to influence the mission from beyond the grave; the repeated allusions to his

[63] Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, p. 67.
[64] Weitzman, 'Specters of Narrative, p. 293.
[65] *G* (F), p. 200.
[66] *G* (A), p. 45.

place ‘en tête’ [‘*në kryë*’] of the lists of names even gives the impression that he is leading the dead soldiers *away* from the General. His influential family wait for his remains so that they can bury him in an ornate mausoleum and mourn him correctly, according to their wishes. Under pressure to locate him, the General recollects conversations with the Colonel’s mother and his young widow, Betty. Across the Adriatic in Italy, the Colonel has assumed—in their eyes—an identity fixed in the past of a devoted husband and beloved son. By contrast, in Albania, the General sees the legacy of Colonel Z’s brutality and cruelty as the head of a punishment division. These identity markers exist in tension with one another and create a contested biography that adds to the dead man’s mystery and the General’s need to find him.

The Colonel’s identity within the Blue Battalion as the perpetrator of cruel reprisals is mediated through the preserved diary of a deserter, whose remains are given to the General by the Albanian miller for whom he worked, and through the memory of the miller himself as he recalls the deserter being found and executed. Bound by this connection, the unnamed soldier of the diary becomes linked to Colonel Z. Like Colonel Z, the unnamed soldier takes on new identity markers through the memory of the Albanian miller. As the Albanian explains to the General that the Italian soldier worked and lived with him and his family, the General responds with disbelief that the soldier renounced his military identity. To the miller, the soldier was not a soldier; he was simply ‘mon valet de ferme’[67] [‘*Ai ishte shërbëtori im*’[68]]. Through the use of the possessive pronoun ‘mon’ [‘*im*’], the miller erases the dead man’s identity as a soldier and recasts him as his subordinate—his possession—and creates a new narrative that is at odds with the General’s understanding of the dead men as fallen heroes. By erasing the dead man’s identity as a soldier, the Albanian miller creates a new narrative around the individual that continues after his death. These conflictual narratives give rise to a new biography that weaves the dead man’s multiple roles together to create a complex picture of the individual—soldier, farmhand, deserter, coward. When the General asks the miller whether the dead soldier ever wore his identity medallion, the miller misunderstands the question:

[67] *G* (F), p. 260.
[68] *G* (A), p. 107.

> Une médaille ? fit le meunier d'un air étonné. Il n'était pas de ceux qui gagnent des médailles. Pour ce qui est de travailler, il n'avait pas son pareil, mais la guerre n'était pas son fort, ça non ![69]
>
> *Medalje? pyeti mullisi i habitur. S'qe ai për medalje, o bir. Për punë të thante, por për luftë s'besoj se ia thoshte.*[70]

This misunderstanding captures the essential conflict between the dead soldier's diffuse identity markers. The soldier's diary acts as both a tangible and symbolic reminder of his interior life; it also introduces a new narrative layer to his complex survival in the General's imagination. By digging up the soldier's remains, he is reanimated; his journal gives him a voice from beyond the grave. Reading the dead man's diary, the General also contributes to this new biography as he disparagingly labels him 'un sentimental, doublé d'un pleurnichard'[71] ['*një qaramani sentimental*'[72]] to the priest. As with the first soldier exhumed by the General's team, there is a stark disconnection between the wishes of the dead individual and the thrust of the mission to find the men (and their possessions—evidence of their secret lives), as underscored by the first line of the diary: 'l'important est que personne ne mette la main sur ce journal'[73] ['*gjithë puna është që fletoren të mos ma gjejë njeri*'[74]].

The soldier's diary cuts through the narrative as the General reads it in time with the reader; it is another of the 'poches littéraires' in the novel. The interaction between the diary in italics and the main narration of the novel in Roman font sets up tension between the historical testimony of the dead man and the General's imagined vision of his army. Éric Faye also contends there is a literary link between the main narration and Kadare's fragmented narrative vignettes:

> Le lecteur traverse des "poches littéraires" que l'on peut considérer comme récits autonomes ; le journal d'un soldat devenu valet de ferme en est un exemple, qui fait penser à la construction du *Don Quichotte* : des nouvelles serties dans le roman, dont l'importance rejaillira tôt ou tard sur la suite du texte alors qu'on ne s'y attend pas.[75]

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[69] *G* (F), p. 261.
[70] *G* (A), p. 108.
[71] *G* (F), p, 283.
[72] *G* (A), p. 130.
[73] *G* (F), p. 265.
[74] *G* (A), p. 112.
[75] Faye, Preface to *Le Général de l'armée morte,* p.166.

Alongside this structural similarity, the dead man himself has echoes of Cervantes's hero. His idealistic search for pastoral peace in the miller's windmill and futile romantic feelings for the miller's daughter in the middle of war, accompanied by threat of reprisals from the Blue Battalion, sets him in opposition to the cold brutality of Colonel Z and the General's conception of a soldier. Still, the General draws a connection between the dead soldier and Colonel Z. Not only do we learn that Colonel Z's Blue Battalion executed him, but, since the two men were the same height, the General considers passing off the unnamed soldier's remains as those of Colonel Z to his family. The suggestion of this perverse substitution of identities also shows how the narratives that emerge around the dead men's remains are tied to the men's living identities and serve as material reminders of their biographical lives. However, because their graves signify transition and rupture, the General can (unconsciously) use this break in the dead men's biographical time to generate new meanings and overwrite their identities.

The idea of substituting the dead soldier with Colonel Z returns to the General during the novel's climactic episode. After completing the mission, the General insists on staying in a village and participating in the local wedding celebrations. The description of his enjoyment of the event—and his liberation from the burden of his mission—is interspersed with one of the final and most revealing 'poches littéraires': the cursing of an old woman who murdered Colonel Z and buried him under her porch. In a scene that recalls the miller presenting the remains of the soldier from the diary to the General, the old woman, Nicë, presents him with a muddied sack of bones in the middle of the celebrations:

> Cette fois, la vieille ne pleurait plus, on n'entendait plus sa voix, mais tout le monde sentait qu'elle était là, à la porte. L'orchestre continuait de jouer, mais on ne l'écoutait plus. [ ... ] Elle était toute trempée, couverte de boue, le visage d'une pâleur de mort, et elle portait un sac sur ses épaules. Le général se leva machinalement et se dirigea vers elle. Il avait deviné que c'était lui qu'elle cherchait. [ … ] La vieille Nice se campa devant le general, fixa sur lui un regard mal assuré, comme si ce n'était pas lui qu'elle regardait, mais son ombre, et, d'une voix cassée, émaillée d'une quinte de toux, elle lâcha quelques mots à son adresse, dont il ne comprit que celui de *vdekje*, ou mort.[76]

[76] *G* (F), p. 375.

> *Por këtë herë plaka Nicë nuk qante, askush nuk ia dëgjoi zërin, megjithëse të gjithë e ndienin se ajo ishte atje te dera. Muzika binte, por askush nuk e dëgjonte atë.* [ … ] *Ajo ishte e lagur qull, e ngjyer e tëra me baltë, krejt e bardhë ne fytyrë, si një e vdekur, dhe në krahë mbante një thes. Gjenerali pa i zotëruar dot gjunjët u ngrit në këmbë, sepse e ndjeu që gruaja kërkonte atë.* [ … ] *Plaka Nicë qëndroi në vend, i nguli gjeneralit një vështrim të papërqendruar, sikur nuk vështronte atë, por hijën e tij. Përmes kollitjes ajo i tha disa fjalë, prej të cilave ai kuptoi vetëm fjalën* "vdekje".[77]

In the scene with the miller, the General is able to interact with him via the translations of the Italian priest. Here, the focus on the sensory—the wedding music, Nicë's deathly appearance, and her stark and unintelligible words—create a disorientating atmosphere that exposes the General's alienation in a place where only death is knowable. And Nicë's violent rupturing of the wedding celebrations arises from rage, in contrast to the miller, who feels he must fulfil a debt to the dead man and ensure he is buried in his homeland. The death of Colonel Z in a remote Albanian village at the hands of Nicë subverts the heroic image of him maintained by his mother and widow in Italy; Nicë's act is the fulfilment of her *gjakmarrje* after the Colonel violently shattered her own family unit—by killing her husband and raping her daughter. That Colonel Z is killed by an old woman according to an archaic customary law of revenge and buried under her house in rudimentary fashion is destabilising to the General and to the narrative's organising centre. He no longer is the fixed point in the chaos of the mission; instead, Nicë's act and her dramatic presentation of his remains (for the old woman takes away the discovery element of the exhumation process from the General as well) precipitate the General's loss of faith in the mission itself and the dismantling of his conception of military glory.[78]

In a dark and subversive parody of the funeral ceremony, the ruined wedding celebrations take on the affective signifiers of grief and mourning—'quelqu'un laissa échapper un sanglot'[79] ['*sekush ia dha kujës*'[80]]. The destabilising effect of Colonel Z's death and the humiliating aftermath of his exhumation, presented in full view of the wedding guests, causes the General to depart for Tirana immediately. The Colonel's remains are the last to be found, thus signalling the end of the mission.

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[77] *G* (A), p. 229.
[78] Weitzman, 'Specters of Narrative', p. 293.
[79] *G* (F), p. 377.
[80] *G* (A), p. 23-.

On the journey, the subversive image of the wedding as a funeral then gives way to an absurd, impulsive inversion: the General loses touch with reality and pushes the bag containing the bones of Colonel Z, the mission's most prized remains, into a ravine. Reflecting upon his actions and Colonel Z's new resting place, the General ironically captures the disorientating, circular reality of his own indebtedness in carrying out the mission: 'Il doit maintenant tourbillonner dans le courant obscur, comme dans un cauchemar'.[81] The loss of the remains is a symbolic reminder of the General's alienation also from his own selfhood now that all sense of purpose is lost; his rejection of the Colonel's remains is further a rejection of the finality that comes from finding the Colonel's bones and thus the completion of his mission. The mission cannot be finished, and the General remains alienated, trapped here in an Albanian backwater—his own 'courant obscur'—and within the mission's circle. The final chapter reflects this ineluctable circularity as its first line mirrors the novel's opening line, the General's starting point, by foregrounding the lexis of foreignness and alienation: 'Une pluie mêlée de neige tombait sur la terre étrangère'[82] ['*Mbi token e huaj binte dëborë e shi përzier bashkë*'[83]].

The General's thoughts also circle back to the soldier from the diary at the end of the novel. He imagines the dead man taking Colonel Z's place—an absurd and perverse substitution of the executioner with his victim. Although he dismisses the thought as profane and 'contre-nature'[84] ['*kundër natyrës*'[85]], he continues to consider presenting one of the other sets of remains as Colonel Z. This potential substitution is the ultimate act of subversion, and it undermines the symbolic goal of returning the dead men to the place where they are thought to belong that underpins the mission as a whole. But it also allows Kadare to recast the vendetta logic inherent to the Albanian conception of justice and revenge—from *gjakmarrje* to *ashtmarrje*—through the eyes of the General; the General has the power to change how Colonel Z is mourned in death or, rather, *who* is mourned as

[81] *G* (F), p. 385. An equivalent passage does not appear in the Albanian version.
[82] *G* (F), p. 422.
[83] *G* (A), p. 277.
[84] *G* (F), p. 388.
[85] *G* (A), p. 192.

Colonel Z. Controlling the narrative of mourning and memory in this way becomes a perverse approximation of retribution; an unconscious act of revenge against Colonel Z, 'meurtrier'[86] ['*vrasësit*'[87]] of the General's men.

Old Nicë, Countess Z and Betty

Memories often denote familiarity and home to the General, even in his recollections of mourning family members awaiting the return of the remains. However, the immediacy of the narrative present uncovers ruptures that signal the foreign and the unknown. The portrayal of mourning women in the novel draws out the asymmetrical relationship between the familiar and foreign in the novel. This is embodied by Old Nicë and Colonel Z's mother and widow. The differences between the two sets of women highlight the strange and unknowable nature of the Albanian condition from a western European perspective; these differences are exemplified in scenes where the women and their surroundings come together—while Italy is bright, Albania is dark and sinister (Erica Weitzman describes Kadare's depiction of the Balkan country in the novel as a European 'heart of darkness'[88]). We encounter Countess Z and Betty in a hazy summer memory at the seaside, in the time before the General's mission: 'Ils étaient tous venus sur cette plage uniquement pour le recontrer : cette jolie femme, la veuve encore jeune du colonel, la vieille dame, sa mère et ses deux cousins germains.'[89] ['*Ata kishin ardhur në plazh vetëm për të. Ishte gruaja e re, e bukur, nëna plakë e kolonelit dhe dy kushërinj të parë. Ata e kërkonin*'[90]].

However, Nicë's murder of Colonel Z violently ruptures the image of feminised mourning that emerges in vignettes of the Countess and Betty and the other Italian mothers and wives waiting for the return of the men's remains; her act of vengeance is rooted in an archaic understanding of paying

[86] *G* (F), p. 388.
[87] *G* (A), p. 242.
[88] Weitzman, 'Specters of Narrative', p. 288.
[89] *G* (F), p. 247.
[90] *G* (A), p. 92.

back one's debt. And her *gjakmarrje* seems to be confirmation of an innate Albanian warlike spirit, which the Italian priest speaks about at length to the General. Unlike Countess Z and Betty, who are contained within and mediated through the General's memories of the time before the mission, Nicë is given a voice to tell her story in first-person narrative fragments that rupture the narration of the General's experience of the wedding celebrations. As these narrative fragments disrupt the chapter's linear structure, they anticipate the violent, physical disruption that comes from Nicë's exhumation of Colonel Z's remains.

Old Nicë's association with mortality is evident from the descriptor in her name. Her connection with mortality and the grave is also made clear in the moment of physical disruption, and it is reflected in her muddied appearance when she enters the room with Colonel Z's remains and seems to take on the qualities of death itself. In contrast, Colonel Z's beautiful widow, Betty, seems frozen in time, as though she has not aged since she married the Colonel. She is an object of desire for the General and called up in pleasant memories of the time before the mission: 'Betty était toujours aussi séduisante et énigmatique, et le ciel toujours aussi bleu ; seulement, de temps à autre, l'horizon se tachait çà et là de nuages noirs, gros de pluie, qui voguaient en direction de l'est, vers l'Albanie…'[91] ['*Beti ishte po aq e bukur dhe e pakuptueshme si më parë dhe qielli po aq i kaltër, vetëm se, herë pas here, horizonteve filluan të shfaqeshin retë, re të zeza shiu, që udhetonin për në lindje, drejt Shqipërisë*…' [92]]. She belongs to a different time and place; as she seems unknowable, she remains alluring.

After the General disposes of the Colonel's remains and returns to Tirana, he imagines an elliptical interaction between Countess Z and Old Nicë, with himself at the centre as though he has taken the place of the Colonel: 'Il se représentait confusément la comtesse Z. et la vieille Nice en train de discuter ensemble. Rends-moi mon fils, étrangère… Mais prends-le doc, comtesse ! Remmène-le… Il était seul entre elles deux.'[93] ['*Në mendjen e tij, kontesha Z. dhe plaka Nicë, të turbullta krejt,*

[91] *G* (F), p. 250.
[92] *G* (A), p. 95.
[93] *G* (F), p. 419.

*merrnin e jepnin me njëra-tjetrën. Jepma djalin, grua e huaj… Merre, moj konteshë… merre… Ishte midis të dyjave fare i vetëm*' [94]. This imagined encounter between the two women, a meeting of the familiar and the foreign, shows how the General cannot ultimately honour his debt in full without either woman possessing the Colonel's remains. Being able to possess the remains as a material reminder of the Colonel as a beloved son (for the Countess) and as a reminder of a blood feud fulfilled (for Old Nicë) offers a way of eliding the conflicting narratives that make up his posthumous image and enable the mourning process.

## Acts of Mourning

> Des milliers de mères attendaient leurs fils. Il y avait plus de vingt ans qu'elles se rongeaient les sangs. Il est vrai que leur attente avait tant soit peu changé de nature : ce n'était plus des fils vivants qu'elles attendaient aujourd'hui. Mais n'est-on pas aussi bien en droit d'attendre des morts ?[95]
>
> *Mijëra nëna prisnin bijtë e tyre. Ato kishin njëzet e ca vjet që prisnin. Është e vërtetë se kjo pritje ndryshonte pak nga ajo pritja tjetër, kur ato shpresonin t'u ktheheshin gjallë bijtë e tyre, por, sidoqoftë, edhe të vdekurit priten.*[96]

The novel's frequent allusions to the thousands of mothers awaiting the return of their sons—a mass as anonymous as the dead army itself—brings out the intersecting themes of homecoming, return and mourning. The verb 'attendre' ['*pres*'] is repeated and used in relation to the mothers' collective state of being; in the General's mind, it is also used in relation to the dead men themselves and their anticipation of his arrival. These references to waiting capture the stasis of the ossified remains as fixed and frozen in time; through the repetition of the word, the writer establishes a parallel between the dead men's in-placeness and the way in which the women are unable to move beyond waiting and overcome the time of mourning until the remains are returned. As we saw in *Doruntine*, the theme of return can suggest that an act of restoration has taken place. Here in *Le Général*, the men's repatriation is a means of imposing mourning rites onto their remains in order to ensure they can be mourned correctly in the place where they belong. But just

[94] *G* (A), p. 273.
[95] *G* (F), p. 177.
[96] *G* (A), p. 21.

as the return of the eponymous figure in *Doruntine* also throws into relief Constantine's boundary-crossing transgression, the return of the remains goes against the wishes of the men we see conveyed in the novel's 'poches littéraires'. These narrative fragments allow the dead to speak and relay how they want to remain buried where they died. Mourning in the novel is for the living, and it exists on two planes: within the bounded intimacy of the (feminine) family unit and in the symbolic national mythology that has the generative capacity to elide their legacy of loss and reconfigure the men as heroes.

Mourning on a national scale takes on the qualities of spectacle and performance, which contrasts with the turn inward that comes from family mourning. Returning to *Doruntine* once more, we saw how Kadare examines the ritualisation of communal mourning in that novel as the dead take on new identities through the performance of funeral lamentations. The funeral mourners convert life—or their version of it—into myth, and in *Doruntine*, with the entire Vranaj family buried, nobody can speak up to change it; the mourners act as narrative chorus and surrogate family members. In the novel and within Albanian cultural history more broadly, Kadare argues that these mourners serve an important theatrical function; he thus writes in *Eschyle, ou le grand perdant* how funeral mourners 'préfigurant en quelque sorte le premier masque tragique [ … ] furent les premières comédiennes de métier.'[97] ['*ishin maska e parë tragjike* [ … ] *edhe aktoret e para profesioniste*'[98]]. However, in *Le Général*, Kadare explores the tension between the performance of mourning on a national scale that comes from the military establishment and the quiet mourning of the mainly female family members, through whom layers of memory and grief are mediated. Through the figure of the impossibly indebted General, the novel navigates this tension between mourning on a national scale and private expressions of familial grief. Seeing the men as individuals rids them of their symbolic myth-making potential as a collective, and viewing the dead men in unitary terms—as the war dead—is an erasure of their individual biographies. In one scene where these two modes of mourning come together, the General recalls speaking to an old

[97] Kadare, *Eschyle*, p. 27.
[98] Kadare, *Eskili*, p. 29.

woman who implores him to return her son, even though he had fought in Stalingrad, not Albania. She is comforted by a stranger who reassures her that the General will find her son: '"Soyez tranquille, ma brave dame, intervint enfin quelqu'un avec douceur, le général fera tout son possible pour vous contenter." Alors la vieille femme remercia et sortit, toute corbée'[99] [' *"Shkoni, nënë", i tha, më në fund, me zë të ëmbël një burrë, "zoti gjeneral do të bëjë ashtu siç thatë ju." Dhe plaka falënderoi dhe iku, duke u mbështetur*'[100]].

Family Mourning

Acts of mourning within the family unit are intimate rather than publicly performed. However, the narratives about the individual men show how, in death, their identities are flattened, and they are mourned as simple soldiers even by their loved ones. As the General thinks back to the time before the mission, he recalls the visits to his home that he received from many of the dead men's family members. The General's recollection of this time sees the visitors blend into one as they mourn the men and relay nearly identical stories:

> Comme leurs propos se ressemblaient ! Et ce qu'il entendait d'eux lui était devenu si familier que, chaque jour, il avait l'impression de revivre en esprit la journée précédente. Souvent, des femmes qui s'inquiétaient du sort d'un fils ou d'un époux ne pouvaient retenir leurs sanglots et le général devenait alors de plus en plus nerveux.[101]
>
> *Sa të ngjashme ishin fjalët e tyre. Dhe ajo që u kishte ndodhur njerëzve të tyre ishte një gjë kaq e ngjashme, sa atij i dukej sikur çdo ditë ishte dita e djeshme, që po e shihte në ëndërr. Gratë, që vinin për burrat, ose djemtë, nuk e mbanin dot ngashërimin. Gjenerali bëhej përherë e më tepër nervoz.*[102]

Tying together the theme of mourning with repetition, made clear through the verb 'revivre' in the French translation, the memory of the General's life before the mission presages its circular monotony: just as every story is familiar, so too is the Albanian landscape and every set of exhumed remains. When the General invites each of the relatives into his room, he gives them time

[99] *G* (F), p. 205.
[100] *G* (A), p. 51.
[101] *G* (F), p. 204.
[102] *G* (A), pp. 49-50.

to tell their stories: 'Puis le déjeuner fini, il gagnait le salon où les visiteurs, à tour de rôle, lui exposaient leur cas'[103] ['*Pastaj, si hante drekë, ai shkonte në sallon dhe njerëzit flisnin me radhë*'[104]]. Intimacy is evoked here through the quotidian and through the act of inviting the family members into his room and allowing them to speak behind closed doors; the General is able to gain access to their private mourning, and because of this, he enters into a pact with the family members to hear about the men and witness their grief on the condition that he returns their remains.

The image of the weeping wives and mothers shows the prolonged grief of many of the family members, and it reflects how the physical distance from the object of mourning through an improper burial can inhibit the mourning process; in the women's minds, their sons and husbands are not buried where they belong. Writing about this question of dead bodies belonging, Katherine Verdery observes how repatriating remains becomes part of refurbishing national identities as the process allows a reburial to be seen as the proper burial.[105] The promise of future reburial and of restoring the men to their homeland offers a way of correcting the past. The passage also frames family mourning as a feminine practice; the General is visited mainly by the mothers and wives of the dead men. In a sense, these women resemble the professional mourners as they act as a chorus—with their voices and stories coming together to create and share a singular narrative of internal grief. In *Doruntine*, Kadare foregrounds the social significance of communal mourning enacted through the ritual of chorus-like female mourning: 'Ces derniers temps, j'ai noté que l'on remettait de plus en plus en usage une antique façon de pleurer les morts, celle dite "*pleurer dedans la loi*"'[106] ['*Kohët e fundit kam vënë re se po ringjallet një mënyrë e vjetër të vajtuari, ajo që quhet "të qash me ligje"*'[107]]. Here, this conception of a codified communal mourning practice suggests a correct, and lawful, way of expressing grief; in the novel, we see this as a performance of grief that passes into the folk memory to create the new mythic identities of the deceased. Yet

[103] *G* (F), p. 204.
[104] *G* (A), p. 49.
[105] Verdery, p. 49.
[106] *D* (F), p. 297.
[107] *D* (A), p. 71.

the question of authenticity is not an important factor in the mourning process; instead, it is the generative potential of the lamentations to become part of an oral tradition and create new mythical versions of Constantine and Doruntine that plays a greater role for the community. Hence, the difference between the intimacy of family mourning and the public nature of national mourning does not coincide with a distinction between ritual and interior feeling. Both forms of mourning are enacted through ritual—in general and in Kadare's texts—but intimate mourning turns *inwards* towards the family members, each having their own relationship with the deceased, whose individuality is thus heightened, whereas public mourning invests the dead with a general purpose that belongs to the state, and not to the deceased. This difference runs along gender lines.

The authenticity of mourning in *Le Général* is conveyed through organic narratives and unreliable details of where each man was killed, which contrasts with the cold accuracy of the datasets compiled by the War Ministry. The mainly feminised nature of familial mourning shows this authenticity and the subversive potential of this kind of outward expression of grief. Gail Holst-Warhaft highlights how historically the mourning carried out by women is often focused on loss, rather than praise or a tribute to the bravery of the dead: 'Men and women may both weep for their dead, but it is women who tend to weep longer, louder, and it is they who are thought to communicate directly with the dead through their wailing songs [ … ] A hero's death, it seems, should be marked by praise, not women's cries'.[108] This is exemplified in a passage in the novel when the General and his team encounter an old Albanian woman in one of the villages he passes through on the mission. As the workmen exhume the remains, she warns them to ensure that the bones are kept safe, away from the other remains, since they had been mourned properly:

> "Dites-lui bien de ne pas mélanger avec les autres. Ceux-là, nous les avons pleurés comme les nôtres, selon notre coutume !" [109]
>
> *"I thoni atij që të mos i përziejë këta me të tjerët, biro," tha plaka. "I kemi qarë me ligje si djemtë tanë.*[110]

[108] Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 1-2.
[109] *G* (F), p. 211.
[110] *G* (A), p. 57.

The exchange between the men and the old woman illustrates what Holst-Warhaft sees as the difference between the mourning practices of men and women in archaic rites and the epic literary tradition transposed here to the twentieth century. Holst-Warhaft suggests that, as women's lamentations are marked by weeping and do not poetically imagine the heroism of the dead man, it can be seen as a subversive way of mourning.[111] Mourning by the Albanian community according to local custom strips the buried soldiers of the trappings of heroism that will be crucial to the future reburial process; the men are mourned by their enemy as men instead of being used as patriotic ciphers to mythologise Italy's military history. The old woman's invocation of 'notre coutume' ['*ligjë* [ … ] *tanë*]—an echo of mourning within the law—is itself subversive as it connects the men to the archaic, cultic practices of the *kanun* instead of the correctness and uniformity of their future burial in a military cemetery.

The Work of Mourning

Representing mourning in gendered terms, Kadare contrasts the interiority of feminine mourning with a masculine depiction of mourning as work. Derrida writes that mourning is itself a form of labour; the work of mourning is 'work itself, work in general, the trait by which one ought perhaps to reconsider the very concept of production'.[112] However, in *Le Général,* the masculine conception of personal mourning is no more productive than the internal grief of the women. It is distinct as an expression of mourning from the intimacy of familial grief since it is related to the bonds of military camaraderie and to an *esprit de corps*. The work of mourning here is instead a mode of reliving the past through memories of the dead men and their proximity to battle. Alongside widows, mothers and daughters, the General is visited by former soldiers who tell him

[111] Holst-Warhaft, p. 5.
[112] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 121.

where remains are buried and warn him of the hostility of the Albanians as though the war were still taking place.

In a sense, the former soldiers are fixed in time like the dead men, and their mourning is as much a practice of reflex as it is an expression of grief. In fact, the work of mourning allows the surviving soldiers to insert themselves into the mission as authorities on Albania, the war and the dead men. In one scene, a former General warns the eponymous protagonist:

> Soyez sur vos gardes. Tenez la tête haute, ne la courbez jamais devant eux. Ils vous poursuivront de leurs provocations, de leur railleries, peut-être, mais il faut savoir leur répondre. Vous devez rester vigilants. Ils tenteront de porter outrage aux restes de nos soldats. Je les connais bien. Ils se moquaient souvent de nous.[113]
>
> *Të jini krenar. Të mos e ulni kokën përpara tyre. Ata do t'ju provokojnë, ndoshta do t'ju përqeshin, por ju duhet të dini si t'u përgjigjeni. Ju duhet të jeni syçelët. Ata do të përpiqen të fyejnë eshtrat e ushtarëve tanë. Unë i njoh mire. Ata shpesh mahiteshin me ne.*[114]

The use of the present tense here—'Je les connais bien' ['*Unë i njoh mirë*']—suggests that the former soldier sees Albania and its peoples as unchanging and fixed in the past. The mission itself, though, is, on the other hand, a means of overcoming this past and changing it by exhuming and reburying the dead men's remains.

## (Re-)Localising the dead

Beyond the intimacy and expressions of grief that come from personal mourning, reburying the dead men on Italian soil serves an important political function. It allows the men to be repositioned and, consequently, re-evaluated; their exhumation from one gravesite and reburial in another marks a change in how they are memorialised and perceived by the living. The reburial process offers a way of re-examining the historical context to which they belonged as soldiers in order to reckon with the legacy of Italy's fascist past. Thus, moving them allows the men to take on a different set

[113] *G* (F), p. 206.
[114] *G* (A), p. 51.

of identity markers as fallen heroes rather than reminders of defeat and of fascism; their reburial shows that dead bodies are not fixed in their symbolic significance.

For Derrida, mourning 'consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead'.[115] In *Le Général*, place-making practices and the act of locating the dead (and their future reburial) provide a way of ontologising the remains in relation to nationhood, collective history and the Second World War. Localising the dead men, then, also means re-localising them; they must be buried and fixed in place where they belong because, in Albania, they are out of place and outside of the time of mourning. The men's connection to Italy as their country of origin makes it a safe and knowable place, where the narrative of their lives and deaths can be controlled; it marks a return to order and normality. In the mind of the General and the Italian military, Italy signifies vitality and life, in contrast to the dark unknowability of Albania; it is where the men can be reconfigured through their homecoming as heroes. Here, Italy's spatial, geographical and social diversity are flattened and the country, like the dead men, is compressed into a unitary whole—an ideological space that can only grant meaning to the soldiers' remains as a collective.

As a Western European country, Italy signifies modernity; where the past can be made present in a way that is beautiful and civilised: through architecture and classical culture. Albania, by contrast, is seen as archaic, wild and hostile, and history cannot be overcome and rewritten in such a backward-looking place—an ultimately ironic suggestion as Albanian funeral practices themselves contain traces of ancient Greek culture. The clear distinction between the two nations is important to the mission and the men's return to their homeland. They are being brought back to civilisation, to be part of their national history:

[115] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p 9.

> Il représentait un grand pays civilisé et son œuvre ne pouvait qu'être empreinte de grandeur. Il y avait dans la tâche qu'il allait accomplir quelque chose de la majesté des Grecs et des Troyens, de la solennité des funérailles homériques.[116]
>
> *Ai përfaqësonte një vend të madh e të qytetëruar dhe prandaj puna e tij do të ishte madhështore. Në punën e tij kishte diçka nga madhështia e grekëve dhe e trojanëve, diçka nga funeralet homerike. O si, do të mbeteshin me gojë hapur shqiptarët, që mbanin kaq shumë ombrella në duar.*[117]

The juxtaposition of Italy's grandeur and the mission's majesty with the depiction of the Albanians in their bleak country is imagined by the General and constitutes his ultimate motivation to return the deceased soldiers. Yet Kadare employs dramatic irony in the 'poches littéraires' to undermine this ideological aim of the mission and allow the dead to communicate with the reader outside of the narrative arc. Katherine Verdery writes that dead bodies have a 'great advantage as symbols: they don't talk much on their own (although they did once). Words can be put into their mouths [ … ] It is thus easier to rewrite history with dead people than other kinds of symbols that are speechless'.[118] We see this in the novel's main narration as the wish to return to Italy is imposed *onto* the dead. Through the 'poches littéraires', though, the novel gives a voice to the dead men. Allowing the dead to speak and recount their own individual stories dismantles the national narrative of patriotism and heroism:

> Eh bien, mettons qu'on les cherche un jour. Si tu crois que cette pensée me console ! Il n'y a pas de plus grande hypocrisie que cette chasse aux dépouilles, une fois la guerre finie. Quant à moi, je ne veux pas de cette faveur. Qu'on me laisse tranquille là où je serai tombé.[119]
>
> *Dhe ja, ta zëmë se do të na i kërkojnë. Kujton se më ngushëllon kjo gjë? S'ka dyfytyrësi më të madhe se kërkimi i eshtrave pasi mbaron lufta. Unë për veten time nuk do ta doja këtë venom. Le të mos më trazojnë më atje ku do të bie.*[120]

This short narrative fragment cuts across the exhumation of the first soldier, whose friend had buried him deeply so that he would not be found. The dead man anticipates the mission and

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[116] *G* (F), p. 179.
[117] *G* (A), pp. 22-23. The final sentence of the passage in the Albanian version is not included in the French translation. I translate it as: 'Oh how the Albanians would stand with open mouths, as they held their many umbrellas in their hands'.
[118] Verdery, p. 29.
[119] *G* (F), p. 185.
[120] *G* (A), p. 30.

condemns the hypocrisy of the military. What purpose does this symbolic dismantling of the nationalist historical narrative serve? On a practical level for Kadare writing under Hoxha, it is a palatable denouncement of Western arrogance and hypocrisy in the eyes of the regime. But as the General's understanding of the mission's glory begins to unravel and we see him start to lose touch with reality in the 'poches littéraires' told from his perspective—one of the narratives takes the structure of a perverse bedtime story; in another the General imagines his army of the dead winning historical battles—Kadare problematises the very idea of writing history. The General's mission, and its nationalist narrative encoded within, emerge as just one more story among others.[121]

The National Narrative and Albania

> Un voile de mystère vous entoure, et quand je songe qu'après ces journées splendides vous allez partir recueillir des cadavres là-bas, en Albanie, j'en frémis d'horreur. Vous me rappelez le héros d'une ballade de ce poète allemand dont le nom m'échappe et que nous avons étudié au lycée… Oui, précisément, ce héros qui se lève de sa tombe pour chevaucher au clair de lune…[122]
>
> *Se ç'keni një vel misterioz dhe, kur mendoj se, pas gjithë këtyre ditëve të mrekullueshme, do të shkoni të mblidhni të vdekur atje në Shqipëri, rrëqethem nga tmerri. Ju më dukeni si heroi i baladës së një poeti gjerman, që e kemi bërë në shkollë, por që s'më kujtohet emri. Pikërisht si heroi i saj, që ngrihet nga varri dhe vrapon me kalë nën dritën e hënës.*[123]

The allusion to Bürger and his poem *Lenore* is a thread we have seen run through Kadare's works; the speaker's inability to remember his name is revealing of the writer's disdain for 'ce poète allemand' ['*një poeti gjerman*'] as he seeks to return the story of the revenant to Albania. Here, the General embodies the dead man who has returned from the grave. Situating him against the backdrop of Albania—a foreign place that provokes feelings of horror in the speaker—the country is viewed from the outside as a shadowy netherworld; this depiction of Albania is consistent with the way in which Kadare writes the nation in *Le Crépuscule des dieux de la steppe,* in which his

[121] Weitzman, 'Specters of Narrative', p. 291.
[122] *G* (F), p. 250.
[123] *G* (A), p. 95.

semi-autobiographical narrator must return home to fulfil an imagined *besa* that exists between himself and his homeland. The elliptical passage in *Le Général*, which connects the character of the General to Albania, shows how contact with the country brings out an unknowability that separates him from his selfhood and instead allows him to take on the role of mourner and revenant—emphasised here through the spectral 'voile' ['*vel*']. Albania is alienating and confusing to Western eyes; it is a place where violence and death are depicted as essential elements of the vendetta logic that exists within the collective imaginary. Representing his homeland from the perspective of an alienated, unwelcome foreigner in this way allows Kadare to test the boundary of what it means to depict this vendetta logic and what it is to imagine a national narrative told from the outside.

The Albanian condition is communicated by the enigmatic and taciturn Catholic priest in the novel. Having fought in Albania during the Second World War, he acts as a guide and translator for the General's mission. His memory of the country is bound up with conflict, and he views Albania through the prism of the past. In one scene, the General asks the Priest whether fighting in Albania had been so terrible, and he confirms it was with a nod. Albania appears doubly foreign to the General as its past connection to Italy during the war is mediated through the Priest's largely unarticulated memories—his nods and fragmentary observations—instead of his own, and the Priest is an unreliable figure. Indeed, the General observes his close relationship with Colonel Z's widow and suspects him of being a spy rather than a spiritual advisor and translator.

Peter Morgan describes the Priest's knowledge of Albanians as a 'set of clichés from Italian fascist imperialism about their warlike nature and their death-oriented culture of *kanun* and vendetta'.[124] The Priest's longest speech in *Le Général* indeed foregrounds death and the importance of *gjakmarrje* within what the character sees as the intrinsically violent psychology of the Albanian people: 'Les Albanais ont toujours eu le goût de tuer ou de se faire tuer. Quand ils n'ont pas trouvé

[124] Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, p. 67.

d'ennemi contre qui se battre, ils se sont entretués.'[125] ['*Shqiptarët gjithmonë kanë pasur dëshirë të vrasin ose të vriten. Ata janë vrarë me njëri-tjetrin, kur nuk kanë pasur me kë të luftojnë*'[126]]. The Priest's insight into the Albanian condition shares similarities with a passage in *Les Tambours de la pluie,* in which the Quartermaster argues that Albanians possess a strong impulse for self-destruction. Both of these impassioned speeches are delivered by non-Albanian characters in Kadare's novels and, rather than functioning as a set of clichés, they illuminate how Albania is viewed from the outside, through alienated eyes. In *Doruntine*, the *kanun*, viewed through the eyes of Constantine, his disciples and eventually Captain Stres, has the potential to be generative and sublime. This layered examination of the national narrative in *Le Général* and across the texts analysed in the previous chapters brings out a tension between how Albania wants to be seen from the outside and how it is seen from within its borders. The tension between these views can be read as a symbolic rendering by the writer of Albania's ambivalent and uneasy place in the twentieth century, caught between the internal—isolation and nationalist mythmaking that draws from cultural history—and external vilification from the international community (in Hoxha's mind, at least). However, beyond this national narrative, Kadare's novel interrogates the writing and memorialisation of history itself and how this is a method for creating and dismantling patriotic mythologies.

## Conclusion

A close reading of *Le Général* brings out the layers that lie hidden below the text's deceptively stark and simple prose. The eponymous protagonist is the novel's focal point; he embodies Kadare's impossibly indebted hero, who experiences Albania from the point of view of an alienated outsider. Through the mission's monotonous circularity, the military glory he seeks becomes increasingly illusory. It is only accessible in the absurd dreamlike passages—the 'poches littéraires' told from the General's perspective—that rupture the quotidian reality of excavating,

[125] *G* (F), p. 197.
[126] *G* (A), p. 43.

cleaning and packing the remains of Italy's war dead, and allow the General to rewrite history and his own place in it. The disposal of Colonel Z's remains is momentarily liberatory for the General, but the aftermath returns him to the reality of the mission for the men's remains are material signifiers of death and defeat. The General's task to bring them home thus culminates in a striking reconfigured understanding of debt as *bone-taking* [*ashtmarrje*], rather than the conventional Albanian *blood-taking* [*gjakmarrje*]. Through their proximity to the General, Kadare also uses asymmetrical relationships between the deceased, Colonel Z and the unnamed solider from the diary, and the foreign, Countess Z and Old Nicë, to interrogate how mourning processes take place—and how familial love and hatred can overlap in the stories that emerge from mourning. The novel shows how intimate mourning can subvert broader narratives of heroism. The work of national mourning and the act of (re-)localising the dead in future military cemeteries is symbolically important, but moving the men so that they are anonymised and buried together erases their individual identities and their personal wishes, which are conveyed in the text through fragmentary narratives. The excavated graves give rise to these stories as the text becomes a *roman à trous* within the main narration and its structure. Albania is inescapably constant throughout the text; it forms the horizon for the mission and, even in Italy, its shadow hangs over the General. The extratextual significance of interrogating Albania's vendetta logic in the novel and depicting it through the eyes of outsiders reveals an ongoing problem of writing debt into the national narrative against the background of history and Kadare's lived experience under Enver Hoxha. The next chapter will consider this artistic tension as it looks to one of Kadare's most allegorical and dissident novels and aims to explore further how Kadare's indebted individuals move through an absurd world.

## Chapter Four: The Empty Protagonist

> Tout ce qui est trouble et néfaste, ou qui le sera dans quelques années ou quelques siècles, apparaît d'abord dans les rêves des hommes. Toute passion ou idée malfaisante, tout fléau ou crime, toute rébellion ou catastrophe projette nécessairement son ombre longtemps avant de se manifester dans la vie réelle.[1]
>
> *Gjithçka që është e turbullt dhe e rrezikshme, apo që do të jetë e tillë pas disa vjetësh a pas disa shekujsh, e jep shestimin e parë në ëndrrën e njeriut. Asnjë pasion apo mendim i mbrapshtë rrebesh apo katastrofë, rebelim apo krim nuk është e mundur të mos dërgojë hijen e vet shumë kohë më parë se të shfaqet ai vetë në botë.*[2]

Returning to Kadare's 'période impériale', this chapter offers a textual analysis of *Le Palais des rêves* [*Pallati i Ëndrrave*] (1981). It pays particular attention to Kadare's characterisation of the protagonist, Mark-Alem Quprili, in order to explore the writer's representation of debt in the novel as a condition that is, at once, patrimonial and personal. An exploration of the novel using this framework of characterisation brings out broader points of overlap with the texts explored in the previous chapters. In *Le Palais des rêves*, Kadare (re-)examines questions of identity, history and authority by once more drawing on Albania's bardic cultural inheritance, its legacy of struggle and invasion, and the role of the impossibly indebted individual at the centre of these questions. He again creates a repetitive, disorientating and claustrophobic work, but his focus on the allegorical in *Le Palais des rêves* marks a shift from reality further toward the realm of the absurd and the intangible—a reflection in narrative form of the hazy nature of dreams themselves.

The novel centres around the oneiric institution of the title. The Palace of Dreams, also known as the Tabir Sarrail, is an important pillar of the government within Kadare's fictionalised Ottoman Empire: the 'États-Unis ottomans'[3] ['*Shtetet e Bashkuara Osmane*'[4]]. It is the sorting hub for the dreams of all of the empire's citizens. In the Tabir Sarrail, these dreams are selected, read and interpreted for hints of unease and dissent as the empire believes that any threats to its power will

[1] *P* (F), p. 160.
[2] *P* (A), pp. 48-49.
[3] *P* (F), p. 195.
[4] *P* (A), p. 83.

emerge first in the unconscious minds of its people. Using the lexis of faith to support its vast and paranoid programme—'Allah lance un rêve annonciateur à la surface du globe'[5] ['*allahu e hedh ëndrrën kumtuese mbi globin tokësor*'][6]—the Tabir searches for the Master-Dream that will symbolically communicate the fate of the empire. The protagonist of *Le Palais des rêves,* Mark-Alem, is thrust into this role in the Tabir at the beginning of the novel; he is the scion of the influential Quprili family and is given a job in the Selection department. But his role has dual, disparate aims: to monitor dreams in the way the Tabir requires and to alert the Quprili to any familial danger he sees encoded in these dreams. Trapped unknowingly at the heart of this tension between his family and the state, Mark-Alem's internal thoughts and movements are restricted; he is stripped of the freedom of choice, and the trajectory of his very existence is overseen and decided by these competing factions.

The original title of the novel, *Nëpunësi i pallatit të ëndrrave* (The Worker of the Palace of Dreams)[7], foregrounds Mark-Alem, but it also reflects his relationship to the Tabir Sarrail; it is a reminder of his submission to the authority of the institution and the empire. He has a similar relationship with his family and its history. His lack of insight and self-knowledge mean he cannot comprehend the shifting power dynamic between the Quprili and the state—and his own role in it. This lack of self-knowledge precipitates the downfall of the Quprili and the paradoxical rise of Mark-Alem within the ranks of the Tabir. And it is this lack of knowledge that also sets Mark-Alem apart from the characters examined in the previous chapters; he is the novel's empty protagonist onto whom thoughts, decisions and conflicts are imposed by others. He rises within the Tabir Sarrail, but his character remains internally unchanged at the end of the novel. He does not develop or experience a moment of clarity about the true nature of his place in the world; his restricted movement and lack of psychological development are reflected in the novel's structural

[5] *P* (F), p. 159.
[6] *P* (A), p. 48.
[7] My translation.

circularity as it begins and ends with Mark-Alem making the same journey between the Quprili home and the Tabir Sarrail—the two opposing forces that limit his existence.

As a result of his limited movement and his characterisation as the novel's empty protagonist to whom things happen separate to his autonomy, Mark-Alem embodies the qualities of the indebted figure in a different way to Tursun Pasha, Captain Stres and the General. He is a meek and passive bureaucrat, not a military figure; he does not gain insight or understand his place in the world in a moment of *anagnorisis*. Further, the concepts of duty and honour are foreign and unreachable to him; they are alluded to in the transgressive Qupili epic, performed in Albanian, which he cannot understand. That *Albanianness,* and thus access to his history and heritage, is out of reach is important to Mark-Alem's status as Kadare's impossibly indebted figure. His relationship to his past and selfhood is disabled.[8] The writer uses structural motifs in the novel to reflect this as the protagonist's movement through the world is restricted. The novel's title guides the reader towards the narrative importance of structures, and inside the walls of the Palace of Dreams, the spatial organisation of its disorientating corridors and the thresholds behind its many doors reveal how Mark-Alem could have had the capacity to overcome his indebtedness and step *into* self-knowledge and awareness, even though he does not and ultimately remains in a state of alienation. The symbol of the bridge captures his limited movement and existence. It is the namesake of the Quprili, and it signifies the family's heritage, Albanian ethnicity and tragic inheritance; it also implicitly refers to the restrictive trope of immurement that haunts the Balkan cultural imaginary.

By analysing each of the elements of Mark-Alem's characterisation, his restricted movements, the spaces that he navigates, and his proximity to both his family and the state—his inescapable *in-betweenness*—this chapter looks at how the inheritance of debt is another layer of the impossibly indebted figure in Kadare's works. Debt in *Le Palais des rêves* is, we discover, inherited, patrimonial; it is a negative condition of the Quprili experience and exacerbated by the family's

[8] Gourgouris, 'Xenia', p. 524.

spatial and linguistic separation from their Albanian heritage. Without understanding this relationship to his own history, Mark-Alem cannot break free of or overcome his debt. The weight of history and a need to make sense of it also hangs over the novel as a whole; Kadare uses the Quprili family chronicle to conceptualise this concern. The symbolic depiction of the Ottoman government and the conceit of monitoring dreams has widely been read as an allegory for state control under Hoxha's government and as a portrayal of the arbitrary repression of totalitarianism more broadly.[9] Situating the metaphor for control in the past, Kadare tests the boundaries between present acts of repression (his lived experience under Hoxha) and a fantastical, historical depiction of imperial subjugation through the common experience of absurdity inherent to authoritarian mechanisms of power. Blending the fictional and real together through symbolism allows him to go beyond mere political allegory, though; Kadare has forged a layered text steeped in *Albanianness* and intertwined with a conception of Balkan identity, a text which also seeks to problematise the nature of symbolic representation itself.

## *Le Palais des rêves* in Context: The Political and the Intertextual

> Je m'aperçus avec allégresse et effroi à la fois que, bien involontairement, j'étais en train de réaliser mon vieux rêve : dans toute la structure du roman, comme en filigrane, se profilait l'Enfer. Plus j'y réfléchissais, plus il se dessinait nettement à mes yeux : c'était une sorte de royaume de la mort, peuplé non pas des êtres eux-mêmes, mais de leur sommeil et de leurs songes, d'une partie de nous située par conséquent au-delà, alors que notre être réel, lui, restait en deçà. Tous les éléments de l'Enfer des anciens Grecs y étaient réunis : les ténèbres, la triste dilution de toutes choses, la pétrification du temps, sa marche à rebours, son sur-place.[10]

*Le Palais des rêves* was viewed by Hoxha's government and has been read more recently by critics like Peter Morgan and Éric Faye as Kadare's most subversive and dangerous novel. Kadare himself describes the novel as a ferocious attack against dictatorship.[11] Although allusions to the institution of the title are visible in Kadare's earlier novels published during the 1970s, *Le Palais*

[9] Ani Kokobobo, 'Bureaucracy of Dreams: Surrealist Socialism and Surrealist Awakening in Ismail Kadare's *The Palace of Dreams*, *Slavic Review*, 70.3 (2011), 524-544 (p. 528).
[10] Kadare, *Invitation à l'atelier de l'écrivain*, p. 52.
[11] Kadare, *Printemps albanais*, pp. 9-10.

*des rêves* was published in full in 1981.[12] It was released against the backdrop of significant political changes within Albania and the world beyond, during a period of transition when Hoxha had grown 'obsessed with purging Albania of impure elements before his own demise'[13] and shortly before the death of Brezhnev in the Soviet Union. The novel initially received little attention from critics or political figures alike. However, following the death—the apparent suicide—of Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu, it was reappraised and condemned by Hoxha's government for being hostile to the regime. The work was banned, and Kadare received an unequivocal threat from Ramiz Alia, an influential member of the Albanian Politiburo, to stop criticising Hoxha: 'Le people et le Parti vous hissent sur l'Olympe, mais si vous ne leur êtes pas fidèle, il vous précipitent dans l'abîme'.[14]

The novel's symbolism and criticism of totalitarian control have meant it has been compared to the dystopian vision of society depicted by Orwell in *1984*[15], and its exploration of the absurd and arbitrary nature of bureaucracy has been described as reminiscent of Kafka's *The Castle*.[16] The link with Kafka's novel is also reinforced by Kadare's narrative focus on the titular structure. These intertextual links reemerge in analyses of *Le Palais des rêves* in a way that suggests the novel must be introduced to Western readers, in particular, through comparison to other works of twentieth-century literature to make its symbolism accessible. This tendency to define the text against other literary works—more than any of Kadare's other novels—speaks to its postmodernist allegory that can be read as a universalised critique of authoritarianism and a work of 'world literature' rather than an articulation of a uniquely Albanian or Balkan experience. Yet, beyond these contemporary allusions, Kadare also borrows from older literary works by Homer and Dante to reconceptualise a

[12] The Palace of Dreams (or its alternative name the Tabir Sarrail) is also mentioned in *La Chaîne des Hankoni* [*Breznitë e Hankonatëve*] (1977) and *La Niche de la honte* [*Kamarja e turpit*] (1978).
[13] Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, p. 227.
[14] Éric Faye, Preface to *Le Palais des rêves*, in Ismail Kadare, *Œuvres: tome troisième* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), p. 144. The original Albanian is also included in Bashkim Kuçuku's 2009 foreword to *Pallati i Ëndrrave* (Tirana: Onufri, 2011), p. 20: '*Ai të vë në krye të piedestalit e të vendos në Olimp, por edhe të rrëzon përdhé e të baltë kur vepra nuk vlen*'.
[15] Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, p. 229.
[16] Kokobobo, 'Bureaucracy of Dreams', p. 540.

hellish vision of the world in the narrative.[17] Indeed, the structural arrangement of the Tabir Sarrail and its circular corridors resemble the circles of Hell; as Mark-Alem moves through the ranks of the institution, each department reveals a new, disorientating space to navigate. When Mark-Alem tries to find the building's archives, a repository of historical dreams, this circularity plays on his mind and becomes sensorially oppressive:

> Maintentant, il avait l'impression que cette galerie était de forme circulaire. Par moments, il croyait encore entendre des pas éloignés, mais ce pouvait être aussi bien l'écho de l'écho de ses pas, ou les pas de gens marchant à d'autres étages. [ … ] Au bout d'une demi-heure il eut l'impression d'être revenu à son point de départ et se dit : Je tourne en rond comme un cheval sur l'aire…[18]
>
> *Tani po i dukej se galeria kishte trajtë rrethore. Herë-herë ndiente kumbime hapash të largët, por ata mund të ishin jehona e jehonës së hapave të tij, ose hapa të njerëzve që ecnin në kate të tjera.* [ … ] *Po vij rrotull si kali në lëmë* [19]

The repetition of words relating to sound and movement in the passage ('écho' ['*jehonë*'], 'pas' ['*hap*']) creates a lexical circularity here to mirror Mark-Alem's restricted existence within the confines of the Tabir. The image of the threshing floor ('aire' ['*lëmë*']) echoes Dante's use of 'aiuola'[20] to refer to the world. This threshing floor of Dante's imagination reflects the relationship between conflict and human greed; in *Le Palais des rêves*, as Mark-Alem finds himself trapped in a circle like a horse on a threshing floor, Kadare highlights both the claustrophobic internal structure of the Tabir Sarrail and the state as a whole in microcosm as it reflects the empire's desire for total control over its subjects and their hopes, dreams and nightmares. 'Ici, il y a tout'[21] ['*Këtu është gjithçka*'[22]], the Tabir's archivist tells Mark-Alem to highlight how the state—the world—and its history are maintained within the institution's walls.

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[17] Kadare, *Invitation à l'atelier de l'écrivain*, pp. 52-53.
[18] *P* (F), p. 275.
[19] *P* (A), p. 159.
[20] For an analysis of the use of the word 'aiuola' in Dante's *Paradiso*, see Robert M. Durling, 'The *Paradiso* and the *Monarchia'*, in *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Volume 3 Paradiso*, ed. and trans. by Robert M. Durling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 702-707 (p.703).
[21] *P* (F), p. 279.
[22] *P* (A), p. 163.

Outside of the Tabir Sarrail, the Quprili residence is a significant space. It is set in opposition to the Tabir as the structural centre of a powerful institution in its own right; it is even known within the family as 'le *Palais*'[23] ['"*Pallat*"'[24]]. It is the space where Mark-Alem's uncle, the influential Vizier, tries to impress upon the protagonist the significance of his position in the Tabir to gain access to any hints of danger that could pose a risk to the Quprili family. But the Quprili residence is also part of the narrative's 'intricately coded theme of ethnic identity'.[25] Within the novel's Ottoman-coded society, the Quprili family retains outward signifiers of their pre-Ottoman Albanian heritage as they refuse to change their name from its traditional Albanian spelling to the transliterated Köprülü and take pride in its historical—and tragic—origins:

> Le nom de Kuprili [*sic*] n'était rien d'autre que la traduction du mot *Ura*, le pont, venant lui-même d'un vieux pont à trois arches de l'Albanie centrale édifié à l'époque où les Albanais étaient encore chrétiens, et dans les fondations duquel avait été emmuré un homme.[26]
>
> *Mbiemri i Qyprillinjve s'ishte veçse përkthimi i fjalës "Ura", që vinte nga një urë e moçme triharkëshe në Shqipërinë Qendrore, e ngritur në kohën kur shqiptarët ishin ende të krishterë, dhe në themelet e së cilës ishte muruar një njeri.*[27]

The connection between the symbolic significance of the bridge, ethnic heritage and linguistic rebellion is taken further behind the closed doors of the Quprili residence as it becomes the site of the novel's *peripeteia*, where Mark-Alem's Albanian nationalist uncle Kurt is arrested during a private performance of the family's oral epic and later murdered by the state for his dissidence; language and ethnicity are at the heart of this transgression as Kurt looks to his family's place in traditional Albanian oral culture. The allegorical connections the novel establishes between a punitive Ottoman power and Hoxha's regime points to an ambivalence in the regime's own relation to the past. We are made to think of the ironic relationship between official ideology and a past that it simultaneously negates and instrumentalises—negates in insisting on a purely national

[23] *P* (F), p. 19, italics in original.
[24] *P* (A), p. 82.
[25] Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, p. 229.
[26] *P* (F), p. 210.
[27] *P* (A), p. 97.

past insulated from Ottoman influence, but instrumentalises in promoting a fixed ideal of Albanian identity.

Contextualising *Le Palais des rêves* reveals the importance of structures; they underpin the novel's intertextual links and political symbolism. As we have seen, the Tabir fuses together the real and fantastical. It evokes an image of inescapable control that recalls Dante's vision of Hell and the lived reality of Hoxha's Albania. The circular arrangement of the institution resembles, at once, the Dantean circles of Hell and the 'round, labyrinthine, cold and gray'[28] bunkers spread across the Albanian landscape that serve as visual reminders of Hoxha's eccentric security project. And the narrative's alternative Palace, the Quprili residence, shows the importance of an alternative structure: the bridge. A significant symbol within the Balkan imaginary, the bridge here connotes insularity, tragedy and sacrifice instead of openness and community-building. Mark-Alem moves within and between these structures, and he is restricted by both.

Mark-Alem's Movement

> Un passant dérapa devant lui sur le trottoir. [ … ] Ouvre l'œil ! fit Mark-Alem à part soi, sans bien savoir s'il adressait cette mise en garde à l'inconnu ou à lui-même.[29]
>
> *Dikush përpara tij rrëshqiti në trotuar.* [ … ] *Kujdes, ia bëri me vete Mark-Alemi, pa e ditur as vetë se kujt ia drejtoi atë fjalë : të panjohurit apo vetvetes.*[30]

*Le Palais des rêves* begins with a description of Mark-Alem's journey from the Quprili residence to the Tabir Sarrail on his first day. The vignette of his brief walk to work offers a moment of escape from the two structures that shape his existence, but there are hints of unease that signal his restricted movement; he is surrounded by identical government workers and bureaucrats making the same journey. And when Mark-Alem sees another man trip on the slippery pavement, he

[28] Kokobobo, 'Bureaucracy of Dreams', p. 541.
[29] *P* (F), p. 148.
[30] *P* (A), p. 36.

experiences a rare and fleeting moment of insight and he warns himself to take care but he nevertheless fails to relate this insight to the danger of his new position.

Before entering the Tabir, he remains on the verge of understanding the nature of his new role in the institution and what this proximity to the state will do—but such knowledge is ultimately out of his reach:

> Il eut l'impression que son visage encore engourdi était encore effleuré par le petit sourire ironique avec lequel il parassait s'être réveillé ce matin-là. C'était la dernière nuit durant laquelle il avait pu goûter le sommeil ordinaire des simples mortels. Désormais, il ne faisait aucun doute que tout, dans sa vie, allait changer.[31]
>
> *Kishte përshtypjen se në fytyrë e kishte ende nënqeshjen shpotitëse, me të cilën i qe dukur se ishte zgjuar atë mëngjes.* […] *Kishte qenë nata e tij e fundit kur kishte shijuar gjumin e mirëfilltë njerëzor. Këndej e tutje, gjithçka do të ishte ndryshe.*[32]

Here, the adjectives 'ordinaire' and 'simples' ['*mirëfilltë*'] reflect Mark-Alem's movement as he leaves normality behind and passes into a realm that is entirely closed off to most people; the journey takes on a symbolic quality as he moves out of the everyday and into the fantastical. There is also an existential turn encoded in this passage as Mark-Alem shifts from being a dreamer to an interpreter of dreams: from citizen to agent of the empire. Although he understands that his life will change, he cannot recognise how because he only sees his future as a 'horizon inconnu'[33] ['*gjithsesi e çuditshme*'[34]]. We understand his new role at the Tabir is an inevitability. The narrative foregrounding of his internal apprehension before he arrives at the Tabir leads the reader to believe that he will begin his new role in the institution immediately. However, when he reaches the building, he encounters the arbitrary judgement of the state for the first time. He has no job, and his immediate appointment to the institution is dependent on the whim of a high-ranking government official. This fact signals the conflictual power dynamic between the empire and the

[31] *P* (F), p. 148.
[32] *P* (A), p. 36.
[33] *P* (F), p. 148.
[34] *P* (A), p. 36.

Quprili family. Mark-Alem is given a job because of his place at the centre of this conflict: 'car tu nous conviens…'[35] ['*ti përlqehesh prej nesh*'[36]].

In both the Albanian and French versions, the pronouns 'tu' and 'ti' highlights Mark-Alem's lack of social power; his position in the Tabir serves a purpose for the empire and the Quprili, but he does not have any direct influence on either side. The protagonist's lack of power and knowledge is emphasised further in his exchange with the official. A lexis of confusion dominates Mark-Alem's thoughts during this exchange, and it reflects an interior world that is narrow and static: 'Il était pétrifié. Il ne savait pas ce qu'il devait faire'[37] ['*Mark-Alemi kishte ngrirë në këmbë. Ai nuk e kuptonte se ç'duhej të bënte*'[38]]. The word 'pétrifié' ['*ngrirë*'] here encapsulates Mark-Alem's restricted existence; the allusion to stone also recalls the Quprili family namesake, the stone bridge with its immured sacrificial victim within its walls, which I will analyse later in this chapter.

The corridors of the Tabir become sites of narrative importance as Mark-Alem's confusion and lack of knowledge are reflected in their labyrinthine spatial configuration. As he makes his way to the institution's Selection department, his first position in the Tabir, his footsteps and his internal thoughts fuse together to create a suffocating, disorientating impression of multisensory reverberations that seems to mimic a beating heart, highlighting his place at the centre of the empire: 'Dans ce désert de couloirs, il eut même l'impression que, battant contre les murs et les colonnades, se démultipliant, ils prenaient une resonance encore plus sinistre'[39] ['*Madje, në atë shkreti mesoresh, i dukej se ato, të përplasura e të shumëfishuara nëpër muret dhe shtyllat, tingëllonin edhe më zymtë*'[40]]. Indeed, the labyrinthine corridors of the Tabir possess an almost corporeal quality; dreams are the lifeblood of the state and its mechanisms for control, and they

[35] *P* (F), p. 162.
[36] P (A), p. 50.
[37] *P* (F), p. 157.
[38] *P* (A), p. 45.
[39] *P* (F), p. 162.
[40] *P* (A), p. 50.

move within the arterial passages of the edifice, restricting Mark-Alem's movement and his perception of the reality that exists outside the walls of the Tabir.

Mark Alem and Corridors

The literary space of the corridor for Mikhail Bakhtin is governed by the chronotope of the threshold. This chronotope involves a breaking point, a moment of crisis or a decision that changes the course of a life—the point at which an individual can choose to step over the threshold or not:

> In Dostoevsky, for example, the threshold and related chronotopes—those of the staircase, the front hall and corridor, as well as the chronotopes of the street and the square that extend those spaces into the open air—are the main places of action in his works, places where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man.[41]

Time, in the chronotope of the threshold, is also 'instantaneous [ … ] and falls out of the normal course of biographical time'.[42] The corridors in *Le Palais des rêves* function as the main places of action where knowledge is accessible to Mark-Alem. In one scene, he witnesses a group of people carrying the black coffin of a dreamer from the outer reaches of the empire; the episode signals the true repressive nature of the state and its sinister motivation to monitor dreams. Yet even when confronted with this stark visual reminder of the state's power over life and death as he navigates the Tabir's corridors, he remains an individual without insight who cannot step over the threshold *into* self-knowledge.

Mark-Alem's lack of self-knowledge is made clear during his journey to the Tabir's Archives, which we have already seen. His movement through these corridors is circular, but the lexis of the unknown also reveals an internal existence that the protagonist cannot understand:

> Il crut entendre des pas non loin de lui et pressa l'allure pour rejoindre l'inconnu, mais les pas de l'autre s'accélérèrent à leur tour. Il s'arrêta, l'autre fit de même. Il s'aperçut alors que ces pas étaient les siens.[43]

[41] Bakhtin, p. 248.
[42] Ibid., p. 248.
[43] *P* (F), p. 274.

> *Atij iu duk se dëgjoi ca hapa përbri dhe shpejtoi që të arrinte të panjohurin, por hapat e tjetrit u shpejtuan, gjithashtu. Mark-Alemi ndaloi në vend dhe tjetri, gjithashtu ndaloi. Atëherë ai e kuptoi se ata nuk ishin veçse hapat e tij.*[44]

Here, 'l'inconnu' ['*panjohurin*'] and 'l'autre' ['*tjetri*'] reflect Mark-Alem's failure to recognise his own self; he exists in an alienated state, separated from this self-knowledge. The repetition of 'pas' in the French version takes on another layer of meaning in the face of this separation as it gestures towards Mark-Alem's interior lack. The episode in the corridors en route to the Archives culminates in Mark-Alem posing himself a question that ironically captures his lack of knowledge both within the corridors of the Tabir itself and internally: 'Comment pouvait-il faire ainsi irruption quelque part en ignorant où il se trouvait ?'[45] ['*Si do të hynte kështu, pa marrë vesh me parë se ku ndodhej?*'[46]]. Mark-Alem asks himself this question as he is unsure whether to open one of the doors on the corridor in order to locate the Archives, and carrying out the action would allow him to step over the threshold into another physical space within the Tabir. He is held back by uncertainty, doubt and fear.

Mark-Alem's inability to confront his lack of self-knowledge sets him apart from the other impossibly indebted individuals explored in the previous chapters. Tursun Pasha, Captain Stres and the General each experience moments of *anagnorisis* in which they are confronted by the true nature of their existence and their lack of knowledge. In a sense, they are each able to cross the threshold into new knowledge: Tursun Pasha understands he can no longer climb the ladder any higher and has to fall—to die—if Albania does not submit to Ottoman rule; Captain Stres understands the boundary-crossing power of the *besa* and begins to subscribe to Constantine's idea of a sublime, internal Albanian order at odds with the power of the state, religion and his own place within the system; the General understands his role in the mission he once saw as noble and necessary and questions the motive to move the dead men rather than allowing them to remain

[44] *P* (A), p. 159.
[45] *P* (F), p. 275.
[46] *P* (A), p. 159.

buried where they fell. Each of these protagonists is motivated by a mission, a driving force, that guides them towards these moments of clarity, even as it simultaneously restricts them.

Mark-Alem does not experience a moment of genuine insight; he fails to understand the importance of his dual, conflictual mission to protect the Quprili and to do his job at the Tabir from the outset. When his uncle, the Vizier, uses veiled language to warn Mark-Alem that it is his duty to warn the family if they appear in the Master Dream, he fails to comprehend the true meaning behind the Vizier's words:

> Mark-Alem buvait ses paroles. Naturellement, avait souligné son interlocuteur, le Maître-Rêve demeurait un élément fondamental, surtout en des moments comme celui-ci, *a fortiori* pour ce qui touchait leur propre famille. [ … ] Mark-Alem ne comprenait pas où il voulait en venir.[47]
>
> *Mark-Alemi dëgjonte krejt i përpirë fjalët e tij. Natyrisht që bashëndrra mbetet përherë një gjë kryesore, kishte nënvizuar tjetri, aq më tepër në çastet e tanishme e aq më tepër kur ishte fjala për familjen tonë.* [ … ] *Mark-Alemi nuk e kuptonte ç'kërkohej prej tij.*[48]

Knowledge is described in spatial terms here; it is the place—'où' ['*ç*']—where Mark-Alem should arrive. The connection that is drawn between knowledge and the spatial recalls Mark-Alem's moments in the Tabir's corridors, where his lack of self-knowledge comes together with his uncertain movement. This is because the political machinations of the state and the Quprili are beyond Mark-Alem's comprehension. He is naïve and sees himself in simple terms as a 'modeste employé'[49] ['*nëpunës i kurrfartë*'[50]] not an 'homme d'État'[51] ['*burrë shteti*'[52]] like the Vizier, but even this moment of humility underscores his inability to comprehend his role in the Tabir and how his privileged position in the heart of the state institution can help the Quprili. The Vizier also warns Mark-Alem that the Master-Dream can even be a fabrication of the empire to justify its repressive nature and punitive actions.

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[47] *P* (F), pp. 267-268.
[48] *P* (A), pp. 150-152.
[49] *P* (F), p. 268.
[50] *P* (A), p. 152.
[51] *P* (F), p. 268.
[52] *P* (A), p. 152.

The concept of self-knowledge in the novel can be related to an understanding of the true nature of the relationship between the state and the familial and one's place in it. However, another of Mark-Alem's uncles, Kurt, embodies a different kind of ancestral self-knowledge grounded in history, heritage and ethnic identity. Kurt also understands the conflictual relationship between the state and the Quprili; he describes life in the empire as equivalent to 'ces gens qui travaillent la terre au pied de Vésuve'[53] ['*ata njerëzit që kanë çelur toka e jetojnë në këmbët e vullkanit Vezuv*[54]]. To him, the Quprili existence is shaped by the constant threat of being wiped out entirely at any time hanging over them. The symbolism behind this fear draws out parallels with Hoxha's Albania and the regime's unpredictable, arbitrary punishments: 'Tout comme eux, qui vivent à l'ombre du volcan, sont recouverts de cendres quand celui-ci entre en éruption et s'embrase, ainsi sommes-nous périodiquement frappés par le Souverain'[55] ['*Ashtu si Vezuvi, që shpërthen herë-herë e djeg e shkrumbon ata që jetojnë në hijën e tij, ashtu dhe ne na godet herë pas here sovrani, nën hijen e të cilit rrojmë*'[56]].

Mark-Alem does not fully understand the risk of the family's influence and their precarious place within the empire because he does not understand himself. His lack of insight is visible in his work at the Tabir, first in the Selection department and then after his promotion in Interpretation. Working in Selection, he comes across two dreams. In one, a black cat with a moon between its teeth is chased by a group of people. Mark-Alem views it as 'un rêve sérieux, que l'on devait prendre plaisir à analyser'[57] ['*një ëndërr serioze, me të cilën ta kishte ënda të merreshe*'[58]]. The dream seems meaningful; the moon could be interpreted as a symbol of Islam and the black a portent of doom. In contrast, he reacts angrily to the other dream and curses the dreamer in a way that is revealing of his conception of social class: 'Un maudit marchand de legumes sortait de son

[53] *P* (F), p. 196.
[54] *P* (A), p. 84.
[55] *P* (F), p. 196.
[56] *P* (A), p. 84.
[57] *P* (F), p.189.
[58] *P* (A), p. 77.

trou et venait vous plonger dans l'embarras !'[59] ['*Të dilte një perimtar i mallkuar dhe të ngatërronte mendjen!*'[60]]. However, he fails to recognise symbols of the Quprili encoded in the grocer's dream and, as a result, does not warn the family of the danger to come. He lacks the foresight and awareness—of himself, his family and the true nature of the empire—to see that the dream could implicate the Quprili in political intrigue.

Mark-Alem and the Master-Dream

In Selection, Mark-Alem has the opportunity to mark the dream as '*nul*'[61] ['*"e pavlefshme"*'[62]], but he worries that the dreamer could complain and he, Mark-Alem, would face the consequences. It is this impulse for self-preservation that precipitates the state-sanctioned purge of Kurt Quprili and the group of Albanian rhapsodists he had invited to perform at the Quprili residence. The signifiers of ethnicity and oral literature are visible—to the reader—in the dream when Mark-Alem first reads it:

> Un terrain abandonné au pied d'un pont ; une espèce de terrain vague, de ceux où l'on jette les détritus. Parmi les ordures, la poussière, les éclats de lavabos brisés, un vieil instrument de musique à l'aspect insolite, qui jouait tout seul dans cette étendue déserte, et un taureau, apparemment mis en furie par ces sons, qui mugissait au pied du pont…[63]
>
> *Një shesh i braktisur, pranë këmbës së një ure; njëfarë djerrine nga ato ku hedhin mbeturinat. Midis hedhurinave, pluhurit, copërave të thyera prej qeramike, një vegël e vjetër muzikore, e paparë ndonjëherë, që binte vetvetiu, dhe një dem i egërsuar, siç duket, prej tingullit të asaj vegle, shkrofëtinte te këmba e urës.*[64]

The relative lack of verbs in the description of the dream and its swift movement from one image to the next highlights the surrealism of the dream on a lexical level, as though it cannot be contained by a linear narrative or grammatical structure. Despite its surrealist trappings, Ani Kokobobo argues that, through the processes of selection and interpretation, dreams in the novel

[59] *P* (F), p. 188.
[60] *P* (A), p. 76.
[61] *P* (F), p. 188, italics in original.
[62] *P* (A), p. 76.
[63] *P* (F), p. 188.
[64] *P* (A), p. 76.

are ‘vandalized, purged of their surrealism, politicized, and forced into the parameters of historical reality and, ultimately, realism’.[65] Mark-Alem is unaware of this layered political process that drives the Tabir and its dream analyses. This process strips dreams of their dream context outside of time and space. The procedure prevents Mark-Alem from looking below the surface and seeing his own selfhood reflected in this particular dream. He is thus completely ignorant of the relationship between the images in the dream and the symbols of his identity and existence—but we as readers know: the bridge is the namesake of the Quprili, the lute is a reference to the performance of the family epic that takes place every year, and the bull is the empire.

When Mark-Alem is promoted to the Tabir’s Interpretation department, he is followed by the dream of the bridge. Encountering it once again, he feels he is greeting ‘une vieille connaissance’[66] [‘*një të njohur*’[67]]. Without realising its symbolic significance, the dream is, in a sense, a constant for Mark-Alem in the Tabir. The structure’s labyrinthine corridors, the institution’s unknowable systems of interpretation and analysis, and the Tabir’s wider place in society as one of the pillars of the state mean that its place in Mark-Alem’s mind shifts constantly. The dream of the bridge, like his Quprili identity, is, on the other hand, constant. Although he is promoted and, as a dream interpreter takes on greater responsibility and the outward trappings of seniority within the institution, Mark-Alem does not change in his psychological attitude towards himself, and towards the palace.

This internal stasis is reflected in his continued inability to understand the meaning of the dream. Mark-Alem comes closer to understanding his relationship to the bridge and the threat to the Quprili it evokes, but his self-doubt means that his analysis of the dream still falls short: ‘Mais attends donc…, se dit Mark-Alem, et une vive oppression lui coupa respiration. Le pont n’était-il pas lié à son tour à leur propre patronyme ? … Peut-être quelque sombre présage ?…’[68] [‘*Po prit,*

[65] Kokoboko, ‘Bureaucracy of Dreams’, p. 533.
[66] *P* (F), p. 237.
[67] *P* (A), p. 123.
[68] *P* (F), p. 238.

*ia bëri me vete Mark-Alemi dhe një shtrëngim ia këputi frymëmarrjen. Ura lidhej me mbiemrin e tyre… Mos vallë një fatkeqësi…*'[69]]. Here, Mark-Alem recognises that the dream could be significant. However, the interruption of his internal processing marked by the ellipses and the hesitancy of his self-questioning reflect the difficulty he has in interpreting the symbolism of the dream fully and its connection to the Quprili directly. After this moment of vacillation, he observes that the bridge is not being attacked by the bull, and reading the dream in these literal terms, means that he misses the clue to the Quprili: 'Le taureau ne se ruait nullement contre le pont. Il tournait en rond dans le terrain vague, sans plus'[70] ['*Demi nuk i sulej aspak kësaj ure. Ai vërtitej në djerrinë dhe kaq*'[71]]. The image of circularity here calls up Mark-Alem's own circular movement in the corridors of the Tabir—'Je tourne en rond' ['*Po vij rrotull*']—and once more reveals an individual who cannot step over the threshold into knowledge even when he is on the edge of understanding.

After Kurt Quprili's arrest, Mark-Alem learns that the dream of the bridge was behind the state's swift repressive action—it became the Master-Dream: 'c'est un rêve qui est à l'origine de tout'[72] ['*një ëndërr paskësh qenë shkaku i të gjithave*'[73]]. When he is told this by another worker in the Tabir, he immediately worries about his own place in the institution and whether he will be punished for incorrectly interpreting the dream. He even appears envious of the person who successfully interpreted it. The disconnection between the tragic fate of his uncle and Mark-Alem's reaction to the interpretation of the dream speaks to his restricted position, caught between the institution and his family; he is unable to take either side. His proximity to the empire has disabled his autonomy and separated him from his own family and heritage. He also becomes alienated from the real world and begins to inhabit the surreal world of dreams in a way that echoes the General of *Le Général de l'armée morte*, who we see grow increasingly separated from the real

[69] *P* (A), p. 124.
[70] *P* (F), p. 239.
[71] *P* (A), p. 124.
[72] *P* (F), p. 322.
[73] *P* (A), p. 204.

world as he shifts towards the 'royaume du Calcium'[74] ['*mbretërinë e kalciumit*'[75]] of his imagination.

Like the General, Mark-Alem's world becomes smaller as he is alienated from reality. We see the General inhabit a dull, grey realm—'a perpetually dismal land of rain and night and obscurity'[76]—and Mark-Alem's role in the Tabir has a similar effect on him when he experiences the outside world on his day off: 'Le monde entier lui paraissait avoir perdu ses couleurs comme au sortir d'une longue maladie.'[77] ['*Bota e tërë i dukej e çngjyrosur dhe e zbehtë si pas një lëngate*'[78]]. It is the Tabir that opens up a new world of colour and excitement to Mark-Alem, though, as the dreamscape becomes his new reality, overriding his former, ordinary perception of the world. But even within the colourful new world of surrealist aesthetics, Mark-Alem remains constrained; he does not understand that it is precisely the source of his new exciting reality and his role within the state institution that limits his existence because stepping into the dreams of others separates him from his self and from the world around him. The implicit and ironic invocation of servitude when he compares his life in the Tabir to reality reveals this process of self-alienation and highlights how he cannot understand the true nature of his restricted existence: 'Comme ce monde-ci paraissait enchaîné, avare et fastidieux au regard de l'autre qu'il servait !'[79] ['*Sa e mbërthyer në pranga, koprace dhe tmerrësisht e mëzitshme dukej kjo botë në krahashim me atë tjetrën, nëpunës i së cilës ai ishte*'[80]]. Yet Mark-Alem experiences a brief moment of clarity when he listens to the Albanian rhapsodists perform the Albanian language version of the family epic. During the performance, he feels connected to his ethnic heritage over his imperial identity as he discovers a part of his

[74] *G* (F), p. 227.
[75] *G* (A), p. 73.
[76] Weitzman, 'Specters of Narrative', p. 288.
[77] *P* (F), p. 260.
[78] *P* (A), p. 144.
[79] *P* (F), p. 260.
[80] *P* (A), p. 144.

selfhood and familial identity that was previously hidden and out of reach: 'inconnue, comme la face invisible de la Lune'[81] ['*i panjohur, si ana e padukshme e hënës*'[82]].

Identity and the Quprili Epic

> Lorsque le rhapsode entrouvrit enfin les lèvres pour se mettre à chanter, Mark-Alem se sentit quelque peu soulagé. Mais, tout comme le son de son instrument, la voix du rhapsode avait quelque chose d'inhumain. On eût dit que, par une singulière opération, elle avait été dépouillée de toutes les intonations quotidiennes, pour ne garder que les éternelles.[83]
>
> *Kur rapsodi, më në fund, hapi gojën të këndonte, Mark-Alemi ndjeu një lehtësim, por ai ishte i shkurtër. Ashtu si tingulli, edhe zëri i rapsodit kishte diçka jonjerëzore. Dukej sikur me një prerje të veçantë nga ai zë qenë hequr gjithë kumbimet e përditshme, për të lënë në të ca si tingullsi të tjera të tjetërkundshme*.[84]

Over centuries, the Quprili have largely cast off outward signs of their *Albanianness* (apart from their name) and assimilated into Ottoman society because within the mechanisms of the state, power and prestige supersede ethnicity.[85] Achieving their level of influence within the United Ottoman States has involved setting aside any linguistic or religious reminders of their difference and submitting to an imperial identity, rejecting the Albanian language and embracing Islam. However, alongside their name, the performance of the Quprili epic as a family tradition goes against this assimilation into imperial identity. The epic, performed by Bosnians, lionises the Quprili and is a source of conflict with the state. This epic is the pride of the family and described as though it were a tangible object: 'La discussion sur la geste de la famille était aussi ancienne chez les Quprili que les antiques vaisselles précieuses, présents des souverains, que chaque génération recueillait pieusement de la précédente pour la transmettre à son tour à la génération suivante'[86] ['*Biseda për eposin ishte e vjetër në e Qyprillinjve, ashtu si serviset e shtrenjta, dhurata të dikurshme të sovranëve, që çdo brez Qyprillinjsh i gjente për t'ia lënë brezit tjetër*'[87]]. By

[81] *P* (F), p. 305.
[82] *P* (A), p. 187.
[83] *P* (F), pp. 307-308.
[84] *P* (A), p. 190.
[85] Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, p. 235.
[86] *P* (F), p. 203.
[87] *P* (A), p. 91.

equating the family epic with these valuable, physical objects, particularly gifts from the sovereign, it is evident that the narrative is a symbol of power that exists separately from the empire. The inheritance of the epic by generations of the Quprili shows the family's claim over history—the epic provides the Quprili with a unique claim over their past that even the empire cannot control. Indeed, the existence of the epic provokes the empire and prompts Mark-Alem to suggest that the Quprili give it away.

Mark-Alem's suggestion to give away the Quprili epic shows his alienation from his past and the Quprili inheritance. He is thus willing to give up much of himself and his ethnic identity in order to integrate into his new role within the state. But it also signals the protagonist's inability to comprehend the relationship between intangible cultural signifiers of one's heritage and artistic tradition; his literal-mindedness means that he genuinely views the epic as a tangible object that can be traded and given away until his mother tells him that it is the history of the Quprili and therefore 'une de ces choses qu'on ne peut donner, quand bien même on le voudrait'[88] ['*është një gjë e tillë që, edhe po të duash ta japësh, nuk e jep dot*'[89]]. Mark-Alem's newfound fascination with the colourful world of dreams after working at the Tabir shows how his alienated self has existed separately from the intangible works of aesthetic imagination; here, the relationship between art and heritage also allows Kadare to problematise symbolically the extratextual role of culture within a repressive system of power. The artistic medium of the epic brings Mark-Alem into contact with another realm of history and oral literature that allows him to connect to his heritage across spatial and linguistic boundaries. Like the world of dreams, Albania also seems to exist outside of reality within the novel, within a separate time and space. It is the unknowable *there*—umbilically connected to the Quprili and their ancestry, but it is still a foreign and other place.

[88] *P* (F), pp. 204-205.
[89] *P* (A), p. 92.

The version of the epic performed by the Bosnian rhapsodists is a point of conflict with the state as it reflects the family's rich heritage. But it is also a celebration of the Ottoman origins of the Quprili.[90] By contrast, the Albanian epic has a primarily ethnic focus; for Kurt Quprili it is the authentic version. To him, Albania is the family's ancestral land and he feels an affinity and strong sense of kinship with the Albanians that goes beyond a nominal connection. His use of the pronoun 'nous'[91] ['*ne*'[92]] to refer to the Albanians and his description of them as 'les Albanais de là-bas'[93] ['*shqiptarët e atjeshëm*'[94]] reflects his sense of belonging to Albania and of having his own purchase on *Albanianness*. Strikingly, this use of 'là-bas' evokes reverence; in *Le Général de l'armée morte*, it is used in relation to Albania to signal the nation's strangeness and separation from the civilised world.

Kurt Quprili and the Epic

Kurt's decision to invite Albanian rhapsodists to perform the epic—a ballad about the bridge of their patronym—at the family residence for the first time is a means of using art to reconnect the family to their Albanian ethnic identity. Peter Morgan argues that the performance shows up a three-way conflict in the novel between Kurt, the majority of the Quprili and the state:

> Kurt represents an Albanian ethnic nationalism which is Islamic, but is also strongly aware of its pre-Islamic roots; his brothers and the Vizier represent the family's political compromise with the Ottoman Empire as Ottoman Muslims ('Balkan' rather than 'Albanian' converts to Ottoman culture and religion); and the Sultan represents the Empire, a long-standing force of occupation of the Balkans with a foreign religion and culture, an imperial capital far from the Albanian periphery, and an interest in maintaining religious and cultural order through the Balkans—not merely in Albania.[95]

By attempting to restore the family's Albanian origins through the epic and break the cultural order of the empire, Kurt enters into opposition to state power. Further, his modification of the

[90] Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, p. 244.
[91] *P* (F), p. 207.
[92] *P* (A), p. 94.
[93] *P* (F), p. 207.
[94] *P* (A), p. 94.
[95] Morgan, *The Writer and the Dictatorship*, p. 245.

performance, choosing Albanian rhapsodists not just Bosnian ones, is also a symbolic break from family tradition and an attempt to restore the family's fractured *Albanianness*, and prove to the people of Albania that the family are proud of their heritage. Indeed, for the Albanians, the Quprili are dominated by their 'dimensions impériales'[96] ['*përmasat perandorake*'[97]]. Their existence in between cultures is seen as a source of tension between the Quprili and the Albanians as the family courted favour from the sultanate rather than remaining true to their heritage. This is made visible in the epic as the Albanian version largely omits the Quprili from the story; it does not valorise them in the way the Bosnian version does. Instead, the epic focuses on mythic images that recur across Albanian cultural forms: 'un macabre défi à se battre en duel lancé à un mort par un vivant qui tourne autour de sa tombe [ … ], les gémissements du mort qui ne parvient pas à se lever de sa tombe pour se mesurer avec son ennemi, hommes et dieux mélangés qui se querellent, se frappent, se marient entre eux, hurlements, combats, horribles malédictions'[98] ['*thirrje në dyluftim makabër e të gjallit ndaj të vdekurit, tek i vërtitet mbi varr* [ … ] *rënkimet e këtij të fundit që s'ngrihet dot nga gropa për t'u ndeshur me armikun, njerëz e hyjni të përzier bashkë, që zemërohen, goditen, martohen me njëri-tjetrin, klithma, kacafytje, mallkime ngethëse*'[99]]. For Kurt Quprili, the Albanian rhapsodists' performance of the epic would be a means of overcoming their absence from the narrative; it would allow the family to rewrite themselves into their own history and assert their ethnic identity over their imperial connections.

By exploring Kurt Quprili's emotionally charged vision of ethnic identity and inheritance, the novel portrays the character as an embodiment of the *Rilindja* in the face of imperial control. The symbolic invocation of the *Rilindja* is significant in the novel as it emerges as an oppositional force to the Tabir Sarrail; its name 'rebirth or 'reawakening' evokes a collective moment of ceasing to sleep and dream—a reaction against the Tabir's repressive activities. The Romantic symbolism of

[96] *P* (F), p. 205.
[97] *P* (A), p. 92.
[98] *P* (F), pp. 208-209.
[99] *P* (A), p. 96.

*Rilindja* art is evoked in Kurt's understanding of the epic, the Quprili and, ultimately, the role of art itself in concretising a collective identity:

> Kurt continuait à disserter d'un ton passionné. Il évoqua de nouveau le rapport existant entre leur famille, *ici*, et l'épopée balkanique, *là-bas*, de même que les relations entre l'administration et l'art, l'éphemère et l'éternel, la chair et l'esprit…[100]
>
> *Kurti vazhdoi të fliste me pasion. Ai foli prapë për varësinë e familjes së tyre këtu me eposin* e atjeshëm *ballkanik, si për varësi midis zyrtarëve dhe artit, të së përkohshmes me të përjetshem, madje një herë përmendi mishin me shpirtin.*[101]

As Kurt impresses upon the Quprili the transcendental power of the family epic, he emphasises the geographical space that separates the Quprili from Albania and how, despite this distance, the two entities are bound through the unifying power of art. Kurt's focus on the sublime nature of the epic shows how its endurance can extend beyond geographical borders: the Quprili epic asserts the family's Albanian heritage. But he also goes one step further and seeks to restore the family's *Albanianness* over their existing Ottoman ties. For Kurt, the Albanian epic is an act of resistance to Ottoman repression. Here, Kurt's description of the Albanian epic recalls Captain Stres's meeting with Constantine's friends as they enter into a discussion of the *besa* in *Doruntine*. In *Doruntine*, we saw how the *besa* forms part of a structure of institutions and laws that are 'éternelles et universelles, au-dedans même de l'homme, inviolables et invisibles, partant, indestructibles'[102] ['*përjetshme brendapërbrenda njeriut, të paprekshme e të padukshme, pra, të pashkatërrueshme*'[103]]. Constantine and his friends are, in a sense, portrayed as a proto-Rilindja movement since they place value in the inherently transcendental nature of *Albanianness* and its codes of honour. Indeed, in Kadare's works, characters that feel this profound connection with ancestral *Albanianness* speak in this register of the sublime as they underscore its universal resonance.

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[100] *P* (F), p. 210.
[101] *P* (A), p. 97.
[102] *D* (F), p. 384.
[103] *D* (A), p. 170.

It is striking, then, that in both *Doruntine* and *Le Palais des rêves* there are episodes where Kadare's impossibly indebted figures come into contact with others who value this vision of Albanian identity. Both Captain Stres and Mark-Alem find themselves listening intently to the speeches of others. When he hears his uncle's words, Mark-Alem 'écoutait, bouche bée'[104] ['*Mark-Alemi vazhdonte të dëgjonte i shtangur*'[105]]. The phrase 'bouche bée' is repeated across the French translations of Kadare's texts, and it signals a moment of real engagement by the indebted protagonist. For both Captain Stres and Mark-Alem, discussions of this understanding of Albanian identity provide moments of genuine freedom. In *Doruntine*, Stres's discussion with Constantine's friends—his disciples—is part of his developing insight. However, in *Le Palais des rêves*, Kurt's words spark the beginning of an awareness in Mark-Alem, about his ethnic heritage and how he could fit into Kurt's Romantic conception of *Albanianness*, which is never fully actualised.

On the day the Albanian rhapsodists are due to come to the Quprili residence to perform the family epic, Mark-Alem observes agitation and excitement in the Tabir Sarrail and in the streets of the capital. When he and his mother arrive at the Quprili house, it is as though they are sealed off from the activity outside. When the rhapsodists begin to perform the epic, Mark-Alem is struck by a monotonous sound:

> C'était comme une longue, trop longue complainte qui vous étreignait la gorge. Mark-Alem se dit que pour peu qu'il continuât encore, tous allaient bientôt se sentir étouffer.[106]
>
> *Ishin si një ankim i gjatë, teper i gjatë, që të krijonte angështi në gjoks. Mark-Alemit iu duk se, po të vazhdonte edhe pak, ata të gjithë do të ndienin mungesë ajri.*[107]

The lexis of suffocation here emphasises Mark-Alem's restricted movement within his own body as he is simultaneously mesmerised by the rhapsodists and alienated. For Mark-Alem, the rhapsodists' performance also stirs a spiritual awakening as he hears about his own ancestry in the epic. He observes how one of the rhapsodist's voices takes on an eternal quality; stripping the

[104] *P* (F), p. 209.
[105] *P* (A), p. 97.
[106] *P* (F), p. 307.
[107] *P* (A), p. 189.

rhapsodist's voice of its human qualities, the voice instead takes on a timelessness that echoes Kurt Quprili's speech about *Albanianness* and its transcendental power. Focusing on the sensory aspects of the epic, Mark-Alem even starts to believe that he can hear the sound of the ancient stonemasons constructing the bridge of the Quprili namesake. As he listens to the rhapsodists' epic, he also feels compelled to shake off the Ottoman trappings of his name and instead turn to his Albanian roots.

In that moment, Mark-Alem experiences a visceral connection to his heritage, even though he cannot understand the Albanian words of the epic. For Mark-Alem, the performance nuances his conception of his Albanian heritage, but is also creates a moment of linguistic dislocation. By listening to the ballad in Albanian, Mark-Alem is transported to a different land and a different time; he is able to grasp the meaning of the epic in an elemental way as he learns through the sensory responses the words spark in him. His inability to understand the words of the ballad is presented as something to overcome so that he can connect with his heritage. He expresses a desire to change his name to an Albanian form of Mark-Alem; he only understands the word 'Ura' in the rhapsodists' epic and it stands out to him because of its resonance with his name: 'Mark-Gjon Ura, Mark-Gjergj Ura, Mark-Gjorgj Ura…, se répétait-il comme s'il s'évertuait à s'habituer à son demi-prénom de substitution chaque fois qu'il entendait le mot *Ura*, le seul qu'il comprît parmi les paroles'[108] ['*Mark Ura, thoshte me vete, Mark Gjon Ura, thua se po përpiqej të mësohej me emrin e mundshëm, sa here që dëgjonte fjalën "urë", të vetmen që kuptonte nga fjalët e rapsodit*'[109]].

Listening to the performance, Mark-Alem is close to experiencing a moment of clarity and an understanding of his role within the Quprili family—rejecting the empire. The Albanian performance seeks not only to bring the immediate family closer together, but also to connect them to their Quprili heritage: the epic is a means of collapsing the temporal distinctions between the generations of Quprili by evoking an eternal, familial link. The rhapsodists' invocation of the *besa*

[108] *P* (F), p. 309.
[109] *P* (A), p. 191.

reinforces this link as it speaks to a familial conception of debt: 'Tu as trouvé la tombe, ô toi, lié par la bessa !'[110] ['*T'ka zanë vorri, o, me besë të dhanë…*'[111]].

The *besa* here also links to Mark-Alem's status as the impossibly indebted individual. In the corridors of the Tabir, he is disorientated and finds himself 'pétrifié' on a number of occasions; he is ultimately unable to step over the threshold into self-knowledge. In the Quprili residence, during the performance of the family epic, he is unable to move physically and act on his impulse to rid himself of the trappings of his Ottoman identity and embrace his Albanian ethnicity fully. Hence, his physical movements within the Quprili residence are unsure and slow: 'Mark-Alem gagna à pas lents sa chamber au premier étage. Il n'avait nulle envie de dormir'[112] ['*Mark-Alemi u ngjit me hapa të ngadaltë në dhomën e vet, në katin e dytë. Nuk i flihej*'[113]]. This inability to move between either side is revealing of his symbolic immurement as he acts as the bridge between the state and the Quprili.

Mark-Alem the Immured Sacrifice

> Mark-Alem eut l'impression d'entendre les coup des maçons qui, dans le soleil froid, construisaient le pont éclaboussé par le sang du sacrifice, ce pont qui, avec son nom, allait refiler aux Quprili sa malédiction.[114]
>
> *Mark-Alemit iu duk se po dëgjonte trokitjen e sqeparëve, që nën një diell të ftohtë, ndërtonin urën e spërkatur me gjakun e flijimit, e cila bashkë me emrin do t'u kalonte Qyprillinjve mallkimin e saj*.[115]

In Kadare's novel *Le Pont aux trois arches* [*Ura me tri harqe*], which poetically imagines the immurement legend from the perspective of a chronicler and monk named Gjon, he writes of the connection between structures and crime: 'les grandes édifices ressemblent tous à des crimes et,

[110] *P* (F), p. 309.
[111] *P* (A), p. 191.
[112] *P* (F), p. 212.
[113] *P* (A), p. 99.
[114] *P* (F), p. 308.
[115] *P* (A), pp. 190-191.

inversement, les crimes aussi ont quelque chose de commun avec les constructions…'[116] ['*gjithë ndërtimet e mëdha u ngjajnë krimeve dhe e kundërta, krimet gjithashtu përngjajnë me to*…'[117]]. Rebecca Gould observes that if these great buildings are crimes, then the state mechanisms are the vehicles for their perpetuation.[118] We can read these symbolic Balkan buildings as allegories for power; this is true of *Le Palais des rêves* as the Tabir is a symbol of the power structure of the state and the Quprili residence is a space that reflects the family's influence. Straddling the space between these structures, Mark-Alem becomes the metaphorically immured sacrificial victim; his restricted movement within and between the two spaces means that he cannot break free of this tension.

We saw at the beginning of the novel that Mark-Alem is given the role at the Tabir because he suits them—his Quprili heritage makes him a valuable connection to the family for the state. The Vizier and the rest of his family consider which government institution he should work in so that he can keep a watchful eye over the empire's activities for his family. It is only Kurt who is cautious about Mark-Alem's appointment to the Tabir; he views it as the most dangerous and absurd institution within the empire. Yet, Mark-Alem's appointment to the Tabir is strategic for both sides and, like the immured victim of the Balkan myth, it is an act of (either voluntary or involuntary) sacrifice that is required to ensure the survival of the structure. Tatjana Aleksić argues that in Balkan literature, the immurement legend has become a powerful and omnipresent metaphor for 'bureaucratic or physical violation and discrimination against undesired bodies, while the bodies themselves are a visible reminder of the fragility of communal ideologies based on restrictive and exclusive identities'.[119]

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[116] Ismail Kadare, *Le Pont aux trois arches*, in *Œuvres : tome premier*, trans. by Jusuf Vrioni (Paris: Fayard, 1993), p. 478.
[117] Ismail Kadare, *Ura me tri harqe* (Tirana: Onufri, 2004), p. 78.
[118] Rebecca Gould, 'Allegory and the Critique Of Sovereignty: Ismail Kadare's Political Theologies', *Studies in the Novel*, 44.2 (2012), pp. 208-230. (p. 209).
[119] Aleksić, p. 17.

By the end of the novel, after Kurt's murder and the dream of the bridge bringing about the purge, Mark-Alem is promoted to the top of the Tabir Sarrail. It is not an honour to be promoted in this way, it is a curse and constitutes the ultimate restricted position. The narrative returns to Mark-Alem's growing awareness of his family's connection with Albania at the end of the novel. As he climbs the ranks of the Tabir Sarrail and finds himself in an impossible position at the apex of the government institution—and doomed with some knowledge that he cannot go any higher, he can only fall—Mark-Alem takes comfort in his Albanian heritage. As well as the Quprili epic, the family chronicle provides a tangible connection to the dynasty's history as a record of their collective history; it is an artefact which highlights their triumphs and downfalls. The Quprili chronicle is invoked at the beginning and end of the novel, and this allows Mark-Alem to place himself within his own family's history; it is something that both comforts and startles him. The chronicle also serves to demonstrate the circularity of the family's fortunes and their tragic inheritance, which even has its own name: 'tristesse quprilienne'[120] ['*trishtim Qyprillinjsh*'[121]]. Family members are known to contribute to the chronicle when they are on the brink of their downfall. At the end of the novel, Mark-Alem experiences an inexorable need to write himself into his family's history by adding his name to the chronicle, hinting that his self-knowledge may come too late:

> Dans ce patronyme, comme un message secret, était prédit le destin que connaîtraient les Quprili génération après génération. [ … ] Et, tout comme alors, il se répéta à part soi : Mark-Gjergj, Mark-Gjorg Ura…, toujours la plume à la main, comme hésitant à apposer sa signature au bas de la vieille chronique…[122]
>
> *Në atë mbiemër, si në një kumt të fshehtë, qe paralajmëruar fati i Qyprillinjve nga brezi në brez.* [ … ] *Dhe, ashtu si atëherë, përsëriti me vete : Mark Ura, Gjorg Ura, ndërsa penën e mbante ende në dorë, thua se mëdyshej të nënshkruante apo jo me të në "Chronique"-n e lashtë*.[123]

The way in which Kadare spotlights the chronicle emphasises Mark-Alem's debt to the past, as well as the debt he passes on to future generations of the Quprili family. Yet it is his desire to use

[120] *P* (F), p. 349.
[121] *P* (A), p. 230.
[122] *P* (F), pp. 350-351.
[123] *P* (A), pp. 230-231.

an Albanian transliteration of his name that is most striking. Mark-Alem's temptation to memorialise himself in the family chronicle as Mark-Gjergj Ura is a means of him connecting with his Albanian heritage at a time when the nation, his family and his very self seem 'de plus en plus distante de lui'[124] ['*duke iu menjanuar*'[125]].

## Conclusion

An examination of Kadare's depiction of Mark-Alem in *Le Palais des rêves* demonstrates the novel's concerns with the inheritance of an archaic familial debt, as well as an existential question of what it means for a protagonist to be impossibly indebted. Like the other impossibly indebted figures within Kadare's works, Mark-Alem is alienated from his self and his identity to such an extent that he cannot recognise himself or his family in the Master Dream. However, where Tursun Pasha, Captain Stres and the General experience moments of clarity and insight, Mark-Alem is unable to step into self-knowledge. Yet perhaps his indebtedness and symbolic immurement is also integral to his survival; his lack of qualities allow him to survive as an empty bureaucrat at the apex of the Tabir.

Despite his promotion in the Tabir Sarrail, he remains the same person at the end of the novel. Through the novel's focus on oneiric imagery, Mark-Alem's emptiness as a protagonist shows he cannot understand the symbolism and nuances of the dream world. Because of his inaction and lack of awareness, he fails to prevent disaster for the Quprili family. It is this inability to recognise symbols of the Quprili in the dream that follows him through the Tabir Sarrail that causes the family's connection with an inherited legacy of suffering and misfortune to be realised once more—perhaps a symbolic nod to Albania's own fate as a place where violence and control are repeated in different forms, working from outwards from the diegetic imperial period to the extratextual conditions of repression that defined its time of publication.

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[124] *P* (F), p. 349.
[125] *P* (A), p. 230.

## Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to show how questions of Albanian identity are explored through procedures of rewriting and allegory across a corpus of four quite different novels by Ismail Kadare. We have seen a subtle play of similarity in these novels both on the level of formal devices and on the level of historical and philosophical reflection.

Close readings of the novels have drawn attention to the different ways these texts encircle and problematise questions of what could be taken to constitute *Albanianness*. They each look to aspects of the nation's past and how it informs the condition of nationhood within an imaginary present; this, in itself, speaks to an idea of debt. A procedure of rewriting history shows the past and collective textual memory can always bleed again and cannot be settled. Each text brings out and problematises paradigmatic elements of this identity construction: a legacy of occupation, violent histories, folk morality, oral culture, and the very memorialisation—and enmeshment—of these elements themselves.

We have also seen within the texts the display of a moral constant: the denial of a rationalistic conception of a hero who would be able to achieve goals and thereby break the spell of past promises and open up the perspective of a new future. This moral continuity is anchored in narrative forms that also continuously foreground structures of repetition. The distinct narrative perspectives of the Ottomans and Albanians in *Les Tambours de la pluie* structurally conceptualise repetition; alternating between two perspectives in this way shows history is carried forward in each retelling like a system of debt that cannot be resolved. In *Qui a ramené Doruntine ?* we see through the process of repetition how a myth is diegetically brought into being. The lexis of repetition in *Le Général de l'armée morte*—made clear through labour and acts of mourning—serves as a way to ground the novel in a past that cannot be overcome. And the structural arrangement of the castle location in *Le Palais des rêves* mobilises repetition as an instrument of an absurd, repressive world.

Across the corpus of novels, the plot configurations are very different and, as seen above, the nature of repetition quite distinct, appearing within different contexts of meaning. Hence, *Les Tambours de la pluie* and *Le Palais des rêves* can be read as overtly political texts, whereas *Qui a ramené Doruntine ?* and *Le Général de l'armée morte* are primarily cultural and, in a more extended sense, political.

A further element of continuity across these texts that becomes apparent only through close reading is formal and stylistic. It consists in an effort to materialise symbolic meaning structures on the level of an earthy, bodily register. As Ottoman bodies come into contact with the castle structure in *Les Tambours de la pluie* we see corporeal suffering transposed to the *external* world in a subversion of traditional siege literature and Balkan myths of immurement: violence as spectacle not hidden within. The graves in *Qui a ramené Doruntine ?* and *Le Général de l'armée morte* are earthy sites of rupture and transition, from which the dead spill out. The dead in *Le Général de l'armée morte* are corpses and the centre of a striking material reconfiguration of a debt carried forward between temporalities: from blood-taking [*gjakmarrje*] to bone-taking [*ashtmarrje*]. In *Le Palais des rêves* the symbolic is similarly made material as the corridors of power are literally corridors.

Between the earthiness of material description and the claustrophobic enclosure of repetition, these novels present a consistent picture of a hero who is the perfect analogue to a problematic Albanian identity; a hero emerging from a past that he can repeat and reconfigure but not obliterate.

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