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## LITERATURE AND TRAUMA UNDER A TOTALITARIAN REGIME: THE ISMAIL KADARÉ CASE<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The present article is an attempt to bring together psychoanalysis, genre theory and the study of the literary forms developed under the socialist regime and in traumatic conditions in Albania, where the authors repressed by the regime had no chance to publish until after its collapse. It does so by delving into the works of Ismail Kadaré, who – although not directly repressed – wrote his works under a totalitarian regime which, after importing uncritically socialist realism from the Soviet Union, did not experience the ‘thaw’ experienced by other countries in the socialist camp.

KEYWORDS: trauma, socialist realism, totalitarianism, thaw, dissent

### “HALF-BLINDED BY TRAUMA”

The clarification of Kadaré’s human and intellectual truth about his relationship with power would require several decades of elaboration: from 1965, when the Albanian state first imposed control over his work, to the new edition, published by Onufri, of the work dedicated to his artistic “atelier”, *Ftesë në studio* (“Invitation to the Writer’s Studio”). This work was written in 1990 and published just days

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<sup>1</sup> The research presented in this article was conducted within the framework of the PRIN 2022 PNRR project “Literature of Socialist Trauma: Mapping and Researching the Lost Page of European Literature (LOST)”, ID: P2022Z45X8, CUP: B53D23029360001, Principal Investigator: Andrea Gullotta (University of Palermo). The project was funded by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities, and Research (MIUR) under the 2022 PRIN PNRR Call for Proposals, Directorial Decree No. 1409 of September 14, 2022.



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before the author fled communist Albania. It is a collection of outspoken poetic essays, which has not yet been translated into Italian.

In Chapter VIII, Kadaré returns with great lucidity to his literary beginnings, between the late 1950s and the mid-1960s, and to the creative “epiphanies” of that unrepeatable period, to confess the “trauma” caused by the rejection (the “cold shower”) received by his novel *Përbindëshi* (“The Monster”, 1965) and to analyse the effects of this “trauma” on a group of later works – *Dimri i vetmisë së madhe* (“The Winter of Great Solitude”, 1971), *Concert në fund të dimrit* (“The Concert”, 1981) and *Pallati i ëndrrave* (“The Palace of Dreams”, 1982) – which we will expand upon later.

In relation to these works Kadaré states:

[...] they are layered in my conscience in two states: the way they are, i.e. the way they look today, and the way they should have been. Their ghosts are always right in front of my eyes, in the late afternoon, in the gloomy studio. But I stand before them utterly serene, because I know that what was asked of them was impossible. The tens of thousands of cells needed to draw them out looking the way I would have liked were missing, killed off during the clash. Not only that, the winches and everything else were damaged and I myself was like this, half-blinded by trauma (Kadaré 2012b: 148–149).

These are works that Kadaré wrote in the years immediately following the publication of his novel *Dasma* (“The Wedding”, 1967), perceived by the author as a surrender to the schematics of socialist realism, a premature literary “death”. And they are works in which the signs of “trauma”, while visible, are accompanied by traces of alternative expressive paths to the schematics of socialist realism. Ultimately, they are works that were composed in a sort of limbo, between the young Kadaré’s feeling of “death” and his zest for life.

Critics have dealt with them mainly in terms of whether or not to attribute them to the so-called literature of dissidence, as confirmed by Sh. Sinani in *Letërsia në totalitarizëm dhe “Dossier K”* (“Literature in totalitarianism and “Dossier K”), relating to M. Zeqo, V. Zhiti, A. Vinca and P. Morgan (Sinani Sh 2011: 86).

In this article, we are going to outline their interpretation in the light of the signs of “trauma” and the expressive elements which predict recovery from it.

First, however, it would seem appropriate to make a few more references to the role that Kadaré played, right from the start, before the “trauma”, in the expressive renewal of Albanian poetry, and the ways in which the “trauma” was effectively suffered.

## BEFORE THE “TRAUMA”

After graduating from Tirana University with a degree in Literature (1958), Kadaré continued his post-graduate studies in Moscow, at the Gorky Institute. He would, however, abandon prematurely his studies (in 1961), due to the tense relations between the Soviet Union and communist Albania.

By the time he published his first novel, *The General of the Dead Army* (1963), he was already an established writer, thanks to the books of poems published from 1957 onwards (*Frymëzimet djaloshare*, *Ëndërrimet*, *Shekulli im*, *Përse mendohen këto male* male; in 1961 a collection of poems was published in Russian by the published Izdatel'stvo inostranoi literatury), which had enthused the new generations.

In *Ftesë në studio* (“Invitation to the Writer’s Studio”), Kadaré recalls the state of grace of those years, characterised by perpetual creative “epiphanies”: “the mind was in a constant state of fibrillation, searching for original structures” (Kadaré 2012b: 76–77), “illuminating epiphanies [...] occurred more frequently than ever” (*ibidem*: 147), with “sudden Big-Bang moments like epileptic fits” (*ibidem*: 145).

Kadaré goes so far as to compare it to an extraterrestrial dimension, fertile with “new genres and forms” (*ibidem*: 146): “Everything was easy and possible, almost as if I found myself on the surface of another planet, where the force of gravity was different” (*ibidem*: 147).

In the volume VII of the *Opera Omnia* (Kadaré 2008) the Moscow poetic texts were published for the first time. These texts, which were not present in the collections available then, give a good idea of the author’s sense of freedom upon his return from Moscow: *Stoli në kopshtin e Institutit Gorki* (“The bench in the garden of the Gorky institute”); *Baltiku i ftohtë* (“The Baltic cold”); *Në gjirin e Rigës* (“In the Bosom of Riga”); *Kthimi në Moskë* (“Return to Moscow”); *Rrugëve të Moskës* (“In the streets of Moscow”); *Llora* (“Llora”).

Cultivating metaphors that were unusual in Albanian literary tradition, Kadaré’s poetry expressed a different lyricism, shot through with love, meditative, different from the model forged by *Zhdanovism*. Its new rhythm was symptomatic of a new quality of life and of a radical transformation of the world: the Mayakovskian concept according to which “poetry is the supreme engineer that also gives form to life” was implemented in the search for a completely renewed structure of poetic language, for a new point of view on the word (Suta 2011a).

So it is no coincidence that Kadaré drew on the poetic legacy of Migjeni, the only avant-garde poet in the Albanian literary tradition (Suta 2011a, 2011b, 2012), as in the case of this poetic text: *Rrugës në pjekshi/ Migjenin, Majakovskin apo Uollt Uitmanë/ “salut” u thoni/ Dhe ktheni me ta nga një gotë birra//* “If along the way you should meet/ Migjeni, Mayakovsky, Walt Whitman/ greet them with a ‘salut’/ and drink together a glass of beer” (*Përcjellja e vargjeve/ “The accompaniment of the verses”*).

THE “TRAUMA”: FROM THE “COLD SHOWER” OF  
PËRBINDËSHI (“THE MONSTER”, 1965) TO THE LITERARY  
“DEATH” OF *DASMA* (“THE WEDDING”, 1967)

The works of Kadaré we feature in this article were composed under a totalitarian regime which, by adopting the method of socialist realism imported from the Soviet Union without any filter, as explained by Ali Xhiku in his extensive study on literary Albania between 1945 and 1961 (Xhiku 2011),<sup>2</sup> did not experience the moments of “thaw” experienced by other countries in the socialist field (*ibidem*).<sup>3</sup>

The novel *Përbindëshi*, written at the end of 1964 and published in the first issue of the 1965 magazine “Nëntori”, is an artistically avant-garde work which, as the author himself claims in *Ftesë në studio* (“Invitation to the Writer’s studio”), accomplishes an unusual, relative idea of time:

[...] with *Përbindëshi*, everything was different. Although at the time I was unaware of Aristotle’s thoughts on time, I had more or less realised his strange conception in this short novel. The characters in the novel were in a chronological position that was simultaneously before and after the event (the fall of Troy). Sometimes they stayed the same, identical, while Troy was transformed before their eyes, changing shape until it took on the appearance of a modern city, with its cafés and airports, etc., at other times it was the city that stayed the same, as if frozen, while the characters were transformed, going through various phases, until they appeared with the facial features of today’s people (Kadaré 2012b: 79).

In 1991, in his conversation with his French editor E. Fayè, Kadaré calls this novel an “anti-Iliad, because the wooden horse never enters Troy”, a work that embodies the idea of “eternal metamorphosis and time becomes absolutely relative” (Kadaré 1991: 32–33).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In his study *Një pasqyrë e Shqipërisë letrare 1945–1961*, Ali Xhiku indicates 1947 as the year in which the term “realizëm socialist” (“socialist realism”) was used in Albania for the first time, translating it from Russian, to define an “other literature” (p. 37), and he also describes the semantic change of the terms “romanticism” and “universal classical literature”, in relation to a “standardised” literature, which clearly demonstrates “the damage caused to the artistic quality of the works” (p. 44).

<sup>3</sup> “[...] the establishment of socialist realism was a smooth process for Albania, which immediately acquiesced to being controlled by the dictatorship of the proletariat”. Indeed, the case of Albania is emblematic of the blows inflicted by *Zhdanovism* on literature, through control, party directives, orientations, guidelines and special measures. And this differed to what happened to Russian and Yugoslav literature, which managed to avoid *Zhdanovism* as an expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat”.

<sup>4</sup> “Le monstre fut quelque chose d’absolument nouveau. Il est paru en 1965, soit après *Le général*, dans une revue littéraire. A l’époque, j’avais décidé que tout ce que j’écrirais devrait chaque fois avoir une nouvelle forme. Pour *Le monstre*, l’innovation résidait dans la manière d’utiliser le temps romanesque. Le texte traite de l’histoire de la ville de Troie, mais d’une histoire éternelle. Un cheval de bois se trouve devant une cité. Tantôt la ville antique est transportée à une époque plus proche de la nôtre, et elle change aux yeux du cheval; tantôt la ville reste figée et c’est le cheval qui change: il devient un

In the absence of archival materials (Sinani 2011: 86),<sup>5</sup> Helena Kadaré's memoirs, *Kohë e pamjaftueshme* ("Insufficient Time"), are invaluable, recounting the few days of life enjoyed by the novel before it was slammed as "decadent" by a Party-affiliated writer (Kapllan Ressuli), immediately extinguishing the enthusiasm of the young author and his intellectual friends, such as film director Pirro Mani, who wanted to make a film version of the novel, considering it to be "a real... Freudian work!" (Kadaré H. 2011: 145):

The final blow to the work *Përbindëshi* was dealt at a meeting about prose. The writer Kapllan Ressuli, a Kosovar emigrant, called it decadent, a bearer of bourgeois-revisionist influence in Albania. He went even further, claiming that the Yugoslav revisionists' interest in I. Kadaré's work was not accidental (*ibidem*: 146).

The slamming of the novel, published a few months after its release in the literary weekly "Drita" (14 August 1966), entitled *Probleme ideore të tregimit tonë. Konvencioni dhe realiteti* ("Ideological problems of the story. Convention and Reality"), and reproduced in the *Enciklopedi Kadareane* ("Encyclopaedia Kadaréana") by Kuçuku-Shkreta (Kuçuku-Shkreta 2009: 484–486), clearly shows the all-ideological approach of its author, who points to the "distorted reality of the work", which "has lost its connection with reality":

The Trojan horse! Synonymous with betrayal, infidelity, diversion, regression... Antipode of the horse as convention is the city, symbol of life, work, tranquillity, silence, creativity... And the work poses the alternative: "Either the city or the horse, there is nothing in between here". Working with these two conventions, as a form of expression of ideas and thought, as a form of embodiment of a specific reality, the author simultaneously creates a hybrid, a duplication, acting with real heroes who, in most cases, step outside the framework of the convention (Kuçukuku-Shkreta 2009: 486).

Note the use of the word "convention" to indicate the construct of the literary work as the result of a compromise between artifice and the outside world, not a plan

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fourgon, un camion... Tantôt les habitants de la ville deviennent des hommes d'une époque plus avancée, tantôt ce sont les occupants du ventre du cheval. Cela change sans cesse, presque à chaque chapitre, et l'on remonte ainsi jusqu'à nos jours. C'est donc une anti-Illiade, car le cheval de bois n'entre jamais dans Troie. J'ai utilisé en cela la conception du temps d'Aristote, très poétique bien qu'absurde. Il dit que nous sommes placés devant le temps comme devant des roues dentées tournant à des vitesses différentes. Aussi nous trouvons-nous parfois devant un événement mais au bout d'un certain temps nous pouvons nous retrouver après. Ainsi Aristote dit: les événements de Troie me sont antérieurs, mais ils pourraient avoir lieu maintenant ou plus tard; c'est un hasard si l'événement nous est antérieur. Tout dépend des engrenages du temps. J'ai utilisé semblable théorie pour le roman *Le monstre sans savoir* alors qu'Aristote en avait parlé; je ne l'ai découvert que par la suite. (arfois donc, le cheval de bois et la ville de Troie se trouvent à des époques différentes; c'est une éternelle métamorphose et le temps devient absolument relatif."

<sup>5</sup> Shaban Sinani, clarifies that the editor's remarks, 27 pages of material, have not been found in the archives (cf. 123).

of elaboration deployed in the space of artistic verisimilitude, governed solely by the laws of “artistic reality”, but a field of intervention circumscribed by the need for the work to approach the “social reality” and fulfil its “educational role”:

[...] What is the first result of a double conventional confrontation like this? I think the main result is that the right political ideas expressed on a general level, in the fantastical horse-city relationship, are not transformed into artistic ideas, and not simply for reasons of form, but because of their detachment from reality, because the conventions have lost their foundations, which were supposed to be based on our social reality; the convention itself, or rather, such a degree of convention in the work, undermines the boundaries allowed by the cognitive and educational role of the artistic work, it remains up in the air, detached from reality” (*ibidem*: 484–485).

In *Ftesë në studio* (“Invitation to the Writer’s studio”), Kadaré remembers the devastating impact that the reception of *The Monster* had on his sensitivity as a young writer:

After the cold reception of *The Monster*, and especially as 1966–67 approached, everything changed quickly. Planet Earth reminded me that I lived on it and whether I wanted to or not, I had to obey its laws. Day by day something lost its sensitivity, growing numb inside me, something became blinded and lost, with no way back. The magma that blazed all around began to be less fiery, the divine lights on the objects faded, the codes and combinations no longer matched. The feelings of desert and death were so dominant, that one day, while scribbling on a piece of paper, I noticed that under my first and last name, I. K., I had written in brackets: “1936–1967.” I was thirty-one years old and felt as if I had really died for art (Kadaré 2012b: 147–148).

The description continues with elements that refer to the pathological dimension of “trauma”: the fatigue of thinking, the perception of irreparable damage, such as the death of thousands of brain cells, nicely convey the idea of a condition that Kadaré himself declares he was only able to talk about for the first time in this essay:

[...] I felt that my epiphanies were no longer what they used to be. Something was missing in them: the signs, while visible, lacked the light they had had before, and the sparkling thought bore signs of weariness. Even when I managed to handle a new mixture, the right form did not occur naturally, and the new technique, like an ill-fitting suit, killed the work, forcing me to abandon it. And so I found myself for a long time enduring a torture that I neither wanted nor was able to narrate to anyone, witnessed for the first time here in this book. After multiple trials, I realised that something irreparable had happened. In my brain, at least tens of thousands of cells had apparently died forever, the very cells that had been the front line of fervour and freedom. Like an invalid, I would now work without them, and this, however painful it seemed to me at first, like any misfortune you get used to, later seemed bearable. I consoled myself with the thought that the only thing that had been sacrificed in the terrible clash was the vanguard of my brain, and that I had other armies of cells, similar, unlike other writers who knew nothing of that fervour (*ibidem*: 148).

The description finally arrives at the feeling of death: “I still remember the atmosphere of emptiness, the secret trial, the autopsy room, the morgue. [...] For a long time I thought I was done with literature” (Kadaré 2012b: 82).

Two years after *The Monster*, Kadaré published the novel *Dasma* (“The Wedding”, 1967), in a cultural context which the author later recalls like this:

It was 1967. The anti-liberal campaign in the field of culture was at its paroxysm. The influence of the Chinese Cultural Revolution was grim. Conformism in literature, euphoria, pseudo-revolutionary ecstasy were at their peak (*ibidem*: 80).

In Kadaré’s opinion, the work bears witness to a moment of surrender to the schematism of socialist realism, certifying that feeling of (literary) “death” referred to earlier:

[...] Even today, I am still not sure what happened in the depths of my conscience, but like a sick person clinging to life again, after being hopelessly ill, one noon, with an uncertain hand, with the weight of a dirge in my soul, I began to write again. I no doubt felt the joy of rebirth, but it was numb, like the joy of a man who dreams of the face of his beloved, dead. So, that unforgettable year, I wrote and published the novel *Dasma*. At first vaguely, then more and more clearly, I began to realise that this novel, which I thought was bringing me back to life, was really the beginning of my death. It was proof that I had bowed to the pressure of schematism. Without really understanding it myself, I had withdrawn and been defeated (*ibidem*).

Even though *Dasma* has been translated into other languages and has been successful outside Albania, Kadaré never changed his opinion.

### AFTER THE “TRAUMA”: WORKS WRITTEN IN LIMBO BETWEEN LITERARY “DEATH” AND LIFE

In the years following the publication of *Dasma*, Kadaré composed works that he himself declared to be characterised by a “dual state”, by “two kinds of blood pressure”:

[...] a novel, in which some of the chapters reflect their image mirrored in others, like images in a hall of mirrors. A work with two types of blood pressure. A work, in which the microbe or infection of the early chapters can lead to fever, hallucinations and gibberish in the later chapters. A novel or drama, with a paralysed part in the middle. A novel with gaps, like icons “consumed by woodworm”, with shut-downs, with trenches. A novel with a dream or fright, like fright while sleeping, in between. A novel with a “bordone” (the monotonous voice that accompanies Albanian polyphonic songs). A work in which the events beat rhythmically in two different directions, like the movement of blood between arteries and veins. A pregnant novella, a river novel (*ibidem*: 149–150).

Wanting to establish methodological references for the analysis of these novels, in addition to the author's definition of them as organisms characterised by two types of "blood pressure", it must be remembered that Kadaré speaks of a rhythmic "movement" of the events "in two different directions", suggesting a complex, non-linear key to the interpretation of the works in question, which – in our opinion – encourages the investigation of the shadowy areas of the narration in search of that aspect that they should have had – if Kadaré's creativity had been free and intact when they were written – but did not, due to the "trauma" caused by the totalitarian experience.

Starting from the Hjelmslevian division between the levels of content and expression, we can recognise the "trauma" as being the element that generated a movement of the two levels in opposite directions, functional to the creation, even in a context of constriction, of a space for art and, consequently, freedom.

In this conception of art as freedom, Cervantes represented a model for Kadaré.

In a fragment of *Ftesë në studio* ("Invitation to the Writer's studio"), Kadaré talks about the fact that he had always wanted to write a version of *Don Quixote* that would bear witness to the conditions of the author, "under censorship, disfigured by fear and conformism" (Kadaré 2012b: 160).<sup>6</sup> Being influenced by Quixote, Kadaré wrote in the "in-between, murky zone, created by the madness that lies neither here nor in the hereafter" (Kadaré 2009b: 533), amplifying "a doubling of it" in the "mind" (*ibidem*), "in the infinite space that madness has created in his brain", a journey that belongs to the "secret chronicle of humanity" (*ibidem*: 535).

From the works examined specifically in *Ftesë në studio* ("Invitation to the Writer's studio"), we chose *Dimri i vetmisë së madhe* ("The Winter of Great Solitude", 1971), *Concert në fund të dimrit* ("The Concert", 1981) and *Pallati i ëndrrave* ("The Palace of Dreams", 1982), works in which the writer's personal "trauma" is reflected in the collective "trauma" of the Albanian people.

We think we should add the autobiographical novel *Muzgu i perëndive të stepës* ("Twilight of the Eastern Gods"), which took a long time to write (from 1962, the year Kadaré left Moscow, to 1978), and which describes the long process of coming to terms with and overcoming the "trauma", in order to regain possession of a writing style that does not yield to the schemes of socialist realism.

As seen in *Ftesë në studio* ("Invitation to the Writer's studio") Kadaré suggests certain thematic-narrative units for each novel: *Dimri* ("The Winter") is the "novel with the bordone"; *Concert* ("The Concert") is the "negative – novel"; *Pallati* ("The Palace of Dreams") is the "novel with a dream in the middle"; *Muzgu ...* ("Twilight...") is the "dream turned into book".

<sup>6</sup> "My *Don Quixote* would be this version of the work, not written in freedom, but on a ship, imprisoned. (It was believed that the pirates had changed their minds at the last minute and said: try writing the book you were talking about, let's see what you come up with and then we'll decide what to do with you, whether or not to let you go). But my variant would be a *Don Quixote* written under threat, under censorship, disfigured by fear and conformism".

The thematic units are repeated within the narrative syntax of the work and “interact” for the purpose of a change of “meaning” (direction), which creates a figurative relationship (on a metaphorical level) in which the meaning turns out to be antiphrastic to that expected by the method of socialist realism.

We have subjected each of these works to a “rereading” each time the thematic unit suggested by Kadaré makes its appearance and relates (Greimas A. J. 1986: 54)<sup>7</sup> with the various internal narrative cores.

The conditioning of “trauma” acts, as already mentioned, both in terms of content and in terms of expression.

- In terms of content, the narrative cores conditioned by “trauma” convey:
  - a. the individual fate of the writer struggling with the mechanisms of control. In all the works, this destiny is ascribable to a subject (identifiable with the writer’s *inner self*) the psyche of which is battered by the anguish exercised by these mechanisms;
  - b. the collective fate of Albania, in its totalitarian conformation.
- In terms of expression, the effect of “trauma” are the figurative nuclei, which have a clearly metalinguistic value, in which the reader is invited to follow the path of the subject in search:
  - a. of form, in the guise of shadow (the one containing the inhibitory mechanism of “trauma” and control, on one hand, and the effort required to overcome it, on the other);
  - b. of universal formal models, supplied by global tradition and Albanian oral tradition, the only alternative for the salvation of art, in the conditions of genius “blinded” by trauma.

## “THE WINTER OF GREAT SOLITUDE”

*Dimri i vetmisë së madhe* (“The Winter of Great Solitude”, 1972),<sup>8</sup> was supposed to be the second volume of a triptych, *Koha e grindje* (“The Time of Discord”), a contemporary saga about Communist Albania’s conflicts with former allies (first

<sup>7</sup> This is a “theatricalised” narrative pattern, in which manifest actantial roles can be highlighted, as we are taught by Greimas: “The narrative dialogue is covered by a relatively dense network of actantial roles manifested, sometimes jointly and sometimes disjointedly, by actors who can already be considered elements of the dialogue”.

<sup>8</sup> In his introductory note in 2011 (Kadaré 2011 (c): 5), Kadaré reconstructs the date of publication: “The novel *Dimri i vetmisë së madhe* was written in 1971 to be published a year later. [...] The current version is mainly a return to its first edition. Some artistic reworking, which the author deemed to be valid, was preserved from the second edition. There are no changes of a political nature”. For a study of the publishing history of the work see Dashi B. (2010, 2018). For the most accurate critical edition of the novel’s manuscripts see Mandala M. (2016).

In relation to the variants of *Dimri i vetmisë së madhe*, the debate on Kadaré’s dissidence or dissent with respect to the schematism of socialist realism has reached the harshest tones. As anticipated in the introductory paragraph of this essay, this is not the topic of the present article.

the Yugoslavs, then the Soviets and finally the Chinese). But the project remained unfinished.

After harsh criticism, *Dimri i vetmisë së madhe* (“The Winter of Great Solitude”) (Kadaré 2012a), was republished only after review by the author, under the amended title *Dimri i madh* (“The Great Winter”), in 1978, and was followed by *Koncert në fund të Dimrit* (“The Concert”, 1981), which we will discuss later.

The two works, which according to the expectations of the official critics were supposed to celebrate the path taken in foreign policy by the Albanian Communist Party and its leader Enver Hoxha, can instead be read as a great saga about the first internal rifts within the international socialist camp.

*Dimri i vetmisë së madhe* is inspired by the meeting of eighty-one communist parties in Moscow in November 1960, at which the Albanian delegation led by Enver Hoxha formalised Albania’s break with the Soviet Union and its subsequent exit (after eight years) from the Warsaw Pact.

The figure of the dictator Hoxha is portrayed very darkly, and this may have been the main reason why the novel was “most harshly criticised” (Kadaré 2011b: 15–18).

The figurative cores of “trauma” are traversed by the “bordone”, the “prolonged, monotonous voice, the popular murmur that accompanies the events” (Kadaré 2012b: 149), which is characteristic of the oral tradition of the cultural circle of southern Albania and is the key element of the polyphonic performance (Çabej 2020: 82),<sup>9</sup> in which the solo voice alternates with the choir.

In *Autobiografia e popullit në vargje* (“The People’s Autobiography in Verse”), Kadaré explains that, through this “bordone” (which is seen as being “older” even than the Greek chorus), the people grant the soloist the “right to sing”:

Southern polyphonic song cannot exist if it is not surrounded by singing. This collective murmuring is more important than the song itself. It is the element in which the song floats. If the bordone is interrupted, then the song must be interrupted. It is through the bordone that the people grant the right to sing. Its interruption takes that right away (Kadaré 2002: 6).

Kadaré’s artistic operation fits into this antinomian relationship between the collective and solo voice, creating narrative units which, in terms of content, inform us of the “trauma” of the author and of Albanian society.

Kadaré’s “trauma” is represented in the character of an aspiring writer (Skënder Bermeta), grappling with the composition of a novel with a bordone (“murmur”):

<sup>9</sup> “Both groups of melodies share the alternation of the lead vocalist with the chorus. Of the lead voice’s part, in the song Tosca we say “ia hedh”, “they pass it on”; in the song Lab “ia merr”, “they intone”. Of the second voice’s part, in the song Tosca we say “ia pret”, “they answer”, in the song Lab “ia kthen”, “they turn it around”. Of the choir’s part of the song, we say “bën iso” (“they sing bordone”) (isos gr.), in Labëria “ia mbush”, “they charge”.”

All the time, Skënder Bermeta was thinking about the novel: the introduction of the parts, the passages and, above all, the endless murmuring, which, like the murmuring of the sea, accompanied the story (Kadaré 2011a: 302).

The anxiety that accompanies the young writer's decision to send the work to the editorial office of the magazine "Nëntori", an anxiety dictated by the knowledge that he had written a gloomy novel, in which "sixty-five percent of the characters die" (Kadaré 2012a: 299), and the words used to describe the fear of receiving negative criticism ("not wanting to be considered a prophet of doom and, even worse, decadent" for having written, "as a beginner", a work tainted by "ideological errors": Kadaré I. 2011a: 299), seem to be a projection of the trauma experienced by Kadaré when *Përbindëshi* ("The Monster") was slammed.

In a relationship of "interaction" and complementarity with the above-mentioned fragment, there is another fragment, the figurative nature of which lends itself to a clearly metalinguistic function of traumatised writing, particularly through its reference to "dead, dry threads, into which events, countries and winters had been squeezed".

The second fragment in question is part of an apparently innocent reflection of an ex-partisan who, beneath the "monotonous humming of the fridge", thinks about writing and cannot understand how "those same lines and letters could contain such different things":

A monotonous humming came from the fridge. The book containing memories of the war was sitting on top of it. Lately, when she was alone in the mornings, she would put on her old glasses, open the book and read a few pages here and there. She struggled to read, her eyes hurt and there were many words she did not understand. It took her a long time to reconcile herself with the idea that days gone by, people who had been murdered, pieces of war, streets in the rain and voices might appear in the lines of a book. She could not understand how those same lines and letters could contain such different things. She found the lines of the book similar to the woollen threads she had spun all her life. Before it was spun, wool too was worked into soft flock, like mist, and as her fingers spun it, the mist became thinner and thinner, until it was completely solid and turned into a fine thread. It was as if the wool flock was alive. That mist contained lots of murmurs, thoughts, words and desperation, as well as the human soul of the person spinning it. While the thin thread was dead. It had to be the same with the lines of the book. Dead, dry threads into which events, countries, winters had been squeezed (Kadaré 2011a: 72–73).

The "lines of the book [...] similar to woollen threads", the "mist of the wool flock, thinner and thinner, until it becomes completely solid", the "many murmurs, thoughts, words, desperation as well as the human soul of the person spinning it", are figures that indicate, outside the linear unfolding of the work, in the shadowy area that accommodates the space constructed by the "murmur", writing as an alternative to the lack of freedom.

But, as mentioned earlier, alongside Kadaré's "trauma" there is also that of Albanian society, split by class conflict.

The collective “trauma” is, first and foremost, that of the fallen classes, the dispossessed, to which the elderly Nurihan, who lives in the basement of her own building and is forced to hear only “terrible things”, “gloomy things”, belongs (Kadaré 2011a: 35–36).

But the ruling social class is also traumatised. A symptom of this is the murmur of the street sweeper Rremë Huta, as he sweeps the streets clean of leftover newspapers full of Party propaganda, cursing Khrushchev (Kadaré 2011a: 439), despite the fact that, until recently, he had been pointed out to the people as a father figure, to whom the socialist camp had entrusted the care of little Albania.

Kadaré declared that he had begun “the frightening chronicle of the rift of communism”, taking his cue for the title *Dimri i vetmisë së madhe* (“The Winter of Great Solitude”) from Shakespeare’s Richard III, “Now is the winter of our discontent” (Kadaré 2012b: 16).

In an antique shop, beneath the threatening murmur of a shadow seeking his uniform, to repurchase it, Kadaré describes a row of old clothes. A cloak (*zhgun*), a tribute to Shakespeare, recalls the murmur of the army of victims sacrificed in the struggle for power, a universal archetype to which the Albanian model is added as one of the darkest:

A priest’s robe has been requested, he said to himself, and they know nothing. Instinct suggested that this was not the same thing as in 1947, 1953 or 1956. This must be something big. The signal had been given. Tomorrow or the day after, they would come and line up, one behind the other, like never before, to look for their old clothes. My cloak with the distinctive markings... my ceremonial staff... then the threatening murmurs: these are not our clothes, they don’t fit properly, you’ve swapped them around. Come to your senses, said Rrok Simonjaku, these are your clothes, but you’ve all gotten thinner, the revolution has reduced you to skin and bones, how can men’s old clothes fit... their shadows. Rrok Simonjak kept looking at the road (Kadaré 2011a: 208).

The form of the Albanian ballads (the ballad of Constantine, the ballad of Sacrifice, etc.), a universal model of narrative container in which the strength of human conscience shines intact, thanks to the “secret, mysterious events”, as an alternative to those traumatic mechanisms that reduce the work to a “body” without a “soul” (“He had only his body, the human roar, which enveloped him like a choir, but his soul was always missing”), is closely linked and complementary to the universal model of crimes:

All the time, Skënder Bermena was thinking about the novel: the introduction of the parts, the passages and, above all, the endless murmuring, which, like the murmuring of the sea, accompanied the story. He recalled the beginning of the work, again and again, and strangely, as much as it pleased him, it also frightened him. You masters, who are building the castle of Rozafa, put down your tools for a while; Constantine of the ballad, who have risen from the grave, bring your horse to a standstill, pause for a moment; you dancers, paranympths,

caravaners, sublime roar of the people, help me begin the song. [...] The story continued to be secret, mysterious, everyone deciphering it according to their own way of thinking. He had only his body, the human roar, which enveloped him like a choir, but his soul was always missing (Kadaré 2011a: 302–303).

The murmuring of the people allows the writing self to feel “multiple and poured into the collective”, in the same way that “the collective pours itself into the individual to its maximum extent”, allowing man to overcome “his own limits”, (Kadaré 2002: 20).

The opposition of the collective voice (“murmur”) vs. the solo voice holds the meaning suggested by the non-linear reading of the work.

The picture drawn by the collective voice (the *bordone*) is opposed to the portrait of Enver Hoxha (solo voice) after the Moscow meeting: “The Politburo meetings were gloomy. All that shone in the government meetings were the chandeliers” (Kadaré 2011a: 333).

But it is not only Hoxha’s image that is gloomy: the project of communist Albania is, as Kadaré suggests in the “Note” to the latest edition of the novel, part of the “global picture of world communism”, one of ‘the darkest ever portrayed in literature’ (Kadaré 2011b: 17).

In the same ‘Note’, Kadaré considers *Dimri i vetmisë së madhe* a novel that helped him arrive at “the intimate conviction that, even in prison, he would be able to use the laws and tools of eternal time”, “the only time of literature” (*ibidem*: 16–17).

## “THE CONCERT”

Written between 1980 and 1981 and originally entitled *Koncert në fund të stinës* (“Concert at the end of the season”), the work was published only in 1988, after the death of Enver Hoxha, shortly before the fall of the regime, under the new title *Koncert në fund të dimrit* (“Concert at the end of winter”), translated into English as *The Concert*.

Dedicated to the breakdown in relations between Albania and China, the novel was reported in 1983, in a “Secret Report” of the Writers’ League as an “anti-socialist work”, making “Albanian and world communism the subject of satire” (“accompanying note in the back of the frontispiece” of the last edition), (Kadaré 2011c: v).

As the key to interpreting the novel, Kadaré provides the metaphor of the X-ray, which runs right through it, speaking of a “negative novel”, of an X-ray:

I was able to render something of the X-ray in two or three chapters of *The Concert*, in which the events, like a patient attending a doctor’s appointment, carry their own X-ray with them. It goes without saying that its interpretation is always very difficult (Kadaré 2012b: 149).

The metaphor “of the sketch of an X-ray”, the negative of a film, becomes the clue that guides the interpretation in terms of writing, from the “double state”, represented by the image “of the mute shadow of bones against the darkness”:

“The X-ray of the foot of a Chinese man goes from one state to another in an aeroplane – he said –. Quite macabre, isn’t it?”

Inadvertently, she raises her eyes to the sky. The man walking beside her seemed for a moment to be linked to that dark celestial mass, through which she expected to see the shadow of a foot. Out of her consciousness, the sketch of an X-ray of her father, taken two years ago, with that mute shadow of bones against the darkness (*ibidem*: 78–79).

The first level of interpretation, the one relating to the “trauma” of Kadaré the writer, is linked to the narrative based on the metaphor of the film negative. The character of Viktor Hila, the man who stepped on the foot of a Chinese citizen, is described as being in a state of anguish as he awaits the outcome of the X-ray commissioned by the Chinese government to clarify the incident: this state of mind is meant to represent the climate that prevailed in Albania after the breakdown in relations with China.

Kadaré knows he has written something “out of the ordinary” because he has reproduced the film negative (which requires interpretation) of a regime similar to the “monstrous Chinese” regime, with which the common Euro-Asian mythology of the communist system was shared: “[...] The man who had to deal with that ghost foot had to be out of the ordinary” (Kadaré 2011c: 78).

The second level of interpretation, the one concerning the collective “trauma”, refers to the grotesque implications of the pretexts with which the Albanian government attempted to conceal its choice of foreign policy. Viktor Hila’s gesture, which had initially seemed to be a mistake, turned out in fact to be deliberate, just like the break with China, which Enver Hoxha propagated as the result of a translator’s error:

“For the past week I have been waking up before dawn”. “Why?” Viktor Hila lowers his voice again. “Because of a lousy Chinaman. A saboteur. [...] Believe me, I’m going mad. As soon as I wake up, instead of thinking about something normal, I say to myself: has the damn X-ray arrived then? And why is he so frightened about an X-ray of his foot?” Asks Silva, looking at him full of malice. “If you really stepped on it unintentionally, the damage can’t be that bad, so the X-ray...” Viktor Hila smiled without looking up. “But that’s exactly it, not only did I not step on it unintentionally, I absolutely devastated his foot” – he said (*ibidem*: 54).

Fayè, Kadaré’s French editor, considers *Koncert në fund të dimrit* (“The Concert”) to be a “‘complete novel’, a polyphonic composition, traversed by the appearance of the media, spy satellites, observers, etc., all of which have the same function as the chorus and the coryphaeus in ancient tragedy” (Fayè 2011: VIII). He also emphasises the tribute paid by Kadaré in this novel not only to Shakespeare, but also to Cervantes (Fayè 2011: II).

As in other works, the spaces dedicated to the author's declarations on writing and the relationship with freedom, is presented with reference to the ballads, an indication of the limbo in which the work must be placed and an indication of its double form, as in the passage in which the "symmetry of two sisters" of the ballads, a single entity, dead and alive, is narrated:

[...] they had been a single entity, as in the ancient ballads, and continued to be one, only now they were like a twig inserted halfway into the water, one part here, above the water, the other there, swaying below the surface of the water, no longer alive. Even though they remembered them together, like before, the symmetry was ruined (Kadaré 2011c: 145).

### "THE PALACE OF DREAMS"

As we can read from the accompanying note on the back of the frontispiece, Kadaré published the first two chapters of *Nënpunësi i pallatit të ëndrrave* ("The Clerk of the Palace of Dreams") in the collection *Emblema e dikurshme* ("The Emblem of the Past", 1977).

He included the unabridged version of the novel in the 1981 edition of the same collection, hoping not to attract attention.

However, in February 1982, the work was examined by a specially convened plenum of the Writers' League, which criticised it harshly "for allusions against the regime". After the fall of the regime, the novel was published as a stand-alone volume with the title *Pallati i ëndrrave* ("Palace of Dreams") (Kadaré 2022).

The thematic unity of the "novel with an awakening in the middle", proposed by Kadaré in *Ftesë në studio* ("Invitation to the Writer's Studio"), is conceptually opposed to that of the "novel with a dream in the middle" ("romanit me ëndërr në mes"): "here there is an awakening, a calming, in the midst of a night full of nightmares" (Kadaré 2012b: 151).

The main character, Mark-Alem – a Catholic and Muslim name – works as a clerk at the Tabir-Saraj, the Palace of Dreams, an institution established by the Ottoman Empire to sift through the dreams of all its subjects.

The palace is a kind of Dantesque Inferno, with the same "nightmares", "palpitations of conscience" and "lack of hope" – Kadaré himself explains in *Ftesë në studio* ("Invitation to the Writer's Studio") – which tormented "our sleep and our dreams" when the novel was conceived (Kadaré 2012b: 64).

The idea of portraying it, despite the possible consequences, is described as a real temptation:

I knew it would be hard, if not impossible for me, to create an original design after the great architects, the anonymous Egyptians, Homer, St Augustine, Dante, who had existed until then. So, when I started writing *The Clerk of the Palace of Dreams*, or when I was thinking about the

middle chapter, with a combined sense of joy and fear, I saw that I was unintentionally fulfilling the old dream: the inferno was surfacing in the whole structure of the novel. The more I thought about it, the clearer it became. It was a sort of realm of death, where, while we did not find ourselves, we found sleep and our dreams. All the elements of the inferno of the ancient Greeks were there: darkness, the sad subsidence of everything, the toughening of the times, their regression, their standing still. There were the nightmares, the palpitations of conscience, the lack of hope. But above all there was an administrative hierarchy, the sectors which examined and interpreted dreams, which made the *Palace of Dreams* resemble the future structure of Dante's inferno. Then the dream messengers (every inferno had its own messengers) and the archive with the endless files in which everything was recorded made it resemble all the infernal buildings (Kadaré 2012b: 64–65).

The metaphor of “reawakening” works like a narrative nucleus with an opposing meaning: the break from dreams, the reawakening, coincides with an awareness by the character of his irreparable condition of death: “At last, he had arrived in front of the “Haxhilelekët” café, where he usually came when ... he was ... in a flash his brain avoids the words “alive”, then “awake”” (Kadaré 2022: 119).

The reawakening, with everything it involves – life, colours, feelings – is experienced by the main character as a day of utter “disappointment”, which, unlike Dante's inferno, as Kadaré recalls again in *Ftesë në studio* (“Invitation to the Writer's Studio”), “had neither salvation nor consolation, not even happiness”:

In the midst of this shadowy realm, I had thought of an interruption, a day of rest for the clerk of the *Palace of Dreams*, when, for the first time, he takes time off to go out once more into everyday life, which he has abandoned due to this gloomy job. Without being a purgatory, and being even less a paradise, this glimpse of space above the darkness reminded him of it anyway. But unlike Dante's inferno, it had neither salvation nor consolation, not even happiness. In fact, it was a day of utter disappointment. To the clerk, the world seemed pale, so he decided not to go out into the city. Without intending to, I had drawn a sketch of hell, which both resembled and differed from the previous sketches. But, after the initial joy at this, I also had the happy thought of being afraid and paying attention. I paid attention in order to avoid that, attracted by this, I would not artificially accentuate the resemblance to hell (Kadaré 2012b: 64–65).

The “trauma” of Kadaré the writer is also evident within the pages of this novel: for example, in the scene that features Mark-Alem wandering between one gallery and another (because the word “endje”, to wander, also means “to weave”), looking for the exit to the Interpretation (which, like all institutions and allegories of hell, is written with a capital I):

“If this wandering continues, I will go out of my mind”, he said to himself. Stand still, perhaps someone would come to show him the way, or turn back, towards the Interpretation, to exit with the others? The latter thought seemed more reasonable to him, but in the end, he was overcome by doubt: what if he couldn't find the Interpretation? The devil only knew if these pale lanterns led in the right direction (Kadaré 2022: 106).

To quote Freud, “in traumatic neurosis” the function of the dream is lost: “here dreams regularly result in a development of anguish” (Freud S. 1969: 555).

There is no way out of the gloomy and nebulous environment of the Palace, populated by its employees, for whom reawakening takes on the meaning of death, echoed by the symbol of the Apocalypse, the day when “dreams will come out of the prison of sleep”.

The (also Albanian) collective dimension of the “dark conscience”, of death, cultivated and archived in *Tabir Saraj*, is reflected in the “adventures and crimes of the state”, becoming co-responsible for events:

“I, on the other hand, say it is the unique structure of our state through which the dark part of the conscience of all citizens makes direct contact with the state” – said Kurt. He looked at everyone carefully, one by one, as if to see whether his words had come from them – “The endless crowds really do not rule”, he continued, “but have an instrument, through which they influence all the affairs, adventures and crimes of the state, and that is the *Tabir Saraj*”. “Do you mean that they are all responsible for what happens, that they are to blame?” The cousin asked. – “Yes”. Kurt replied – “In a way, yes” – he added confidently (Kadaré 2022: 61–62).

The dream locked in the palace spills over into the work, becoming a “complete dream”: the *Tabir Saraj* became a *Tabir total*, conveying the distinguishing mark of the novel’s elaboration.

On his day off, Mark becomes aware that his country, Albania, has stayed “there” (*atje*), in the empire of death:

While Albania... like a distant, cold constellation, turned grey again, avoiding him, and he wondered if he would ever be able to understand what lay inside. And if he had understood it, whether he would have had the right to speak about it... And he was left wondering, as the pen weighed heavier and heavier in his hand, until it touched the paper and on it, instead of the word ‘Albania’, he wrote “there” (Kadaré 2022: 204–205).

The universality of the reading about the cyclical mechanism of the birth of dictatorships which rest on spilled blood occurs, as in other works, through a tribute to Shakespeare:

Today’s states, including even the Ottoman empire, were, according to the postman of nightmares, no more than bloody ancient buildings (structures), buried by time and then resurrected as ghosts (Kadaré 2022: 103).

*Pallati* describes the ambiguous zone between life and death in which the sense of movement of the “double state” work is guided, when he describes the voice of the rhapsode singing the ballad of sacrifice, combined with its words. This takes on qualities “beyond human perception”:

[...] with such a voice, from which one perceived that the human throat and the throat of the mountain had agreed to settle their differences. After that, they had come to an agreement with other voices that were farther and farther apart, arriving at their lament. Then, apart from that, the voice combined with the words was such, that it seemed it could be used by both the living and the dead, so the agreement was also made with them, indeed, the latter seemed to be the most successful (Kadaré 2022: 164).

The character's day off, which should be a moment of ascent into life from the empire of death of the "saraj", "the need for awareness to rebel against the cursed work" ("Punë e mallkuar, tha me vete Mark- Alemi, i habitur edhe vetë nga ky çast rebelimi i ndërgjegjes së tij": (Kadaré 2022: 49), continues to be the dream of a "celestial vault", "raised", which "could not be reanimated and could not be reanimated":

The dream was of a pupil at a religious school in the capital: two men had found an old rainbow, on the ground. They had stood him up with much effort, they had dusted it clean, one of them had begun to paint it again with colours, but the celestial vault would not come to life and would not come to life (Kadaré 2022: 80–81).

Obliged to work "bent over the dossier, passing from one person's sleep to another person's sleep", Mark-Alem understands that he is part of a mechanism in which, by entering the cruel climate of the world, the dream loses the power of man's connection with the "past" (Kadaré 2022: 93–94): the idea of a literature lacking this dream dimension is the cause of the trauma of Kadaré the writer.

### “TWILIGHT OF THE EASTERN GODS”

*Muzgu i perëndive të stepës* ("Twilight of the Eastern Gods") is an autobiographical novel that Kadaré began writing in 1962, the year after he left Moscow, and published in 1978.

In *Ftesë në studio* ("Invitation to the Writer's Studio"), Kadaré describes it as a work that "finds its beginning in a dream" and which could have been subtitled: "a dream turned into book" (Kadaré 2012b: 30).

The dream of returning to the Gorky Institute, where he had studied ten years earlier, embodies the experience of "trauma", which Kadaré elaborates with an oblique writing style of "betrayal", which makes the novel a path towards the salvation provided by creative consciousness.

Kadaré introduces references to this chronologically subsequent experience into the Muscovite setting.

An example is offered by his description of a kind of aphasia triggered by the "upset" and intimate "hostility" of his own being:

I was devoid of feeling, in fact, I was speechless. I had only a few linguistic particles, the odd “hmm”, “so”, “right”, “therefore”, etc. I remembered that every time I had experienced such an upset, the words disappeared, the way the flora disappears from hard ground, and I was left with only the particles, as if they were the only things capable of withstanding the sudden hostility of the climate within me (Kadaré 1978: 283).

This puts the Moscow of the 1960s on the same level as the Albania of the 1970s. Kadaré’s fate is common to that of writers from the socialist camp, “traumatised” by the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Returning to his years at the Gorky Institute, Kadaré describes the conformism engendered by the homologation already enforced by the state’s control mechanism, when he recalls the “criticism” received by his verse “Formless is the sky, like an idiot’s brain”:

All around were the greyish Russian izbas and, above them, a monotonous, grey sky, about which, some time before, I had written a verse in endecasyllabic, “pa tru është qielli, si tru idioti”, which, translated into Russian, sounded even gloomier: безформленное небо как мозг тупици, унылый дождь заливаet улицы (“bezformlenoe nebo kak mozg tupitsi, unylyi dozhd’ zalivaet ulitsy”) and for which I had been harshly criticised at the poetry seminar (Kadaré 1978: 249).

The mediocre dormitory of the Gorky Institute is akin to a terrible “inferno” (*ibidem*: 253–254): a “seven-storey Sahara” (*ibidem*: 215), representing the state of artistic ruin of the aspiring young writers who populate each floor of the symbolic seven.

The “sterile sobbing” of the narrator’s inner self, running distraught from floor to floor to reach his room, and the impossibility of satisfying the “desire to weep” (*ibidem*: 263–265), are allegories of the artistic-intellectual drought of socialist realism.

The mediocrity of Russian literary production (“some of today’s books are so boring, full of broad-shouldered heroes who smile all the time”, *ibidem*: 204), which Kadaré also denounces through the figure of the writer Fadeev (whose head is filled with nothing but “alcohol and emptiness”, *ibidem*: 189), is the cause of the spiritual crisis felt everywhere (*ibidem*: 246).

Moscow, like Tirana, is a difficult environment for writers: not only Kadaré, but also the Greek poet Anteos, his friend, confesses to “being bad with his nerves”, while discussing the infamous principle of “typical characters in typical circumstances”:

Typical characters in typical circumstances – I replied, smiling – as said by Engels, right? – Yes. True, in typical circumstances. Hmm... in typical circumstances – he repeated, moving his head. Right, right (*ibidem*: 243–265).

The violence of the dictatorship of the proletariat was extolled in the “typical” character of socialist realism: this is a literary-theoretical category which arrived in communist Albania via Russia, in the style of the great empires (Suta 2022: 519).

The works read between the floors of the dormitory of the Gorky Institute reflect the same expressive flatness as the works read in Tirana:

[...] they spoke of internments, prisons and crimes, of the monstrous differences between the wages of the workers, “masters of the country”, and those of the high-ranking party members and the government leaders, “servants of the people”. A hundred in one, this is the title of my play, someone said to his comrade (*ibidem*: 261).

*Ibret tashé* (“learn from horror”), the theme of the novel “The Niche of Shame”, which Kadaré talks about with Anteos, provokes reflection on the climate of terror and fear:

He told me about the severed heads of the Greek partisans, which their enemies kept in the fridge for the people to see, and I told him what I had heard about the severed heads of the Albanian rebel pashas, who displayed them in a stone niche in Istanbul, to provoke terror of separatism. – This is in the style of big, aggressive States – he said. Plant terror to spread panic. Terrorise, punish without mercy. What was the name of that niche, again? – *Ibret tashé*, learn from horror (Kadaré 1978: 245).

The analogy with the Russian environment produced by the mechanism of state control is represented by the episode that describes the collective pillory suffered by Boris Pasternak after receiving the Nobel Prize for *Doctor Zhivago*, “a poisonous gift from the international bourgeoisie” (Kadaré 1978: 272).

The voice that attacks the author of the novel from the radio is described by Kadaré as an integral part of the collective violence: “naked, severe, inhuman”.

The narrating self’s encounter with Pasternak’s work, in the “left side of the dormitory”, in the grip of the “murmur” of “boring nights”, the result of the “search for a space in which to let yourself go”, marks the climax of the narration because it condenses all the difficulties of the writer-dictatorship relationship

*Doctor Zhivago* becomes a training novel for Kadaré: the page on which Pasternak evokes the “snow”, blown “everywhere by the wind”, ever “thicker and heavier”, precedes the description of the psychological state of the writing self, still affected by “trauma”, far from the centre of desire (of the dream), caught in “greyish” plateaus where there is no consciousness:

I was tired and lay down at last in bed, but, although I tried hard to fall asleep, I could only reach the peripheries of sleep, some grey, colourless, soundless plateaus, while the picturesque centre of sleep and dreams was still far away (Kadaré 1978: 228).

Reviewing Pasternak’s story and the workings of the state control mechanism becomes a model against which to mirror his own story, as evidenced by the writing, in 2018 of *Kur sunduesit grinden. Rreth misterit të telefonimit Stalin-Pasternak* (“When the Rulers quarrel. On the mystery of the Stalin-Pasternak Phone Call”)

(“A Dictator Calls”). Taking advantage of the freedom granted by the rift within the communist camp, Kadaré makes some very brave statements in his conditions:

With a lucidity as sharp as the tip of a knife, I felt just what a terrible thing this gigantic machine that had been set in motion and was now running at full speed was. To be criticised, I thought, was to fall into its maelstrom. The mythological Slavic head passed through my mind, bellowing its jaws, horrible in the middle of the steppe. Soviet propaganda had begun with it. [...] Falling between the gears of this frightening mechanism. (Kadaré 1978: 279).

More markedly than in the other novels, the trace of “trauma” in this work is accompanied by the conscious effort to elaborate a universal model of art that can ride, as in the old ballad, both the dead and the living, coping with the “blows” that can come from unpredictable “depths”:

Then it occurred to me how every evening of human life can be threatened and how man can never foresee the wasted depths from which the attack can come. But it is no accident, I said to myself, that the shadow of the ex-king appeared right here, in the midst of my inner turmoil, in this space of empty dunes, through which they ran in silence, astride ballad horses, two by two, dead and alive (Kadaré 1978: 205).

The image of the pallor that illuminates the white skeletons of the horses, age-old fossils that carry literature between life and death, brings us back to Dante’s metaphor of the “weak light” of dawn, a symbol of “tragic awareness”, which Kadaré finds in the “besa” (Kadare I. 2009c: 72–73).

The dichotomy *besa/pabesia* (ability to keep one’s word/betrayal) at the basis of the novel’s structure overcomes the first level of interpretation, linked to the loyalty/disloyalty of the respective countries (Russia and Albania) to Marxism: it is the writing that has taken on the essence of betrayal from the ballad.

Kadaré himself, in a moment of “pabesia” (betrayal), is preparing to betray the method of socialist realism when he writes: “I had felt its aura for months [...] And I had long been looking for an excuse to separate myself from it for some time”.

The novel ends with the realisation that the time has come to speak about the relationship between writing and dictatorship, having elaborated it on a conscious level:

If I had not told Lida Sniegina in Rizhskii Vokzal in Moscow, evidently my conscience had not elaborated it to the right degree to express it in perfect form. Whereas now I felt that the time had come to talk about it (Kadaré 1978: 191).

The aura referred to by Kadaré can easily be traced back to his present in Tirana. The theatrical closure, in which the writer who returns in silence to his world of the dead, reinforces this interpretation.

In *Ftesë në studio* (“Invitation to the Writer’s Studio”), the path to overcoming “trauma” is described as a path of writing innervated by thought, rather than by

creative “epiphanies”. Kadaré, in particular, says he realised that writing *Twilight of the Eastern Gods* no longer brought “joy”, but was produced by a brain that was “awake, filled, like a military tank, with logic, memories and the mastery of writing”:

*Twilight of the Eastern Gods* originates from a dream, or, more accurately, from my effort to alter or correct a dream. I did not know that there could be anything on planet earth that could provoke an irresistible nostalgia, the kind that seems to turn your ribs into cartilage, making them sky-blue, turning them into sunbeams like those in film studio symbols. Moscow’s “Tverskoi” Boulevard, adjacent to “Pushkin” Square. Former home of Herzen and Gorky... Why the building of the Institute and not the home in Butyrskii Khutor? I had this same dream for years. I could see “Pushkin” Square, but could never find “Tverskoi” Boulevard. There was always a lot of digging, mud, interruption. I would try to approach from another direction, from Arbat, but couldn’t. I would be somewhere near the Central Post Office. I would walk along “Gorky” Street, but I was always blocked by squares that had been dug up. Tired of the impossible, I thought that to free myself from this nightmare I should write something for the “Gorky” Institute. In other words, I would have succeeded in reaching the places I had failed to reach at night (when my sleeping brain had failed to let me in), during the day, when my brain was awake, fully equipped inside, like a military tank of logic, memory and writing technique (Kadaré 2012b: 29–30).

The elaboration of “trauma” through the writing of this novel takes place in the form of the repair of damage (Kadaré mentions the “correction of a dream”).

The irreparable dimension of “trauma” is described by the psychological state that Kadaré feels when describing the realisation of the form of this novel, a brutal victory, similar to the conquest of a woman “who has made you suffer for ages, and you finally make her yours with violence” (*ibidem*).

## CONCLUSION: FOR A POETICS OF “TRAUMA”, BETWEEN UNIVERSAL MODELS AND AESTHETIC INNOVATION

The attempt to trace a path that holds together psychoanalysis and theory of genres and of the literary forms produced by socialist realism, under conditions of “trauma”, is accompanied by the difficulty that arises from the fact that, in Albania, writers condemned by the regime did not publish anything until it collapsed.

Although Kadaré did not serve time in prison, which is why he has often been accused of ambiguity in his dealings with power, his talent possesses the insight needed to portray the effects of dictatorship on literature and to elaborate forms of dissent through writing. The works that accomplish this function do so in a zone of “shadow”, of “death”.

The realisation that writing is an organism that “lives” in this zone is a common element in all the novels examined, with the recurrence of allegorical forms that graft

into the cracks and ruins of the narrative structure, “spectres” of salvation, as we are taught by Benjamin (Benjamin 1963: 202).

The imperative of representing the “mechanism of control over people’s consciences, invented 4000 years ago”, as Kadaré writes in the essay “Art as a Sin” (Kadaré 2009a: 412), makes his art comparable to that of other great authors.

He draws on Shakespeare, Dante and Cervantes to enlighten the universal mechanisms of the relationship between writing and freedom from an original point of view.

The constant of the Albanian ballads, like that of the *besa*, lends itself, on an isotopic level, to be used in all the works produced during this phase, as a proposal for reading the models grafted within the inert organism of the novel of socialist realism.

The time of the *besa*, like the sacred time of pagan festivals in which the souls of the dead return among the living in a sacred ritual (Altimari, Nanci 2008), becomes the relative mechanism of time.

The actantial function of the *besa*, as a switch of conscience in an opposite direction (that of “betrayal”) with respect to its linear meaning (of “loyalty to the word given”), helps us understand why, in Kadaré’s work, the reversal of the perspective plane on which the realm of the dead (in which a memory of salvation is preserved) and the realm of the living (in which all hope of salvation now seems lost) are placed. It expresses the author’s rebellion against the dogmatism of socialist realism.

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