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**MITI, HAPËSIRA DHE KOHA: TEKNIKAT NARRATIVE NË PROZËN
E ISMAIL KADARESE**

**МИТОТ, ПРОСТОРОТ И ВРЕМЕТО: НАРАТИВНИ ТЕХНИКИ ВО
ПРОЗАТА НА ИСМАИЛ КАДАРЕ**

**MYTH, SPACE, AND TIME: NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN THE
PROSE OF ISMAIL KADARE**

Abstract

This article examines the complex interplay of space, time, and characters in two of Ismail Kadare's most renowned works, *The Castle* and *The General of the Dead Army*. In these novels, Kadare creates a multi-layered narrative universe where space and time transcend their physical functions, profoundly influencing the psychology and fate of the characters. In *The Castle*, space symbolizes national resistance, while the mythical figure of Skanderbeg is portrayed as a "mobile hero," representing the clash between reality and myth. In *The General of the Dead Army*, the narrative exposes the absurdity of searching for the remains of dead soldiers in a landscape that emphasizes isolation and futility, with space and time generating constant tension for the characters. This article also analyzes figures such as the blind poet and the architect, who embody mythological and cultural ideas, deepening the connection between history and symbolism. Kadare successfully crafts a narrative that uniquely intertwines Albanian and universal history, shedding light on aspects of national identity and the human experience.

Keywords: *space, time, mythology, characters, symbolism*

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Introduction

Ismail Kadare is one of the most distinguished representatives of the avant-garde movement of the 1960s and contemporary Albanian literature. He is highly regarded for revitalizing the Albanian novel, which, in the context of communist dictatorship in Albania, “was restricted by the rigid rules of socialist realism” (Kodra, 2021). Challenging these norms, Kadare steered the Albanian novel toward a more modern form, emphasizing relativism and ambivalence—qualities that Milan Kundera, in *The Art of the Novel*, describes as essential features of the modern European novel (Kundera, 1988, pp. 5-6). Kadare’s work forms a complex literary universe where every element—whether narrative, thematic, or stylistic—can be analyzed individually. What sets his writing apart is his unique approach to expanding narrative boundaries, where storytelling goes beyond mere event depiction and delves into layers of thought, philosophy, and existential reflection. This fusion of contemplation and action transforms his works into rich landscapes for multiple levels of interpretation. According to scholar Ymer Çiraku, “His brush creates a rupture with traditional storytelling styles, becoming sharper, more focused, and inclined towards existentialist themes. From one work to another, Kadare emerges as an explorer of existential depths—both individual and national—in horizontal and vertical dimensions, with reflections and stylistic structures that are macro and micro, almost dizzying” (Çiraku, 2011, p. 115).

The key features of these narrative intersections, which will be analyzed in *The General of the Dead Army* and *The Castle*, become evident through the use of modern techniques such as polyphony and focalization. As Genette (1980, pp. 243-245) describes, these techniques “create a multidimensional narrative structure,” constructing a rich and complex dynamic through the presentation of multiple voices and perspectives in reciprocal harmony. The use of nonlinear time and flashbacks, emphasized in these novels, transports the reader between past and present, highlighting the absurdity of historical situations. Through retrospection and the prioritization of subject over object in narration, “Kadare creates characters that embody the existential dilemmas of their time” (Dado, 1999, p. 206). In *The General of the Dead Army*, the Italian general moves between inner emotions and external reality, with events unfolding through a deeply focalized narrative that accentuates his growing sense of disappointment and loss. The general transforms from a powerful and pompous figure into an antihero—a character reflecting the absurdity of war and the futility of his mission. In *The Castle*, Kadare employs external focalization and a multi-layered narrative structure, intertwining past events with analogies to the contemporary era. Through the use of flashbacks and prolepses, the reader experiences a continuous sense of time and a collision between historical events and contemporary tensions. The characters in this novel are portrayed through a richly polyphonic narration, representing

opposing sides in conflict, thereby creating an interaction of voices that fosters an ongoing dialogue between different perspectives. This article aims to analyze the narrative techniques Kadare uses to challenge traditional storytelling structures, including polyphony, focalization, and nonlinear time. The analysis reveals how these techniques contribute to creating “a narrative open to multiple interpretations by the reader,” allowing them to decipher “the double encoding” that Kadare constructs in his work (Eco, 1984, pp. 19-21). This double encoding not only challenges the reader but also grants them the freedom to delve into the complex structure of the work, engaging with it on deeper levels of interpretation.

Methodology and Literature Review

This section explores the theoretical frameworks and methodologies applied in the analysis of Ismail Kadare’s works, particularly *The Castle* and *The General of the Dead Army*. Kadare’s novels are renowned for their intricate narrative structures, where historical, mythical, and symbolic elements are seamlessly intertwined. The concept of the chronotope, as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), is central to this analysis, uniting space and time to create a coherent narrative framework. In these novels, Kadare merges historical and psychological dimensions with spatial contexts, reflecting Albania’s socio-political struggles.

Lotman’s theory of the “mobile hero” (1990) serves as a key approach to understanding how space influences character development, particularly in *The Castle*, where the fortress symbolizes both physical and cultural resistance. Characters such as the architect and the blind poet also embody mythological and symbolic dimensions, representing broader themes of creation and destruction. These figures align with Roland Barthes’ (1970) concept of characters as “**signs**” that convey deeper historical and individual values.

The methodology also integrates an analysis of **polyphonic narration**, inspired by Genette (1980), where multiple perspectives—such as those of invaders and defenders in *The Castle*—create a rich narrative complexity. Through this polyphony, Kadare facilitates a diverse interaction of voices and ideologies, inviting readers to engage with multiple narratives that explore time, space, and identity.

To analyze Kadare’s multifaceted characters, this study employs a combination of **structuralism, hermeneutics, and psychological analysis**. By integrating these methodologies, the research delves into how Kadare’s characters represent both individual struggles and collective national dilemmas, with a particular focus on **the universal themes of human existence**.

Narrative Techniques, Polyphony, and Historical Symbolism in Ismail Kadare's Works *The General of the Dead Army* and *The Castle*

Narrative and Symbolism in *The General of the Dead Army*

Ismail Kadare's prose is characterized by an interplay between objectivity and subjectivity in narration, creating a balance between events and the author's perspective. According to theorist Wolfgang Iser (1974), a literary work involves an interaction between the author's textuality and the reader's aesthetic realization, which is reflected in Kadare's prose through the use of multiple narrative voices (Iser, 1974: 285).

The narration frequently shifts between first-person and third-person perspectives, making the narrative more complex and multi-layered. Objectivity and subjectivity are naturally intertwined, forming a narrative flow that follows the internal logic of the work (Dado, 1999: 214). Rather than adhering strictly to traditional storytelling, Kadare delves into characters' emotions, worldviews, and tensions, creating a more innovative and emotionally charged narrative, particularly in his prose from the 1960s and 1970s (Kuçuku, 2005, p. 31).

The novels "Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur" (The General of the Dead Army originally published in 1963 and republished in a revised version in 1967) and "Kështjella" (The Castle written between 1967–1969, published in 1970, and reworked and republished in French in 1994 under the title *The Rain Messengers* and in other languages with the original title *The Castle*) represent two of Kadare's works from this period. By not adhering to the fundamental principles of socialist realism, they "would serve as models for Albanian literature writers of the 1960s and 1970s" (Kodra, 2024).

The narrative structure in these works is characterized by a polyphony of voices and a shift in perspectives, distributing the storytelling in a way that challenges the classical homogeneity of historical novels. According to Fraj (1990), this narrative weaving is related to "the attempt to create a complex flow of events, where the thematic aspect often remains secondary, while narrative lines are constructed through the transition from a narrator (storyteller) to a narratee (the one being narrated)" (Fraj, 1990: 113). As a result, the storytelling style changes with the shift in perspective, creating a heterogeneous and multi-layered structure.

In the novel "Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur" (The General of the Dead Army), the story is based on a true event: "the arrival of an Italian diplomat in Albania to repatriate the remains of soldiers killed during World War II" (Morgan, 2009: 74). The plot unfolds around this tragic premise: an Italian general, assigned and authorized by his government for a two-year mission, along with a senior military cleric, travels through Albanian territories to collect and return home the remains of their fallen soldiers, who died about 20 years earlier.

The general and the priest are also entrusted with a special task by the beautiful aristocratic widow, Beti, to locate and repatriate the remains of her husband, Colonel Z, the former commander of the Blue Battalion, which executed Italian deserters during the occupation of Albania and Greece. He was a descendant of a distinguished Italian family and a decorated war hero.

This situation serves as a means to explore philosophical and political contradictions, while the subject unfolds through the narrative of a third-person omniscient narrator, yet with intentional limitations. Suzanne Keen (2003) asserts that “a creative writer can construct an external, authorial, omniscient, and uncertain narrator” (Keen, 2003: XI).

This implies that an omniscient narrator can be influenced by the perspectives of the characters, which Kadare utilizes to build a narrative where events are primarily experienced through the general’s eyes, giving the storytelling a more subjective and complex dimension.

This type of narrator maintains a certain distance while creating the illusion of first-person narration, “allowing the reader to delve into the experiences of the main character and their moral dilemma” (Fludernik, 2009: 86–88).

Thus, it is the fabula (story structure) that serves in this novel to explore important philosophical and political contradictions, while the plot (syzheu) sharpens these contradictions and drives the events forward. This type of storytelling creates “a self-movement of everything reflected in the work” (Dado, 2003: 145).

Kadare utilizes this model to craft a narrative that, while following a limited perspective, maintains the omniscience of the narrator by integrating the characters’ thoughts and actions in a dynamic and intricate manner.

In *The General of the Dead Army*, Kadare employs a third-person omniscient narrator but introduces intentional shifts, such as in the monologues of the old woman Nicë, where the narrator delves into her psychology. This deep exploration enables the reader to understand her trauma and experiences, justifying her reactions and actions.

Kadare also intertwines first-person singular narratives within the structure, using diaries, letters, and memories to provide a more intimate perspective. This is evident in the general’s letters, which contrast with the omniscient narration and enrich the novel’s narrative structure.

One of the longest sections where a first-person narrator is integrated is the diary of the unknown soldier, through which various insights are provided about wartime experiences, Albania, Albanians, and their character. The soldier’s reflections reveal themes of love, longing for home and loved ones, hopes for the future, and the fear of punishment for his desertion. Additionally, the diary sheds light on Colonel Z’s ruthless nature, exposing his atrocities. This is particularly evident during the soldier’s dialogue with his fellow deserter from the Iron Division: “Listen,” he said to me, “Have you heard anything about the Blue Battalion?” My heart trembled. “No,” I

replied, "Why?" "*What's their troop count?*" I asked. "*A hundred men,*" he said, "*all fanatical fascists. They commit massacres everywhere, spreading terror. As for deserters...*" "What?" I asked, feeling my heartbeat weaken. "*Immediate execution, that much is known.*" (Kadare, 1963:96)

The unknown soldier's diary offers thoughts and impressions, providing a direct and subjective perspective. This technique allows the third-person narrator to momentarily shift into a first-person narrative—a strategy that scholars describe as "a way to deepen subjectivity in complex narratives and create a stronger connection between the reader and the characters" (Herman, 2009:145-150). These first-person accounts intertwine with the main storyline, giving the reader the opportunity to experience events from multiple viewpoints.

In some instances, the first-person narration in *The General of the Dead Army* also appears in plural form, creating a collective perspective that reflects shared experiences. This occurs in excerpts from diaries or notes, where the soldiers' thoughts and actions merge into a unified voice:

"*Usually, we spent the day either smoking cigarettes while leaning against the bridge's railing or at the small wooden shack, whose owner had written 'Coffee-Orange Soda' in crooked letters above the entrance. We were six soldiers guarding the bridge.*" (Kadare, pp. 139-140)

According to modern narratology scholar Uri Margolin (2011), "the collective narrative voice helps build a communal identity, expressing the group's experiences, but is often limited to their shared perceptions without possessing full omniscience" (Margolin, 2011:45-49). This collective perspective deepens the richness of the storytelling.

The use of the collective voice in Kadare's work reflects a shared sense of isolation, loss, and wartime experiences, particularly in the depiction of Italian soldiers in Albania. This plural narration solidifies group experiences through a shared voice, intensifying the universal tragedy of war.

Building on Margolin's discussion of an essential distinction in modern narratology—between "telling" and "showing"—it can be said that Kadare employs this contrast in a sophisticated manner. The omniscient narrator in his works not only reports events but frequently intervenes with commentary and generalizations, helping the reader grasp not just the events themselves but also the characters' motivations and moral dilemmas. Through the narrator's voice, the reader perceives how the absurdity of the general's mission to repatriate the remains of dead soldiers symbolically reflects the broader tragedy of war and the impossibility of absolving past crimes.

E. M. Forster, cited by Margolin, emphasizes that "telling" and "commenting" are essential in enriching a narrative, providing readers with deeper access to the characters' inner worlds" (Margolin, 2013). Kadare applies this approach to construct a narrative that interweaves different perspectives with the omniscient narrator's voice. Characters such as the old woman Nicë, the

soldier, and Beti (Colonel Z's widow) represent distinct layers of trauma and wartime experiences, which merge to form a broader depiction of human drama.

This approach in modern literature, where authors often strive to balance "showing" and "telling," is used by Kadare to build a multi-dimensional and emotionally engaging narrative. One of the key techniques supporting this structure is multiple focalization. Kadare allows the reader to experience events through various viewpoints, shifting perspectives from the general to the priest, the fallen soldiers, or the war victims. These focalization changes continuously intertwine individual voices with collective experiences, offering the reader not only the personal drama of central characters but also a deeper understanding of the larger-scale tragedy affecting entire groups, such as fallen soldiers or Albanian civilians suffering the war's consequences. Multiple focalization enables Kadare to approach events from diverse angles, creating a deeper sense of the moral and emotional complexity faced by his characters. Thus, the impact of war and its consequences are experienced on both individual and collective levels, providing readers with a more comprehensive portrayal of human experience.

Kadare's use of multiple focalization can be analyzed through Gérard Genette's theory, as outlined in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980). Genette "distinguishes between internal, external, and zero focalization," demonstrating how shifts in perspective contribute to "the creation of complex and subjective narratives in modern literature" (Genette, 1980, pp. 189-194).

Allegory and Multiple Perspectives in *The Castle*

In the historical novel *The Castle*, the plot focuses on the siege of a medieval Albanian fortress by the Ottoman army during the historical period of Skanderbeg. The story revolves around the failed attempts of the Turkish commander, Turgut Pasha, and his troops to conquer the fortress over a three-month period, from June 18 until the beginning of the autumn rains. From the very outset, the Ottoman army sets up camp around the fortress and employs various tactics to force the Albanian defenders (the castle's inhabitants) to surrender, including diplomatic negotiations, military assaults, and punitive measures such as burning villages, cutting off the water supply, and using heavy artillery. However, the Turkish efforts are met with determined resistance from the castle's defenders, who display extraordinary defensive skills, utilizing every available means to survive. The military mission ends in failure, and the retreat of the Turkish caravan—following the suicide of Tursun Pasha—at the conclusion of the narrative underscores the inevitable defeat of the invaders and the cyclical repetition of human fates shaped by war.

In the novel's narrative structure, two distinct voices are interwoven: the collective first-person voice of the chronicler and the external third-person

narrator. The transition between the narrator and focalizer (the perspective from which the event is experienced and presented) occurs at various points—both when moving from one chapter to another and within the same chapter.

The chronicler provides the collective perspective of the fortress's defenders, while the external narrator presents events from the viewpoint of the Ottoman troops. This narrative structure, built upon interruptions of linear storytelling, enriches the narration by offering a multifaceted and comprehensive vision of events. The chronicler's voice creates an intimate experience of the defenders: "*We are ready for battle. From time to time, exhausted by the sight of the Turkish camp, we lift our eyes toward the mountains where we have sheltered our children and elders.*" (Kadare, 33)

The shift between narrative voices in *The Castle* gives readers a broader perspective, moving from the chronicler's subjective storytelling, which reflects the personal experiences of the defenders, to the omniscient narrator's objective account, which describes events within the Ottoman camp. This interplay of perspectives is not positioned on the same discursive plane, as the omniscient narrator stands above the chronicler, possessing knowledge not only of events but also of the chronicler himself: "*Write this in your chronicle...*" (Kadare, 32). As an omniscient narrator, he is capable of judging what occurs and acts as a witness to events.

This multi-layered focalization makes the narration more intricate and symbolically rich. The storytelling does not remain on a single level but expands through symbolic and allegorical layers, creating a clear contrast between the world of the Albanian defenders and the Ottoman invaders. The interweaving of voices deepens the complexity of the narrative and offers readers a stark contrast between the two perspectives, adding a profound interpretative dimension.

The author alternates between the collective voice of the chronicler, representing the struggles and emotions of the fortress's defenders, and the omniscient narrator, who provides a broader overview of the events in the invaders' camp. This interplay of perspectives helps construct a multi-dimensional narrative, intensifying the tension and clash between the two civilizations while allowing for an exploration of deeper symbolic themes.

Polyphony enables the "interweaving of independent and equally significant voices, giving each conflicting side a distinct presence" (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 81-82).

"*Within homodiegetic narration, we must distinguish at least two types: one in which the narrator is the protagonist of their own narrative, and another in which the narrator is primarily an observer and witness*" (Genette, 1980, p. 245). Kadare employs the second model in *The Castle*, positioning the chronicler as a participating witness rather than a protagonist, allowing the author to avoid overt personal and ideological stances. The focalizer shifts

multiple times, depending on the character or group of characters, enriching the narrative and providing readers with a multi-dimensional experience.

The ideological conflict between Albanians and Ottomans in *The Castle* is further emphasized through these perspectives, highlighting profound differences between the two civilizations in terms of race, religion, and customs. For instance, the voice of the castle defender reflects national resistance: "*We asked only one thing: that their army immediately pack up their tents and leave, because their presence weighed heavily on our land.*" Meanwhile, the Sheik's voice represents efforts for assimilation: "*We will cover their faces and their cunning eyes with black veils, so that they will no longer be free to gaze upon men.*" (Kadare, 49). This narrative division not only creates a deep interpretative layer but also disrupts the homogeneity of storytelling, presenting visible clashes between historical realities and modern interpretations. Thus, in *The Castle*, the use of multi-layered polyphonic narration enables readers to engage in open-ended interpretations.

The chronicler's lexicon is influenced by communist-era rhetoric, incorporating terms such as "blockade" and "delegation". Through this usage, Kadare draws parallels between historical events and Albania's political situation in the 1960s-70s, following the breakdown of relations with several countries in the former socialist bloc, including the Soviet Union, and the impending split with China. Hence, the author's intent is not simply to recount historical events or glorify the national hero, but to construct an allegorical narrative that reflects the era in which the novel was written (Qosja, 1973, p. 155). In fact, another study on myth and allegory in Kadare's work notes that "allegory, in the text, reveals time through recontextualization." (Rexhepi, 2008, p. 72)

The fusion of medieval language with modern political terminology becomes evident through the omniscient narrator, who observes events with critical detachment. According to Genette (1980), this approach creates "external focalization," dissolving the boundaries between historical time and the time of writing, lending a "modern dimension" to the retelling of a medieval story (Genette, 1980, pp. 189-194). The era of *The Great Siege* serves as Kadare's platform to explore the existential fate of mankind under the pressure of conquest, creating a parallel between historical struggles and contemporary concerns. The fortress, from a historical standpoint, transforms into a symbol of Albanian resilience and perseverance, evoking metaphoric and allegorical allusions "..., also constitutes the most prominent aspect of I. Kadare's prose" (Kuçuku, 205:31).

The interweaving of the chronicler's subjective voice and the narrator's objective voice allows Kadare to simultaneously address historical and symbolic dimensions, using the siege of the fortress as a metaphor for Albania's political isolation in the 1960s-70s. The third-person narrator contrasts with the chronicler's voice, creating a complex narrative structure that juxtaposes

the nation's isolation and resistance while connecting the past with modern reality. In this way, *The Castle* offers an allegory open to multiple interpretations, forging a strong link between history and the present.

Myth, Space, and Time: Narrative Techniques in the Prose of Ismail Kadare

Kadare's narrative is carefully constructed to balance characters, setting, and atmosphere, creating a harmonious interaction between these elements. This dynamic is essential for understanding how Kadare's characters—far from being mere fictional figures—are deeply intertwined with the time and space in which they exist, representing universal ideas and themes (Schmidt, 2014, pp. 45-49).

Character construction, as a complex concept, is closely linked to the logic of the novelist's creative universe. Literary scholar Albert Thibaudet observes that "a true novelist creates characters with infinite possibilities in their potential lives," highlighting that the novel's brilliance allows readers to experience these possibilities without fully uncovering the truth (Thibaudet, 1965, p. 257). Kadare follows these creative principles, using advanced techniques such as typification and individualization to build a rich and profound literary universe. His characters represent more than fictional figures; "they become narrators who communicate directly with the reader, forming a close and deep connection" (Dado, 2006, p. 104).

In Kadare's works, characters are carefully depicted in their physical, social, and psychological aspects, fostering a strong connection with the reader. These descriptions incorporate universal elements that make the characters globally relatable, while also reflecting a broad spectrum of social typologies, mirroring the diversity of Albanian society. However, these characters do not exist in isolation—they are intricately connected to the space and time surrounding them.

The Role of Space and Time in Kadare's Literary Universe

In Kadare's creative world, space and time are fundamental elements shaping his novels' narrative structures, forging a complex interplay between the characters' experiences and the realities surrounding them. Space and time (chronotope) are inseparable, as they create the context in which the action unfolds, strengthening the link between the characters and their historical and social reality (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 84-90). Kadare utilizes space to explore his characters' movement and resilience, while time often appears fragmented and relentless, reflecting their internal and historical tensions. Thus, his characters not only represent different social layers but are also products of

unique spatial and temporal realities, making them integral to a broader narrative structure that mirrors Albania's historical and societal struggles.

The concepts of anatopy and metatopy, as discussed in modern space theories, help in understanding Kadare's treatment of spatial settings. Anatopy, a space that does not exist in reality but carries nostalgic or sentimental elements of a lost place, is a concept Kadare avoids. Instead, he prefers metatopy—an experience of space that transcends physical constraints, closely tied to the characters' personal and historical experiences (Foucault, 1986, pp. 22-27).

Kadare constructs a space that is both concrete and imaginary, using a rich language infused with visions of the past and future, much like Einstein's theories on the close relationship between space, movement, and time (Einstein, 1960, p. 140).

Moreover, Kadare's use of chronotope, as seen in *The Castle* and *The General of the Dead Army*, suggests that he positions his characters "above time" on a metaphysical and artistic level. This gives his work a universal dimension, portraying history not just as a documented fact but as a personal and collective experience. Thus, Kadare redefines the concept of time and space, integrating them into a unified structure that "reflects tensions and clashes between the past, present, and future" in the Albanian experience (Bachelard, 1994).

Unlike time, which is often fragmented, space in Kadare's novels provides a sense of movement and existence in a stable and familiar zone. This separation between time and space reflects the challenges faced by Albanians during a period marked by ideological and political isolation, where censorship and lack of freedom suppressed every attempt at change. In this context, Kadare employs symbolic and metaphorical language to express his rebellion against the totalitarian regime, refining his style under strict surveillance and censorship, transforming his literature into a platform for aesthetic resistance (Morgan, 2010, pp. 43-50).

In *The Castle* and *The General of the Dead Army*, space is closely linked to Albanian folklore traditions, while also incorporating elements of the modern novel and intertextuality. This blend creates a complex depiction of the relationship between time and space, where past and future coexist in unconventional ways. Time in Kadare's works does not follow a linear progression but shifts according to the characters' perceptions and actions, creating a narrative experience that challenges traditional structures. In this way, Kadare uses space as a tool to explore both personal and historical experiences, "creating a multidimensional reality for his characters," as evident in the treatment of time and space in modern literature (Eco, 1996, p. 83). From a chronotopic perspective, Kadare places his characters "above time," suggesting a detachment from its limitations while reaffirming his status as a modern writer. His characters operate within a clearly defined

historical framework, connected to periods such as the Middle Ages and anti-fascist and anti-communist struggles. In *The Castle* and *The General of the Dead Army*, Kadare constructs characters that embody the historical and political tensions of their time, intertwined with a unique experience of time and space. He sculpts a literary universe where war and physical space harmonize, simultaneously expressing the Albanian experience and the universal dimensions of human existence.

In *The General of the Dead Army*, space and characters are deeply intertwined, reflecting their psychological state and actions. The General and the Priest, the two central figures, traverse a bleak and hostile Albania, experiencing profound alienation and fear. To complete their mission—retrieving the remains of fallen Italian soldiers—they must navigate a landscape filled with memories of past wars and deaths. This hostile and distant Albanian space affects not only their actions but also their psychology, intensifying their sense of isolation and absurdity. Space in the novel is limitless, not only in physical terms but also as a concept closely linked to the characters' emotional and psychological experiences. As Kestner (1978) suggests, “space can be used as a formal construct and a critical reading method, influencing how events are structured and interpreted” (Kestner, 1978, p. 9).

In Kadare's novel, toponymy is restricted to Albania and Italy, with only brief references to specific locations such as Tirana, Durrës, and Gjirokastra. However, space remains crucial in shaping the narrative and characters. From a formal perspective, “space is not merely a backdrop for events but an essential element of the novel's narrative structure” (Genette, 1969, p. 57). The general's mission is inevitably linked to the exploration of space, creating an interaction between the physical terrain, where he meticulously searches for the graves of fallen soldiers, and the actions of the characters. Each exhumed grave represents a mini-space that, despite its size, carries significant weight as a symbol of a larger conflict—World War II and its aftermath. These mini-spaces contribute to a macro-spatial network, marking Albania as a terrain burdened by past and present tensions, highlighting the contrast between the aggressor (Italy) and the victim (Albania). This spatial aspect also emphasizes the complex geopolitical relationship between these countries, where Albania is portrayed as an isolated and impoverished land, while Italy appears as a triumphant nation struggling with the loss of an army.

In the novel, rural space is depicted as hostile, contrasting with the foreign world. Albania's natural environment, with its harsh mountains and difficult roads, amplifies the general's psychosis of fear and alienation. Space becomes a metaphor for the tensions between the living and the dead, as well as for the ongoing battle between memory and oblivion. In accordance with Lotman's (1990) theory of the “mobile hero,” the general embodies a tragic figure who moves through foreign spaces, exploring places tied to a troubled past without fully understanding the terrain he traverses. This perception of

space, as suggested by Frank (1945), transforms from a physical dimension into a psychological one, where the terrain directly influences the emotional state of the characters. Space not only determines their actions but also creates a profound sense of absurdity and pessimism, reinforcing the central theme of the novel—the futility of the mission and the tensions between two contrasting worlds: Albania and Italy. In this way, space in *The General of the Dead Army* becomes a living narrative element that interacts with the characters and their actions, revealing the novel's internal contrasts and influencing the reader's perception of the characters' psychological state and historical experience.

The Hero and Space: Skanderbeg as a “Mobile Hero”

In *The Castle*, the relationship between characters and space is inseparable, where each character interacts with and is influenced by their environment. This interaction helps us understand the symbolic function of the characters, who often represent grand ideas such as wisdom, creative power, and national resistance. Space, like the characters, is not merely a physical backdrop but an active element that shapes and reflects their fates.

In *The Castle*, space is far more than just a geographical boundary separating the two camps—the Albanian defenders isolated in the fortress and the Ottoman camp sprawling across the plains below. The fortress, built atop mountainous terrain, and the towering mountains surrounding it, serve as Skanderbeg's base with his army. This space carries a deep metaphorical and symbolic purpose, representing a stronghold of defense and national resistance. Albanian space in the novel becomes a symbolic place embodying the spirit of resistance against invaders, while Skanderbeg reinforces this symbolism through his distance and mystery. The fortress is not merely a physical structure but a symbol of protection and endurance, embodied by Skanderbeg himself. According to Jurij Lotman, this space reflects the clash between two worlds: “This” – an internal, enclosed, and protective space, “That” – an external, open, and threatening space (Lotman, 1984, p. 161).

Mateo Mandalà argues that this spatial division represents a collision between the concrete historical world and the mythical realm, deepening the tension between reality and legend in Kadare's work (Mandalà, 2009, pp. 169-170).

Skanderbeg, the national hero, has a unique connection with Albanian space. Though his physical presence is limited in the novel, his impact is deeply felt through the symbolism he embodies.

Skanderbeg is the only hero in the novel capable of moving between two worlds, making him a “mobile hero” in Lotman's terms. He moves not only across geographic spaces but also through narrative spaces, acquiring a dual dimension: both as a historical figure linked to real events and as a mythical figure symbolizing the spirit of Albanian contemporaneity that must be revived (Mandalà, 2009, p. 173). On the other hand, Tursun Pasha, the

Ottoman commander assigned to conquer the fortress, embarks on a mission as perilous as it is futile, with a tragic fate foreshadowed from the very beginning of the novel. The fortress before him looms as a dark and ominous structure, with an unusual layout and towers positioned in an eerie manner (Kadare, 1976, p. 6). The ominous signs for Pasha are clear: his anxiety before the imposing fortress, his yearning to return to Anatolia, and the sound of rain beating like a drum. Unlike Skanderbeg, Pasha cannot transcend space and is confined to the Turkish camp. He is the only one who catches sight of Skanderbeg and tries to confront him, yet in the end, he moves from life to death, toward sacrifice, in stark contrast to Skanderbeg, who moves from death to life.

The blind poet is another symbolic figure, disconnected from the physical world due to his blindness, yet capable of accessing a deeper spiritual dimension. The space around him reflects his inner state, serving as an expression of wisdom gained through suffering. This mythical blindness functions as a way to emphasize the perception of the unseen, where physical space loses significance and transforms into a spiritual realm (Barthes, 2016, p. 26). On the other hand, the architect directly interacts with physical space, constructing and destroying monumental structures. He represents the human ability to shape material reality, with the construction of Constantinople and the threat of its destruction serving as examples of his influence. The architect embodies the power to manipulate space, reflecting his control over time and historical events. In this context, he parallels the Trojan Horse myth, “where manipulating space leads to significant historical and political consequences” (Lotman, 1990, pp. 149-150).

The end in *The Castle*, space is far more than just a backdrop for events—it is an active force that shapes the actions and destinies of the characters. Skanderbeg, the Turkish Pasha, the blind poet, and the architect are all closely connected to the space around them, creating a deep narrative where the clashes between the individual, history, and national symbolism intertwine. As Umberto Eco suggests with his concept of double encoding, Kadare interweaves myth with historical reality, “offering a multi-layered interpretation for the reader” (Eco, 1984, pp. 19-21). This approach allows Kadare to construct a complex allegory, where space serves as both a battlefield and a symbolic reflection of national struggle. Allegory, “particularly symbolism, must be understood as one of the primary sources of modern literature in general” (Selimi, 2022, p. 13).

Final Thoughts

Analyzing *The Castle* and *The General of the Dead Army* reveals the powerful impact that Ismail Kadare achieves through the fusion of myth, history, and symbolism in his works. In both novels, the characters are not

merely individual figures—they serve as conduits of deep ideas and collective fate, reflecting not only Albanian history but also universal themes.

In *The Castle*, characters such as the blind poet and the architect are not simply professionals, but representatives of human potential for experience and creation. The blind poet, for instance, symbolizes knowledge and wisdom, acquired through suffering and sacrifice. The architect embodies the dual power of creation and destruction, linking him to the myth of constructing and manipulating space and time. Meanwhile, Skanderbeg is depicted as a mythical hero, moving between physical and symbolic realms, more of a presence than an active agent. This limited depiction of Skanderbeg reinforces his symbolism as a national protector, influencing events through the power of myth and history.

In *The General of the Dead Army*, the Albanian landscape plays a crucial role, acting as both a psychological and physical challenge for the general and the priest. These characters are foreigners in a land saturated with memories of past war, confronting a people deeply rooted in their history and culture. The conflict between two worlds—Albanian and Italian—is conveyed through the hostile environment, where terrain and weather become symbols of resistance and survival. In this novel, space is not just a geographical location but a psychological sphere, influencing the state of the characters and reinforcing a sense of absurdity and pessimism.

Both works illustrate Kadare's mastery in crafting characters that transcend the boundaries of reality to represent broader and universal ideas. His generals, poets, and heroes move through spaces that shape and challenge them, creating a narrative where history and myth merge to construct a deeper vision of human existence and national destiny. Through these novels, Kadare offers a new understanding of the relationship between the individual and space, time, and history, placing his characters in a continuous dialogue with the world around them. This interweaving of myth, space, and reality in *The Castle* and *The General of the Dead Army* strengthens the universal themes of Kadare's work, positioning him as one of the most significant voices in contemporary Albanian and international literature.

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