

## RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE GREEK MYTHS IN THE POETRY OF ISMAIL KADARE

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### **Recontextualization of the greek myths in the poetry of Ismail Kadare**

**Abstract.** Mythology and literature are closely related and this has been proven by numerous literary works throughout history. This study focuses on the influence of Greek myths in the poetry of Ismail Kadare, one of the most well-known and valued Albanian authors in the world. Although this author is better known for his prose works, we should not forget the fact that his poetry also carries some important elements that should not be ignored and forgotten. In this study, some characteristics and elements of the Greek myths that are manifested in the verses of Kadare will be analyzed; it will be shown how these myths are recontextualized and adapted in the verse of the writer from Gjirokastra. The ancient Greek myths are so dense and manifested in the literature that there is no way they are not present in the creation of Ismail Kadare. In this study, this study, some Greek myths will be found and decoded, these make up the basis of some poems of Kadare and are incorporated, making the poetry of this author even richer in terms of ideo-thematic and artistic aspects.

**Keywords:** Greek mythology, Albanian literature, poetry, Ismail Kadare.

### **Recontextualizarea miturilor grecești în poezia lui Ismail Kadare**

**Rezumat.** Mitologia și literatura sunt strâns legate și acest lucru a fost dovedit de numeroase lucrări literare de-a lungul istoriei. Acest studiu se concentrează asupra influenței miturilor grecești în poezia lui Ismail Kadare, unul dintre cei mai cunoscuți și valoroși autori albanezi din lume. Deși acest autor este mai cunoscut prin scrierile sale în proză, nu trebuie să uităm că poezia acestuia poartă, de asemenea, elemente importante care nu trebuie ignorate și uitate. În acest studiu vor fi analizate doar câteva caracteristici și elemente ale miturilor grecești care se manifestă în versurile lui Kadare cu privire la modul în care aceste mituri sunt recontextualizate și adaptate în versul scriitorului din Gjirokastra. Miturile grecești sunt atât de dense și se manifestă în literatură încât nu există nicio posibilitate să nu fie prezente în creația lui Ismail Kadare. În acest studiu vor fi găsite și decodificate unele mituri grecești care stau la baza unor poezii scrise de Kadare, făcând poezia acestui autor și mai bogată din punct de vedere ideo-tematic și artistic.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** mitologie greacă, literatură albaneză, poezie, Ismail Kadare.

### On mythology

Mythology is the field that deals with the study of myths. Historically, myths have served man to explain various natural phenomena, cosmogony, the nature of the universe, and other phenomena related to man and the meaning of the world in general. “Mythos” from ancient Greek means “narrative”. Aristotle used this term in his book *Poetics* to define the fable of tragedy, as one of the six main elements of Greek tragedy. In ancient Greece, mythos meant the narrative aspect, while logos referred to the logical side of a discourse. “Myth is an explanation for a *creation*; it tells how something was created, how it began to be. The myth tells us what is truly possible, what has fully revealed itself. Actors of myths are Supernatural Beings. They are known, first of all, for what they did in the transcendental times of the *beginning*, simply the *supernaturalness* of their works” [4, p. 13-14]. “Myth, defined simply, is a fictitious story or half-truth, but it goes much deeper than that. Scholars of mythology have struggled to pinpoint an exact definition that encompasses all of the attributes contained within a myth” [3, p. 2]. Over the years and centuries, myth has been a field from which different authors have taken different elements to recontextualize them in their works. The myth continues to be a very important domain for various literary works around the world.

### Ismail Kadare and his writings

Ismail Kadare is one of the most well-known writers and one of the most successful authors of Albanian literature, winner of several important literary prizes and nominated many times for the Nobel Prize for literature. Kadare has a wide range of literary writings, such as novels, novellas, short stories, poems, studies, etc. He is an author who, in his literary career has addressed a large thematic sphere and is a name with great influence in foreign literature as well. His work has been studied and continues to be studied a lot by foreign researchers, giving great importance to different aspects of his writings. Kadare is an author who knows Greek antiquity well, and his literary creation is closely related to this field.

Ismail Kadare’s books have been translated into many languages of the world such as English, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Swedish, Portuguese, Romanian, Polish, Arabic, Chinese, and many others languages. Many of Kadare’s books have been translated into Romanian, and thanks to the translator Marius Dobrescu, Kadare has enjoyed high popularity in the Romanian language, where his books are well received by Romanian readers. Some of the books translated into Romanian are: *Dimineți la Café Rostand*, *Podul cu trei arce*, *Mesagerii ploii*, *Amurgul zeilor stepei*, *Generalul armatei moarte*, *Spiritus*, *Accidentul*, *Viața, jocul și*



*moartea lui Lul Mazrek, Palatul Viselor, Piramida, Dosarul H, Cetatea...*

### **Myth in Kadare's poetry**

The myth is present in almost all of Kadare's literary writings, and his work in many cases cannot be understood without the myth itself. In addition to his prose, where he raises major issues with a theme from Albanian history where he deals with various aspects of the Albanian people, he combines other universal issues thus incorporating myth into his work. In his prose, the myth can be found in works such as *The Ghost Rider*, *The General of the Dead Army*, *Cold Flowers of March*, *The Bridge with Three Arches*, *The Boring Season in Olymp*, etc. But the myth is also present in his poetry. The myth of the Trojan horse is well known from ancient Greece and has become an universal topic found in the works of many authors of various kinds of literature. Kadare takes this topic and writes the poem "Trojan Horse". The myth about the Trojan horse, as is known, refers to the Trojan War, in which the Greeks, using various tricks, used the horse to triumph in the war against the Trojans. According to mythol-

ogy, the Greeks build a large wooden horse and hide several men inside it. The Trojans bring the horse out into their city as a sign of triumph, but the Greeks retreat from the horse and open the gates for the rest of the army, and thus the Greeks enter and destroy the city of Troy, ending the war. What does Kadare do in his poem?

It brings back the Greek myth in a slightly different dimension, but without changing the basic reference of the myth. The author presents the Trojan Horse as a large construction with a defensive force against the enemy, but at the same time creates connections with today by placing the Trojan horse between times.

In the stillness of the night listen,  
don't you hear a muffled knock in the distance?  
from the depths of ancient myths to our modern cities  
A horse is knocking.  
It's the Trojan Horse.

.....  
Approaching.  
With its wooden hollows it looks from afar to our time,  
Houses, radio towers, antennas  
And he still walks.  
Walk towards us [1, p. 83].





Kadare universalizes the myth of the Trojan horse by restoring it to the contemporary context, but it has its source in antiquity and “orders” others to listen for the arrival of a giant horse, which symbolizes the protection and hidden strength of a powerful military army. Kadare gives the attributes of the horse, comparing it with the phenomena that happened at the same time, but in the center was the horse, which ruled over the entire population and space. The verses warn of his entry into Troy, so Kadare’s verses are among the most beautiful of his poems in terms of the elaboration of the Greek myth in general.

### Other myths

“If the myth is at the base, at the origin, that narrates, explains, and exposes a world (with anonymous authors), then as a cultural and literary heritage it is the presentation of written and authorial literature. All the evidence so far says that Greek mythology and Jewish mythology are at the foundations of what is called Western literature and culture. From here, myths like events or heroes will develop into literary

themes and literary characters through the Homeric heritage or Greek tragedians in later and modern literature”. [5, p. 17]

Another poem by Kadare that is directly related to Greek mythology is the Laocöon poem. This long poem deals with the myth of Laocöon, who is supposed to be a Trojan priest, who was against the wooden horse of the Greeks, which he speared, and as punishment for this, the gods drowned him and his sons with a side of snakes. So Laocöon constitutes an analogical line with the Trojan Horse as it has the same source, the Trojan war, and the events involved in this war that we find in the work of Homer. “Whilst Laocöon with his two sons stood prepared to perform the sacrifice, two enormous serpents suddenly rose out of the sea and made straight for the altar. They entwined themselves first around the tender limbs of the helpless youths, and then encircled their father who rushed to their assistance, and thus all three were destroyed in sight of the horrified multitude. The Trojans naturally interpreted the fate of Laocöon and his sons to be a punishment sent by Zeus for his sacrilege against the wooden horse and

were now fully convinced that it must be consecrated to the gods". [2, p. 250] The presence of the Greek myth reinforces the thematic part, but also the artistic plan of Ismail Kadare's poetry. The author builds this poem through a very special perspective as he speaks from Laocoon's voice, from his imaginary self, namely through his sculpture that is in various museums around the world. The author's desire is not to change the myth as a phenomenon, but as a function to re-functionalize it, to elaborate more deeply the truth about the Greek myth, a myth which in the eyes of the world is still seen with a deep indifference because according to Kadare's poetry, the lack of real information about Laocoon poses the risk of the disappearance of his sculpture in the museums of the world, which he neatly reflects under the self of the dead Laocoon.

You see me getting choked by snakes  
in the Louvre museum, in Madrid, in New York  
in front of your eyes and cameras of tourists  
I have been suffering for hundreds of years  
because I can't speak [1, p. 86].

Through the myth, Kadare creates a special poem placing in the center the universal symbol of Laocoon seeking justice, the truth about the events of the Trojan war. Kadare in one of the verses says:

That was the end of the horse controversy,  
You know what happened with Troy after that.  
Three thousand years in a row,  
From museum to museum,  
I, the porter of marbles, carry the lie [1, p. 89].

Kadare treats the Greek myth in his poems with other motifs. For example, in the poem "You were for me" (Ti ishe për mua), he creates analogies with the ancient myth, being built based on the figure of comparison. In this poem, Kadare, relying on the myth of the Trojan War, builds a comparative discourse between a female character, whom she idealizes, characterizing her as powerful as the invincible Troy of ancient times. The Greek myth acquires a new context within the verses, serving as a

point of reference, but also a connecting bridge between the subject and the object of the poem, but also the connection between the human resistance and a place that does not collapse easily from a war, which in this case is the case of Troy. This resistance and this stability acquire a universal dimension in the re-contextuality of a hard-to-reach love, and the lyrical subject represents the lover, who in the case of victory for that much-sought-after love, surpasses the joy of the Greeks in the Trojan War.

Only in dreams, ah, in dreams  
I hugged your thick hair  
I felt more joy when I conquered you  
Then all the Greeks when Troy fell [1, p. 176].

What characterizes this poem is the emphasis and the special role of the personal pronoun "You", since it carries the symbolism of what the subject is referring to. Including the title, the poet uses this preposition a total of four times within the poem, emphasizing what the poem has as its purpose, as the author himself says in the title, "You were for me", but also in the first sentence of the poem,

You were as invincible as Troy for me [1, p. 176].

While in the poem "Yearn" (Mall), one of the author's most popular poems, he includes a quote from Heraclitus, one of the famous heroes of Greek mythology, the son of Zeus.

In this poem, Kadare touches lightly on the Greek myth of Heraclitus intending to keep alive the dynamics of his poetry, revealing the lack which itself brings longing. Here it is noticed that it is enough for Kadare to insert a short quote in a verse to create the analogy of today with the past, with the old myth and the thoughts of mythical personalities. In addition to the Greek myth, Kadare also deals with the Egyptian myth of the Pyramid of Cheops and the pharaohs. Undoubtedly, the pharaoh is directly related to the Pyramid and the beliefs of the pharaohs who were considered deities in ancient times and their burial went through various rituals. In the poem, the myth is not dealt

with extensively but is touched upon through a light perspective. It is known that the Pyramid of Cheops is at the same time the oldest of the seven wonders of the world and that resists time, keeping the myth around it alive.

Ismail Kadare's poetry, like all his literary creation, testifies to the continued dominance of myth and, as a result, makes his poetry even more special in terms of ideo-thematic and artistic aspects.

### Conclusion

With this study, some close connections between Greek myths and Ismail Kadare's poetry have been found and revealed. Some of the key myths that have been analyzed in this study are the myth of the Trojan horse and the myth of Laocoon. After reflecting on some general theoretical aspects of mythology and some information on the writer's profile, the study was based on the identification of these greek myths

with certain poems from Ismail Kadare's poetry, myths without which these poems would not have the same value that they have. It can be seen that Greek myths have a great influence on the poetry of this author and that this is only an indicator and proof that myth has a great function in the literature of this writer and in his prose, which is also the favorite literary genre of the Albanian author.

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