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Ismail Kadare's literary strategies. Legends, architectures, and a parallel universe in *The Three-Arched Bridge* (1978)

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Introduction

Located on the Balkan Peninsula on the edge of Southeastern Europe, Albania (Albanian: *Shqipëria*) is not only a small country in geographical terms, but also economically a minor power. Albanian (Albanian: *shqip*) is likewise a minor and isolated language, as it is not related to any other Indo-European tongue, constituting its own independent branch within this linguistic family.

This country produced Ismail Kadare (born 1936), often counted among the most famous living writers globally and nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature multiple times as well as awarded some of the most prestigious literary awards.²

As Eric Faye points out (1993: 38), Kadare's literary works are generally classified into four groups:³ (A) autobiographical, (B) allegorical works

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² For example, he was awarded the inaugural Man Booker International Prize in 2005, the Prince of Asturias Award of Arts in 2009, the Jerusalem Prize in 2015, and the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 2020.

³ *Chronicle in Stone* (1971) is emblematic of Group A, Kadare's autobiographical works. Group B consists of political themes related to living under a socialist dictatorship, including *The Monster* (1965), *The Winter of Great Solitude* (1973), *November of a Capital* (1975), *The Concert* (1988), *Agamemnon's Daughter* (2003), and *The Successor* (2003). In these works, Kadare describes his country's relationship with the Soviet Union or China

about totalitarianism, (C) historical novels based on modern history, and (D) other miscellaneous works. Above all, it is his historical novels which have been labeled unique and controversial; in addition to works drawing on Greek tragedies and epics from classical antiquity, he has written about legends which originate not only from his homeland, but from the Balkans in a wider sense, and even from Asia and Egypt. Among these narratives, it is *The Three-Arched Bridge* that the writer himself regards as his essential work (Faye 1995: 98).

This paper aims to identify the skillful strategies employed by Kadare in his novels which have helped to elevate the status of his works from Albania's own literature to notable works of literature globally. This paper examines how such strategies can be seen as both unique and universal when reading Kadare's writing as international literature, focusing on his major work of a historical novel: *Ura me tri harqe* (*The Three-Arched Bridge*).

This paper is organized as follows. First, it explores the way in which legends are adopted and developed in the novel by comparing the latter to two other works which refer to a legend about immurement in terms of human sacrifice. Second, it is analyzed how architecture and larger structures function in the novel, and it is suggested that they indeed play an important role in Kadare's literary world. Third, an explanation of a parallel universe or *another Albania* is provided to demonstrate how Kadare's literary spatial-temporal universe is formed.

Above all the function of architecture has been less discussed than myths, legends, and parallel universes; in this paper, particular attention is paid to this issue by invoking the concept of *literary architecture*.

The outline of *The Three-Arched Bridge*

The Three-Arched Bridge takes the form of a chronicle written by an Albanian Catholic monk, Gjon Oukshama, in 1377, when the Ottoman Empire first invaded Albania, ten years before the Battle of Kosovo. In a small principality on the Balkan Peninsula, in the late 14th century, various strange events occur surrounding the construction of a bridge over a large river known as *Ujana e Keqe*, or "Wicked Waters." These events were orchestrated

and Albania's situation during, and after, World War II. The following novels belong to Group C which encompasses historical themes: *The Siege* (1970), *The Three-Arched Bridge* (1978), *Broken April* (1980), *The Ghost Rider or Doruntine* (1980), *The Palace of Dreams* (1981), *The File on H.* (1989), *The Blinding Order* (1991), and *The Pyramid* (1992).

by the Ottoman Empire, but nobody noticed they were a series of “silent” Turkish invasions that consisted in not so much overt military aggression, as cultural aggression (in the case of which most people suspect nothing dangerous to be happening as they become manifest very slowly and gradually). While silently infiltrating the border, the invaders violate local communities’ languages, religions, and customs via considerable influx of foreigners and pagans. To begin with, bridge construction staff arrive along with their family members, and strangers appear as travelers, merchants, street performers, fortune tellers, beggars, wandering minstrels, and propagators of paganism.

One of the most startling events is that Murrash Zenebisha, a stonemason, is apparently willing to be immured inside one of the bridge’s piers to make a sacrifice to the angry waters. This event reminds people of ancient legend of human sacrifices and evokes strong sentiments of fear. Ironically, Zenebisha’s death helps promote the success of the construction. However, the closer the completion of the bridge is, the more anxiety people develop about the Turkish takeover: they now see many more foreigners in their home country than ever before and keep hearing strange foreign words being spoken.

Suddenly, the day arrives when people’s anxiety is finally realized. They see Ottoman troops coming to their land across the bridge. One of the seven Ottoman cavalrymen, disregarding the guards’ warning, attempts to cross the bridge. Following Zenebisha’s sacrifice, another bloodshed breaks out on the bridge. The Turkish threat is just around the corner. The monk Gjon assumes that he should keep a chronicle of the events in the principality as both a witness and a storyteller of the Turkish invasion, even if he might be killed like Zenebisha.

Strategy 1: Legends

In the novel a widely known legend from the Balkan region is introduced as a basic motif, and at the story’s climax, an ominous event reminiscent of the legend takes place. Legends of immurement in the form of human sacrifice are not necessarily unique and exist all over the world. There are numerous versions of these legends on the Balkan Peninsula that have been passed down from generation to generation; some of them were once sung by wandering minstrels, originating in ancient times. Besides *The*

Three-Arched Bridge, some works that are noteworthy examples of typical literary works from the region, carrying the motif of human immurement, include: *The Milk of Death* (*Le lait de la mort*, 1938)⁴ by Marguerite Yourcenar (1903–1987) and *The Bridge on the Drina* (*Na Drini ćuprija*, 1945) by Ivo Andrić (1892–1975).⁵

Although these three works adopt the same legend as their main motif, *The Three-Arched Bridge* is considerably different from the two other books in its methods of how the legend is treated. In *The Three-Arched Bridge*, the legend drives the development of the plot, while in the other two it remains a mere impressive motif.⁶ Kadare quotes the legend through the words of the monk Gjon, who narrates the following:

I began to tell him [the construction staff] the legend of the castle of Shkodra, just as I had heard it years ago from my mother. There were three brothers, all masons, who were building the walls, but their work was not going well, because what they built in the day was destroyed in the night. (...) A wise old man told them that the wall collapsed because it demanded a sacrifice. So, they decided to immure one of their wives in the foundations. (...) They argued over the matter at great length and decided to sacrifice the wife who brought them their midday meal the next day. (...) They gave their *besa*⁷ to each other that they would not tell their wives about the

⁴ *The Milk of Death*, a collection of short stories (*Oriental Tales*) by Yourcenar, applies a typical Rahmenerzählung (frame story) style where the legend of human sacrifice taken from ballads of the medieval Balkans is transformed into an embedded structure and narrated.

⁵ Ivo Andrić was Yugoslavia's ambassador to Germany in the early years of World War II and was arrested in April 1941. In June of that year, he was allowed to return to Belgrade. He wrote this famous novel from July 1942 to December 1943 in occupied Belgrade where he lived in retirement. Published in 1945, this work, written in Serbo-Croatian, quickly became a classic in his country, and greatly influenced the decision to grant him the Nobel Prize in 1961.

⁶ In *The Milk of Death*, a female victim, immured with the aim of building a castle, asks her husband to leave a hole for her breast so that she can breastfeed her baby. After that, it is said that milk continued to flow from the wall. Andrić's novel re-narrates a legend of immured twins where the Serbs who interfere with the construction of the bridge are sentenced to impalement.

⁷ *Besa* is a strictly Albanian cultural precept. It means "to keep one's promise" or "to keep one's word" and is usually translated as "pledge of honor," "faith," or "oath." *Besa* is very important in traditional Albanian customary law (*Kanun*). Albanians believe they must

decision they had made. (...) But that night two brothers, the oldest and the second, told their wives the secret and so broke the *besa*. The youngest brother kept it. (...) Then morning came, and when their mother-in-law as usual tried to send one of the wives with food for the masons, the two older wives who knew the secret pretended to be sick. So, the youngest set out, and they immured her, and that is all. (1997: 90–92)

Following this popular legend told as a kind of foreshadowing, as a critical aspect of the plot Kadare creates a new legend about immurement; that is, Murrash Zenebisha's death inside the bridge. There are no female victims and neither tears nor milk for a baby like in the conventionally retold legends; however, the new version is, in reality, an artificial crime, and not just murder, but an elaborate and evil scheme.

In this plot, the function of the legend is critical. Based on the story of Zenebisha's immurement, the old legend shared in a local community for a long period functions as a kind of trigger to unleash chaos that develops quickly. Mistaking the crime (probably invented by the Ottomans) for a similar legend allows the Turks to invade not only the surrounding territories but also the people's minds.

Kadare made a daring choice to dynamically use an old legend as a powerful weapon to link a historical account with a contemporary context. The most notable thing is his introduction of a method of rebuilding legends; he reconstructed the above mentioned legend according to his own creative intentions, having disassembled its diverse elements. In the process, lyrical aspects were drastically excluded (in contrast to the amplified lyricism in Yourcenar, for instance). Furthermore, contemporary social relations and politics are included in the plot, where diverse conflicts are expressed, such as the one between a great power and a minor country, between history and individuals, or between authorities and citizens.

The same can be said of Kadare's other historical novels where he equally refuses to view legends in terms of a temporal link between the past and the present. Instead, he regards them as containing concepts of life and death. The legendary world that Kadare reconstructed is not dominated by the past, but rather a different dimension – that of the dead. In other words, legends can provide people with a *topos*, in this case, a special place to interact with the dead. Through legends, people can learn about,

keep their word (*besa*) for life or in honor of their families.

and remember the stories of the dead, interpret them based on individual or social circumstances, and value them as contemporary issues. In these ways, legends in Kadare's works are not just relics of the past, but entail a vast scope of elements and therefore should be comprehended at multiple levels; legends are what make Kadare's literary universe richer and more complex, along with the architecture (which we are going to discuss later).

Strategy 2: Architecture and larger structures

In the previous chapter, *The Three-Arched Bridge* has been examined from the perspective of the use of legends. In this chapter, it is considered from an architectural angle. Victor Hugo (1802–1885) wrote in *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831), “Architecture was the great book of mankind, the principal expression of man at his different stages of development, whether as strength or as intelligence” (193). The great novelist perceived architecture as akin to a book in which human history was written and from which people could learn about history – by “reading” architecture. The English writer Thomas Hardy (1840–1928), who had been an architect, nurtured a keen interest in the interaction between literature and architecture, not unlike Hugo. Hardy stated: “[Hugo’s] memory must endure. His works are the cathedral of literary architecture, his imagination adding greatness to the colossal and charm to the small” (Hardy 1984: 334). Modern critiques entail insights related to Hardy’s recognition in referring to the relationship between literature and architecture. Peter Conrad proposes a concept of “negotiation (interaction) between literature and architecture” (Conrad 1973: 134), and Ellen Eve Frank discusses a similar idea in her book *Literary Architecture: Essays Toward a Tradition* (1983). Another critic, Philippa Tristram argued that “Hardy’s response to stone, both in natural forms and as a presence in buildings, is closely related to his understanding of the history of societies and the fate of individuals” (Tristram 1979: 164). This notion of *literary architecture* lends itself to be perhaps viewed as a traditionally European literary concept.

The idea of *literary architecture* is useful in analyzing Kadare’s works. If architecture tells stories and speaks of history as well as books do, it constitutes a kind of medium of remembering things. Various stories are engraved in architecture for generations: people see and touch structures

directly, they live in a building, and learn stories from the past. In this context, both literature and architecture are recognized as texts. As long as architecture is a kind of text, *literary architecture* can help to perpetuate “memory” in the same way books can. In this sense, the bridge in *The Three-Arched Bridge* can be seen as a kind of text and bearer of stories. Given this metaphor, what text does it narrate, or how is it told?

The title of the novel, *The Three-Arched Bridge*, irresistibly evokes the novel mentioned in the previous chapter: *The Bridge on the Drina* by Ivo Andrić. Certainly, as Jean-Paul Champseix pointed out (2003: 50), the intention of *The Three-Arched Bridge* overlaps with that in *The Bridge on the Drina*. However, these two texts, “far from showing a common understanding, reveal the radical difference between the universes of these writers who are nevertheless geographically close” (op cit. 50).

First of all, in *The Bridge on the Drina*, the bridge is described positively in the plot. In fact, the bridge over the Drina was built by Mehmed Paša Sokolović, a Serbian boy who grew up to become the grand vizier of the Ottoman Empire in 1577. Naturally, the purpose of the construction was to benefit his hometown and its people. In the novel, the bridge has continued to be useful and serves as a witness to the region's turbulent history, until it is abandoned due to construction of the railroad. This view is supported by the following statement from Champseix's discussion:

Therefore, the bridge [on Drina] has a beneficial and sacred character. It is an inlay of Heaven inlaid in earth. The angels convinced us of the bond between the kingdom of God and our world and allowed human beings, the creation of God, to meet each other. By sending his messengers, God guided and moved those who believed in him. (*op.cit.* 50)

In *The Three-Arched Bridge*, in contrast, the bridge in fact serves as one means of invasion by the Ottoman Empire. In Kadare's plot, the symbolic aspect of territorial expansion of a major power is emphasized, rather than the aspect of serving the public interest; the bridge is portrayed rather negatively. As Champseix indicated, “The upheaval that the bridge causes by its construction, the diversion of water and the foul mud that seems to invade everything, disrupts the order of nature” (*op.cit.* 51). Moreover, the critic emphasises the aspect of cultural invasion, suggesting that the bridge could cause confusion among languages. In other words, the bridge in *The*

Three-Arched Bridge is yet another rendition of the Tower of Babel (51), while the bridge in *The Bridge on the Drina* resembles a set of “an angel’s wings” (50).

Second, in addition to the contrasting significance of the respective bridges, their functions are also different; Granit Zela discusses the origin of these novels and mentions that “myth and history, two key components of these two literary works are two different starting points...” (2016: 193). Furthermore, Zela points out the following:

In Andric’s novel the bridge is not the history, but a witness to it, and the main focus is not the bridge but the story of the people in the town where the bridge is being built. The population of the town [varies], but in this case, Andric chooses to emphasize the coherence of the whole to contrast with the insignificance of the individual human life within a broader perspective of life, which itself is full of ups and downs. At this level, the bridge is a symbolic structural knot. (*op.cit.* 197)

In Kadare’s novel, unlike Andric’s, the bridge holds a function that goes far beyond mere infrastructure. In this regard, Peter Morgan indicated that the bridge in effect embodies the land of Albania, and that this is the message implicit in its structure (Morgan 2011: 200). The three arches of the bridge represent the three eras of foreign occupation: the Roman, Byzantine, and the Ottoman (Haroche 1990: 711). In his *Invitation à l’atelier de l’écrivain* (“An Invitation to the writer’s atelier”) Kadare himself describes the structure in question as a “seul pont : celui aux trois arches, d’où irradie toujours le malheur” (“solitary bridge: the one with three arches from whence misery always radiates”) (246). In his novel, “the bridge is constantly associated with the omen feeling of a threat. This threat is related to the 500 years conquer of Albania by Ottomans, a threat that risks the Albanian identity” (Zela 2016: 197). Zela writes:

“The Three-Arched Bridge” in Arbëria is built in the wake of the onslaught of the Ottomans in the Balkans and more than a union bridge, it is a bridge that separates two civilizations, a bridge between Europe and Asia through which Asia would conquer and alienate Europe. (...) messages that come from the sacrifice in the bridge and “calamity” it foretells are a proclamation through which History of *Arbëria* [Albania] is decoded while it is opposite to the Asian apocalypse that risks its being (*ibid.* 196).

Zela's description seems to accurately express some of Kadare's intentions. Located in a border zone between Europe and the East, the principality in the novel, not unlike in the real Albania, has always been in a difficult geopolitical situation. In such a country, the bridge denotes both progress and lack of freedom. Loaded with symbolism, it reflects the writer's intentions, serving the purpose of protest against the oppression by larger powers.

Kadare created a context where the new bridge is the bearer of an invisible Turkish invasion; that is, a silent invasion. Moreover, by adding an unexpected murder into the plot, the threat of a silent invasion is intensified. At the same time, the bridge is a metaphor for real Albanian politics and social conditions. Namely, the bridge has a multi-layered history: it contains the history of a nation and people oppressed by a great power – not a history of grace and glory, but rather one of Albania's true past threatened by foreign countries, or of the compromise and conflict between Kadare and the authorities. The composition of the oppressor and the oppressed in this story alludes to the prior situation in Albania and also a metaphor for the relationship between Kadare and the authorities. In Morgan's words, the dilemma of modernization and Kadare's ambiguity in opposing Albanian communism are expressed in this fable retelling the history of the Balkans. In the context of communism, sacrifice for the sake of progress is justified, but the conflict between freedom and restraint weakly undermines the confidence in the legitimacy of sacrifice, not unlike in the case of Murrash Zenebisha being immured into the bridge. (Morgan 2011: 201–202).

However, the writer neither criticizes the regime clearly, nor suggests an answer to his own dilemmas. He seems to believe in documenting events as a stable tactic. Morgan, mentioned above, scrutinizes this strategy from the perspective of modern Albanian history, as follows:

Faced with the threat to his country in 1377, Gjon Oukshama, a skeptical and enlightened monk, is terrified. The self-referentiality, which was emphasized in Kadare's later works under the regime, is felt when the monk's objectivity gives way in the face of death and the exhaustion of his writing. (...) The reflections of Gjon Oukshama echoed through generations, warning his compatriots some 600 years later that the liberticidal apocalypse was about to spread to their country. (Morgan 2011: 210)

The history around the bridge is recorded faithfully as the chronicle of a small country. Its fidelity to facts makes it possible to leave the evaluation of historical events, both major and minor, to posterity. The history recorded in the chronicle is also perpetually told by the bridge itself as it is destined to tell stories via *literary architecture*. Instead of Kadare overtly objecting to politics and regimes, or valuing certain times and events over others, *literary architecture* imprints the truth of the times and human lives on the bridge's body and, like a faithful chronicle silently but eloquently tells stories to anyone and at all times.

These are the reasons why Kadare often incorporates a large structure as a strategy for universality, into the center of his work. The more the structure is familiar to people, the more efficient its role is in the plot. The use of a universal motif of architecture makes readers from different backgrounds see the same horizon. We experience a complex interpretation by following two texts: one being a story and the other – the text told by a large structure. Furthermore, since most large structures are of historical nature, there is no doubt that they also have their political aspects. Hence, the text told by architecture cannot escape engaging in politics, nationalism, and a set of ideologies. These must have fulfilled Kadare's primary and hidden purposes alike, especially under Albania's socialist dictatorship.

Strategy 3: A parallel universe or *Another Albania*

David Bellos, a professor of French and comparative literature at Princeton University and the translator of Kadare's novels from French, stated the following in the article tellingly entitled *Why Should We Read Ismail Kadare?:*

In some ways, he's like Balzac. But Balzac limited himself to one place, called Paris, and one time, the 1820s (with just a few excursions to the French provinces and the Renaissance), whereas Kadare takes us everywhere: to ancient Egypt, to modern China, to a tourist resort on the Baltic, to Moscow and Austria and to the Ottoman Empire. He has an almost Jules Verne-like capacity for traveling the world. If you read Ismail Kadare, you also cover all the ages since the invention of script: from Cheops building the Great Pyramid to arguments over the succession of Enver Hoxha in 1980s Albania, and on to events and situations that take place in western Europe after the fall of communism. He has created, so to speak, a parallel

universe, with a deep relationship to the one we live in. It is the whole world in literary form. (Bellos 2021)

This parallel universe is a literary spatial-temporal world created by Kadare and is horizontally vast and vertically profound. Its landscape is both characteristic and impressive because it very much resembles a real one; for instance, the Albania's mountainous areas, but with the weather always cloudy, rainy, windy, or even stormy. The view is somehow threatening and keeps the reader restless or anxious, as if it were a picture painted with only dark colors. Neither a blue sky nor the blue Adriatic Sea seems to exist there.⁸

In addition, the inhabitants of Kadare's world are familiar to the readers of his works; some repeatedly appear in different novels, just as the characters in *The Human Comedy* (1829–1848) were reintroduced by Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850). For example, a young man appearing in *The Blinding Order* is then set as the protagonist of *The Palace of Dreams*, and it is his ancestors who take the initiative to build the bridge in *The Three-Arched Bridge*. Moreover, common motifs are found in many of Kadare's novels: the same inn appears in several other stories, and ruins and graveyards are often used as story backgrounds. Kadare's unique literary world, which can be called *another Albania* or *a nostalgic Albania*, is an imaginary one created by the writer as a necessary ploy. Myths, folklore, and legends are reproduced, and a modern twist is added.

Another notable feature of this universe is that it has a labyrinth-like structure in several ways. A mysterious atmosphere of the labyrinth seems Kafkaesque and sometimes Borges-like (Naço 2013: 255). For instance, in the novel *The Palace of Dreams*, the building of the government office is called The Palace of Dreams as it handles the dreams of all citizens and is a labyrinth in itself; its structure is extremely complex, as if designed for getting lost. In addition, absolute confidentiality is maintained in the organization. Everything in the novel – including Kadare's way of choosing the most important and dangerous dream – is mysterious and labyrinth-like. In *The Ghost Rider/Doruntine*, nobody knows who brought Doruntine

⁸ Coincidentally and interestingly, such depictions of landscapes remind us of the great filmmaker of Albania's neighbor to the south. The award-winning Greek film director Theo Angelopoulos (1935–2012), a contemporary of Kadare's, also turned his back on the azure Aegean Sea and uses dark and gray landscape in his films.

back home even at the end of the story. In *The Three-Arched Bridge*, even the monk Gjon – although he is the storyteller – cannot establish the truth about the incident: that is, why Zenebisha had to be immured alive into a bridge pier. With a crucial lack of information, the reader's imagination endlessly develops to converge nowhere, and the search for an answer lasts forever in the labyrinthine world.

Why can the parallel universe of *another Albania* contribute to the universality of Kadare's works? Bellos may hint at an answer:

It is common and natural to read his works as a writer who only really talks about his own life in Albania under the Hoxha regime. There is certainly some truth in the notion that all the different places and times of Kadare's universe are displaced images of one particular place and time. But you do not have to know that, nor do you need to take any notice of it in order to read Kadare. You can read Kadare's stories simply as stories. (...) [H]is blending of myth and folklore with portraits of modern minds and local realities is so masterful that I find myself drawn in. (Bellos 2021)

Kadare's parallel universe is an alternative to the real Albania. However, such a simple interpretation could underestimate the literary world of *another Albania* as the latter "has many levels, including the irrational, the transcendent, and the strange" (ibid.) Although various factors and the complicated structure of his universe can be quite confusing, at the same time its mystery and uncertainty inevitably draw the reader into a realm that exists nowhere else. Finally, the reader may feel as if they have dwelt for a long time in Kadare's imaginary world: the dismal landscape, the disagreeable weather, and even old, rigid conventions become somehow nostalgic, like memories of distant hometowns in old memories. These memories have certainly become nostalgic over the years, yet we would rather not remember such things, and shy away from them instead. They might be like the backwater of recollections which evoke shame, disgust, regret, and suffering. The universality of Kadare's works goes beyond simply sharing his memories with readers. What readers relive with his novels is the pain and sorrow experienced in the absurdity of a fictional parallel world. Kadare's works are undoubtedly stories of ongoing human activity in a real part of the world (or its microcosm). Moreover, the more profound one's empathy for pain and sorrow, the more strongly it makes one aware of the

significance and difficulty of inheriting and carrying the burden of history. Hence, the creation and expansion of a parallel universe could sufficiently serve as a strategy for universality.

Conclusion

“Albanians, a people constantly shrinking – in his own poem, *The Ballad of the Exhumation*, Ismail Kadare talks about the fate of Albanians after the death of Skanderbeg” (Zejneli 2021): in fact, Albania has been destined, geographically and historically, to be dominated by, or existing under the influence of, the major powers. Both its language and literature are unfamiliar to the wider public; all of Albanian works tend to be regarded as “minor.” In this context, Ismail Kadare is often said to be “a great writer in a small country.”

This paper has attempted to reveal the strategies in Kadare's literary works which produce originality and universality, focusing on the historical novel *The Three-Arched Bridge*. The legend of “human immurement,” whose variants have been passed down throughout the Balkans, is introduced and reproduced in the plot. Although the legend of human sacrifice is conventional, Kadare created a new legend parallel to the old one: that of Zenebisha's death. The reproduction of the legend enables us to interpret a historical narrative as a mysterious modern novel. In his other works, legends are rebuilt in a social or political context. Such a multi-layered structure allows us to develop more potential analyses.

Large structures also play an important role in Kadare's works. They symbolize power and authoritarianism; on the other hand, architecture, representing historical and political texts, tells stories of invasions or oppression and silent and perpetual protest. By comparing *The Three Arched-Bridge* with *The Bridge of Drina*, they converge on the topic of the bridge and the legend of human immurement. It is suggested that the bridge in Kadare's novel neither functions as a mere background or motif, nor is positioned in the plot's background; the large structure propels the plot as its driving force. Furthermore, through the concept of *literary architecture*, the present paper indicates that architecture, like legends, expresses a multi-layered context. Moreover, architecture's symbolism and multi-layered meanings reflect on the actual political and social situation in which

the writer is always placed, as well as his own ambiguity and dilemma. Thus, large structures are equally landmarks in a parallel universe.

Kadare, rather skillfully evading the interference and censorship by the authorities, created his own parallel world to live in. Instead of directly protesting against the dictatorial regime, he often alluded to dissent in the form of allegories, ubiquitous in his works. He constructs this parallel universe allegorically, with the help of traditional Albanian conventions, legends, landscapes, architecture, and diverse motifs and factors, which have their roots in the depth of the Albanian land. Kadare's literary works that exist in his parallel world certainly reflect the vicissitudes of Albanian political life, and Kadare's can be called a universal voice against totalitarianism. Although his works are mostly evaluated from a purely literary standpoint, it is inevitable that interpretations should form that are informed by historical and political angles. This article elaborates on a strictly literary interpretation of Kadare's characteristic methods by considering them to be strategies of rendering his works accessible to the public across the world.

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Summary

The Albanian writer Ismail Kadare (b. 1936) is sometimes called “a great writer in a small country”; this paper, focusing on his historical novel *The Three-Arched Bridge* (1978), reveals some strategies inherent to his works, suggests their place in world literature, and asserts how they can be seen as both unique and universal as part of world literature. First, the paper examines how legends have been reconstructed in the novel and compares them to two similar works. Second, the paper analyzes how architecture functions in the novel. Third, a parallel universe or “another Albania” is described so as to show how Kadare’s literary universe is formed.

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