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The case of the anti-hero in *The White Caravan* by Azem Shkreli

Przypadek antybohatera w *Białej Karawanie* Azema Shkreliego

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Abstract

The aim of the work was not only to identify the characteristics of the antihero but also to gain a deep understanding of the moral, social, and psychological aspects that shape his role in literature and society. Special attention was given to the role of Dyl Mehmeti as an antihero who opposes authoritarian structures and traditional society while simultaneously preserving his internal moral integrity. The methodology of the study included textual analysis of the novel to isolate the main characteristics of the antihero. An interpretative approach was applied, examining characters through the social and cultural contexts of the era, as well as postmodern criticism, to analyze the image of the antihero in light of changing paradigms of heroic and antiheroic behavior. The results of the study revealed that Dyl Mehmeti was a key figure who not only represents traditional resistance to change but also embodies a complex moral Dylemma, existing at the intersection of individual resistance and social pressures. He opposed the Soviet regime while simultaneously striving to preserve the traditional identity of the mountain peoples. It was found that the antihero in Shkreli's novel is a central figure who remains unaffected by external changes and steadfast in his beliefs, distinguishing him from the classical hero. The main characteristics of Dyl Mehmeti, such as isolation,

rejection of social norms, and internal conflict, are innovative for Albanian literature of the mid-20th century. The conclusions indicate that the image of the antihero in *The White Caravan* is critical of the society and historical conditions prevailing at the time of the novel's writing.

Introduction

Azem Shkreli is a distinguished character in Albanian literature from the second part of the 20th century, recognised for his creativity in prose and poetry. His contributions enhanced the literary heritage of his community while also introducing innovative artistic forms and ideas, reflecting a profound comprehension of historical and social dynamics. This innovation has made his work particularly pertinent to the examination of literary processes in the Balkan region.

The significance of examining the anti-romantic hero in Shkreli's works, especially in "Karvani i bardhë" *The White Caravan* (1975), is linked to the necessity for a more profound comprehension of the antihero in postmodern literature. In a period of societal shifts and the reevaluation of ethical principles, the antihero is crucial in deconstructing traditional literary archetypes. Shkreli's art is notable for its protagonists, who defy conventional social conventions and encounter struggle with their environment, symbolising intricate dynamics between the person and society.

Researchers have thoroughly examined Shkreli's impact on contemporary literature. Merita Bajraktari Januzi (2019) examines Shkreli's poetic style, highlighting his role in the evolution of innovative literary forms and expressions, emphasising the depth and intricacy of his creative methodology. Michael West (2021) analysed the evolution of the parodic epic and its critique of conventional heroic virtues, which is essential for comprehending the literary antihero. Zainab Abdullah Hussein Al-Jubouri (2022) employed a psychoanalytic framework to examine antiheroism in literature, investigating the internal tensions and psychological instability that define 20th-century antiheroes. This thematic analysis encompasses figures like Winston Smith in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, examined by Shaimaa Mahmood Waseen (2020), who characterises Smith as a contemporary antihero resisting an authoritarian state. Victor Ahonen Milkovic (2021) and Helmbrecht Breinig et al. (2024) have contributed to the examination of antiheroes in fantasy and revolutionary literature, respectively, highlighting their function in mirroring societal struggles and critiquing conventional heroic standards.

Agim Vinca (2020) analysed Ithaca as a universal emblem of homeland, identity, and human existence in Albanian poetry, connecting it to Odysseus'

classic voyage and the lasting affection for one's roots. Dana Percec (2021) examined anti-heroism in Ian McEwan's *The Cockroach*, demonstrating how the protagonist's objectification signifies identity and memory concerns within the context of modern political challenges such as Brexit, therefore highlighting literature's involvement in social transformation. Vjollca Dibra Ibrahim and Sejdi Sejdiu (2021) analysed contemporary Albanian literature from the 1940s onwards, emphasising Azem Shkreli's contribution to socialist realism. Although ideological limitations, Shkreli used subversive motifs that critically reassess societal norms. Despite the examination of antiheroism in European, Turkish, and Albanian literatures, there is a lack of study into the particular language and creative approaches that define the antihero in Shkreli's work.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the linguistic means by which Azem Shkreli created the image of the anti-hero in *The White Caravan*, as well as to study the innovative aspects of this character in the context of modern Albanian literature.

Analysis

Aesthetics and innovation in the work of Azem Shkreli

Azem Shkreli's literary career started in the late 1950s and early 1960s, signifying a crucial juncture in Albanian literature, especially in post-war poetry and prose in Kosovo. His debut marked a new era in the region's poetic arts, as Shkreli endeavoured to modernise evolving literary genres. Shkreli's debut was pivotal in shaping new tendencies in Albanian literature, facilitating creativity and modernisation, particularly in poetry.

The character Dyl Mehmeti in *The White Caravan* by Azem Shkreli (1975) was examined within the extensive historical context of postwar Albanian identity. Dyl's repudiation of modern political influences and commitment to traditional values illustrate historical resistance to alien ideologies in postwar Kosovo. A comparative-historical examination investigated Shkreli's contributions to Albanian literature, emphasising Kosovo's mid-20th-century evolution. This research clarified how Shkreli both challenged and enhanced literary traditions, contrasting Dyl Mehmeti's character with contemporary and historical literary antiheroes.

A close textual study examined the narrative structures, language strategies, and symbolic frameworks employed by Shkreli to construct the antihero character. This technique analysed the character's superficial attributes and deep mind,

uncovering significant motivations and moral dilemmas driving his behaviours. The study highlighted Shkreli's linguistic and narrative techniques to create a complex portrayal of Dyl Mehmeti, merging social commentary with psychological depth.

His creative path demonstrates a steady increase in skill and maturity. From one work to another, Shkreli convincingly proved his capacity for literary innovation, and his works became an essential part of the Albanian literary tradition. Azem Shkreli is renowned as a poet whose aesthetic style is striking in its brevity and depth. His poetic language is characterized by minimalism, where each word carries significant weight. A rational approach to selecting vocabulary, combined with a lyrical rhythm, creates a unique personal modeling that distinguishes Shkreli from his contemporaries in Albanian poetry. Of particular interest is his early literary start: at the age of 14, Shkreli began writing poetry, indicating his exceptional natural talent and dedication to literary activity. By the age of 23, he had established himself as a promising novelist, having published his first novel. Over the course of his 45-year literary career, Shkreli not only developed his early achievements but also continuously improved, creating works in various genres – from poetry to prose and drama.

Azem Shkreli (2001) published his complete collection of literary works in 2001. This collection includes works of various genres, summarizing the author's creative heritage, which earned him a name as one of the most outstanding representatives of modern Albanian literature. One of the key motifs in his work is the profound contemplation and depiction of life in his native region of Rugova, located in the Republic of Kosovo. This area, inhabited since the 12th century by highlanders, shepherds, and farmers, plays a central role in his works. Shkreli skillfully recreates the harsh natural landscapes, cliffs, gorges, and the everyday life of local residents, who struggle to survive in a "godforsaken" land. Through the stories of these people – their pain, joy, and wisdom – Azem Shkreli conveys the deep spiritual and cultural heritage of the region, which forms an essential part of his literary identity.

When characterizing the novel, *The White Caravan*, attention should be paid to its multilayered and symbolic significance, which transcends the classic canon of a novel dedicated to the theme of war. Although the work was conceived in 1961, when Azem Shkreli was just starting his literary journey, its final publication in 1996 reflects the maturity and profound intellectual experience of the author. The 35-year gap between the writing and completion of the work symbolizes not only Shkreli's development as a writer but also a shift in his approach to literary form and content. In this context, *The White Caravan* became an important

artifact of Albanian literature, combining traditional narratives with a modernist and postmodernist worldview.

Azem Shkreli's literary career, beginning in the late 1950s, signifies a notable transformation in Albanian writing. In *The White Caravan*, Shkreli's distinctive storytelling method is evident in his portrayal of the antihero, Dyl Mehmeti. Shkreli utilises fragmented storytelling tactics to expose Dyl's internal conflicts, frequently presenting the character's ideas in a fragmentary, unarticulated manner that underscores his moral uncertainty. A pivotal excerpt from the novel, in which Dyl reflects on his lonely existence, highlights this fragmented narrative style: "I walk alone, but the road is not mine; it's the mountain's, the wind's, and the sky's. I've never felt the weight of the world, only my thoughts, which drag me deeper into the silence." (Shkreli 1975: 145). This internal monologue illustrates the antihero's feeling of alienation, as solitude serves as both a literal and metaphorical manifestation of his internal struggle (Drozdovskyi 2022).

One of the key aspects of the novel is its structure, which is distinguished by a complex organization of narrative intertwined with linguistic and philosophical experiments. Language in the novel emerges not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for philosophical reflection on existence (Mykulanyets 2022). Shkreli imbues the diction of his characters with a special philosophical-ethical and moral-aesthetic weight, elevating them to a new level of literary experience. This is a kind of "linguistic ritual" through which the characters not only interact with each other but also rethink their own existence and the world that surrounds them.

The originality of Azem Shkreli's language and style is also expressed in his masterful use of humor as a means of counteracting harsh reality. In post-war Kosovo, where social instability, material poverty, and political repression were integral parts of life, humor became an important tool for psychological survival. Shkreli skillfully weaves subtle, sophisticated humor into his texts, allowing his characters to confront the tragedy of reality and find new ways to overcome life's crises.

Equally original are the characters Shkreli develops within the context of Rugova, a region with a long history and distinctive culture. His characters represent a complex mosaic of individuals who, despite canonical societal constraints, are able to relativize these conventions thanks to their spiritual humor and capacity for self-irony. They function not only as individual personalities but also as bearers of the collective identity of the Rugova region, through whom Shkreli creates a symbolic bridge between the historical past and the present. Particular attention should be given to the role of language as a cultural and philosophical

experience that represents a specific group of people associated with a particular geographical region. This is reflected in the rhythmic structure of the text, which conveys the cyclical nature of life and nature. Such a narrative decision allows Shkreli to create a sense of the closed circle of time, in which the characters live out their fates without stepping beyond their own cultural space, while simultaneously reflecting the universal Dilemmas of human existence.

Analyzing the works of Azem Shkreli, attention should be drawn to the symbolic significance of his characters and the worldview they embody. The author conveys deep social criticism of these traditions while simultaneously showing how closely they are connected to the highlanders' worldview. Shkreli, while condemning the tragic consequences, does not reduce the issue to one-sided judgments. He shows the importance of honor, sacrifice, and adherence to moral principles for the residents of mountainous regions, while also emphasizing the tragedy when these values clash with the desires and aspirations of individuals. The work conveys a lot of pessimism and concern, reflecting the discrepancy between the possibilities of achieving a more comfortable life and the characters' desires. This tension between reality and dreams was one of the central themes of Shkreli's works. He continually addressed the theme of human confrontation with natural and social conditions that limit their ability to achieve what they desire, and this confrontation takes on particular sharpness in the backward, archaic society.

Azem Shkreli constantly turned to the image of the highlander as the central figure in his works. For him, the highlander is not only a symbol of physical endurance and resilience but also an embodiment of moral steadfastness, a deep connection with nature, and adherence to tradition. In his works, Shkreli expresses the understanding that a person living in harsh natural conditions inevitably becomes part of them. This connection with nature makes the highlander a master of his own fate, yet at the same time condemns him to a life full of hardships, which takes on shades of late romanticism. Through the image of the highlander, Shkreli creates a profound metaphorical subtext that touches on themes of freedom, responsibility, and predestination. This typification of characters is evident not only in his prose but also in Shkreli's dramaturgy, particularly in his plays *Fossils* and *The Cuckoo's Grave* (Rugova 1999). In these works, he uses the characteristic traits of the highlander, embodied through characters like Dyl Mehmeti. Shkreli's characters act in different times and situations, but they are united by a common trait – a constant struggle with circumstances, inner resilience, and the ability to maintain their individuality in the most difficult conditions. Through this typification, the author reveals moral Dilemmas and social conflicts that are universal for many cultures and times but are especially acute in the mountainous regions of Kosovo.

An unusual aspect is that, despite the complex political and social situation in Kosovo after World War II, Azem Shkreli, in his youth, had already addressed the theme of the antihero. His novel *The White Caravan*, written in 1961, coincides with the general European and American literary tradition, where in the 1960s and 1970s, the antihero became one of the central figures in connection with the Cultural Revolution and counterculture. Especially in the context of the youth protest movement, aimed at fighting social injustice, materialism, and rigid social structures, the antihero became a symbol of opposition to the system. Like Western writers, Shkreli created his antihero, who reflected all the complexities of the period – both personal and social Dylemmas.

The evolution of the antihero concept in world literature

During the analysis of the character's features and the construction of the antihero, a structural-stylistic method was employed. This approach investigated how Shkreli constructed his story and employed stylistic strategies to foster interactions between Dyl and his surroundings. This approach concentrated on the psychological and ethical "Dylemmas" encountered by the character, with "Dylemma" being a neologism introduced by Shkreli. This phrase combines the protagonist's name, Dyl Mehmeti, with "dilemma" to represent the character's distinct moral and psychological conflicts throughout the tale. This word reflects the character-specific, culturally influenced internal struggle that characterises Dyl's journey in contrast to a universal ethical problem. Dyl's rejection of the alterations enforced by the external environment, represented by his seclusion in the harsh mountains, constitutes a primary moral conflict in the novel, illustrating his defiance against social and political influences.

The antihero as a literary phenomenon plays a crucial part in *The White Caravan*, stemming from Dyl's individual conflicts and his defiance of society conventions. Dyl's engagements with other characters, particularly the village elders, illustrate his rejection of communal objectives. For example, at a pivotal moment in the novel, Dyl's reluctance to participate in the communal discourse on the village's future underscores his isolation: "The elders speak of progress, of changing with the times, but I cannot hear them. Their words are not mine. My silence is all I have left." (Shkreli 1975: 102). This text illustrates Dyl's ethical ambiguity and psychological conflict, as his silence functions as both a means of resistance and a symbolic retreat from societal expectations.

To identify the key characteristics of the antihero, a comparative literary method was used. Based on the systematization of the works of Linda Chicco

(2023), the main traits of the antihero were highlighted, such as psychological ambivalence, moral uncertainty, internal conflict, and social isolation. The method of induction was utilized to derive general characteristics of the antihero based on his behavior and internal contradictions as revealed in Azem Shkreli's work. The induction approach was employed to ascertain the general traits of the antihero, informed by his behaviour and internal conflicts, as demonstrated in Shkreli's work. This approach facilitated a profound comprehension of how Dyl's actions, frequently paradoxical and ambiguous, mirror the greater cultural and social issues in Kosovo during that period.

The difference between an antihero and a traditional hero lies in their unconventional qualities and moral characteristics, which often evoke mixed feelings in the reader. While the traditional hero, in the classical sense, embodies ideal virtues, courage, and honor, the antihero stands in opposition to these ideals. The antihero represents a figure who, despite their negative nature or lack of heroic traits, plays an important role in the development of the plot and may even evoke sympathy from the reader.

According to one definition, a hero is a "warrior" who "lives and dies in the pursuit of honor" (Schein 1984). He is distinguished by high moral principles and loyalty to duty, playing a central role in events and serving as an inspiration or example for others. Meanwhile, according to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2024), a hero is "the main male character in a literary or dramatic work." Traditionally, he is considered a positive character endowed with heroic qualities that influence the course of events and guide the development of the narrative. According to Sydney Hook (2023), the hero acts as a "cult figure," potentially key to the rise and fall of nations and cultures.

In contrast, the antihero is an "infamous" character who often evokes antipathy or mixed emotions in the reader. He does not possess traditional heroic traits, his actions and motives may be immoral, selfish, or even criminal, yet he remains an integral part of the literary work. It is important to note that despite his negative traits, the antihero frequently retains a certain appeal for the reader, even if they do not approve of his behavior or principles. As noted by Murat Kadiroglu (2012), the reader may not be sure whether they should listen to or read about a "lazy person," but it often turns out that this very character overshadows all others and captures attention.

Although the term "antihero" was not known in antiquity, Homer already mentioned such a figure in the character of Thersites (Eremenko 2023). The term "antihero" itself first appeared in 1714 (Furst 1979). The broad introduction of the antihero into the literary context began in the 1950s and influenced, in particular,

the Albanian writer Azem Shkreli, who created his own antihero, Dyl Mehmeti. By choosing an antihero as the central character, Shkreli deprives the reader of the opportunity to identify with a hero who would traditionally be strong, brave, or intellectually exceptional. The antihero becomes a symbol of the modern individual with their social antitheses and internal ambivalences, and their existence reflects the social contradictions that form the basis for their development (Wilpert 2001).

One of the earliest examples of an antihero figure is Don Quixote from the novel of the same name by Miguel Cervantes (2018), written at the beginning of the 17th century. Despite his noble intentions, Don Quixote often finds himself in comic situations due to his misunderstanding of the real world. This hero challenges traditional notions of heroism, showing that a hero can be imperfect, mad, and even ridiculous. Another important example is Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen's novel *Simplicissimus* (2023), where the main character, unlike the idealized knight, is cunning and often immoral, indicating his adaptability to the harsh conditions of war and chaos. Like *Don Quixote*, *Simplicissimus* mocks the social standards that prevailed at the time.

Subsequently, the antihero type continues to evolve, particularly in the work of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1978), where we see an antihero in the figure of Werther in the novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Werther opposes the social conventions of bourgeois society, and his personal crisis not only reflects deep internal conflict but also serves as a critique of the overly formalized social life. Werther is a vulnerable, emotionally unstable, and destructive character whose behavior irrationally opposes social norms, typical of an antihero. His suffering due to love and conflict with social norms highlights the contradictions between individual aspirations and societal limitations.

In addition to critiquing social norms, the figure of the antihero emerges in literature as a means of critiquing civilization as a whole. A striking example of this is Dyl Mehmeti in Azem Shkreli's novel *The White Caravan*, where the antihero becomes a personification of resistance to a totalitarian regime attempting to destroy the traditional values and cultural identities of the people. Like previous antiheroes, Dyl Mehmeti embodies internal conflict arising from the clash of personal convictions with harsh external conditions. However, in this case, his antagonism is directed not only at personal problems or social conventions, as with Werther, but at opposing the system of power. Shkreli uses this image to not only show the individual's struggle to preserve their identity but also to express a critical view of the influence of political regimes on culture and society.

The antihero is distinguished by his ability to overshadow even the traditional hero, capturing the audience's attention with his ambiguity and unpredictability.

His actions may be selfish, and in certain cases, this makes the antihero even more interesting than the main positive character. As Murat Kadiroglu (2012) notes, the antihero, thanks to his moral Dylemmas and complex inner world, often “steals” the reader’s attention, preventing them from fully embracing the traditional hero, who may not always embody the depth of conflict characteristic of the antihero.

Based on the research analysis by Linda Chicco (2023), the main traits of the antihero that reflect his complex nature and role in literature were identified. The traits of the antihero were structured in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the antihero in literature

Types of anti-heroes		
Cynical antiheroes are characters who are closed to society and are characterized by a negative attitude towards the world around them		Tragic antiheroes are sympathetic characters who suffer from inner torments that lead to their downfall
Main characteristics		
The lack of traditional hero traits – realistic identifications that can reflect human vulnerability	Internal torments are strong internal conflicts that determine their behavior and choices	Psychological depth
Role in the plot		
The central character around whom the action revolves		Emotional involvement of the reader due to its ambiguity and complexity
Psychological traits are dark personality triads		
Narcissism (manifested in their grandiosity and self-centeredness, which makes them not always positive characters)	Machiavellianism (often use manipulation to achieve their goals, which calls into question their morality)	Psychopathy (lack of sympathy for the suffering)
Moral ambivalence		
The complexity of moral choices		Identification problem

Source: compiled by the authors based on Linda Chicco (2023).

The antihero in literature is distinguished by its multifaceted nature and complexity, allowing the exploration of their character through various types and traits. Specifically, antiheroes can be divided into cynical and tragic types. Cynical antiheroes are often characterized by their detachment from society, a negative perception of the surrounding world, and a pessimistic attitude toward life’s

circumstances. They reflect not only individual crises but also serve as metaphors for social and political injustices. Tragic antiheroes, on the other hand, evoke sympathy as their fate is shaped by inner torment and failure. These characters embody the struggle between personal desires and moral constraints, which in turn leads to their downfall. This dual perception of the antihero reflects the complexity of human nature, which does not always lend itself to straightforward interpretation.

The main characteristics of the antihero include a lack of traditional heroic traits, which makes them realistic figures, capable of reflecting human vulnerability. Antiheroes often face deep internal conflicts that define their behavior and choices. This psychological depth creates the preconditions for the reader's emotional involvement, as they become carriers of complex moral Dilemmas. The dark triad of personality traits, particularly narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, adds even more complexity to antiheroes, allowing them to be seen not only as negative figures but also as carriers of certain moral questions. Narcissism manifests itself in grandiosity and egocentrism, which may complicate the positive perception of these characters. Machiavellianism emphasizes the use of manipulation to achieve goals, which raises questions about the morality of their actions. Psychopathy, characterized by a lack of empathy, highlights the antihero's distance from traditional moral values.

Thus, the antihero in literature is a complex archetype that poses various ethical questions to the reader and sparks discussions about the boundaries of morality and immorality. Their role in the plot is central, as the action revolves around their character, shaping the dynamics of conflict. The complexity of moral choices faced by antiheroes challenges traditional notions of good and evil, while the issue of identifying with them allows the reader to delve into their own internal conflicts and doubts. Therefore, the antihero becomes not just a simple means of entertainment, but a powerful tool for exploring human psychology and morality.

The timeless antihero in the novel *The White Caravan*

Cultural methodology enabled the study of the novel within the historical and cultural circumstances surrounding the author and his characters. An examination of the socio-cultural environment of Kosovo, namely the customs of the Rugova region and the broader Albanian society, offered a profound insight into the influence of cultural legacy on Dyl Mehmeti's character. The novel *The White Caravan* by the renowned Albanian writer Azem Shkreli (1975) is a unique work, not only due to its literary style and innovative approach to the subject but also

because of its deep exploration of the antihero. This study utilised a textual-analytical approach to enhance the comprehension of the antihero, using Dean Brink's (2013) notion of "turning inside out". This method facilitated a thorough analysis of Dyl Mehmeti as a figure that not only withstands external influences but also participates in an introspective discourse with his surroundings. Dyl exemplifies postmodern apprehensions over identity and societal norms through this procedure. An essential component of the research was narrative analysis, concentrating on the narrative strategies and language employed by Azem Shkreli to influence Dyl's trip. Azem Shkreli's employment of non-linear narrative techniques illustrates Dyl's psychological disintegration. The narrative alternates between past and present, reflecting Dyl's fragmented identity and his difficulty in reconciling old ideas with the swiftly evolving world around him. This storytelling style offers a postmodern perspective, viewing internal conflict as a dynamic interaction between inner identity and external cultural influences.

The central character, Dyl Mehmeti, who stands at the core of the plot, is a complex and multifaceted figure, combining both heroic and antiheroic traits. Shkreli departs from the traditional heroic canon and bestows upon his character new qualities that reflect the post-war relativism and complex moral Dilemmas characteristic of the period following World War II. Mehmeti becomes a symbol of a new reality, where the notion of heroism is erased and reinterpreted.

Dyl Mehmeti's journey in *The White Caravan* is a profound exploration of the antihero's function in mirroring individual and social conflicts. Shkreli constructs a complex character in Dyl, who embodies neither a conventional hero nor a straightforward villain. Dyl articulates his internal struggle in response to the demands of contemporary society: "The world outside has changed, but I have not. They call it progress, but to me, it is nothing but the loss of all that is true and pure. Am I to abandon everything I know for a future I cannot touch?" (Shkreli 1975: 178). This quote illustrates Dyl's profound psychological struggle, a fundamental characteristic of the antihero. His resistance to societal change stems not from a political ideology, but from his dedication to ancient values he perceives as in danger. Dyl's rejection of societal transformations symbolises cultural conflict in postwar Kosovo. His profound affinity for the traditions of the Rugova region reflects the overarching social dilemma between preserving cultural heritage and accommodating the demands of modernisation. Shkreli exploits this internal cultural resistance to highlight Dyl's significance as a representation of the persistent effort to maintain cultural identity in the midst of political upheaval.

From the very beginning, the author introduces the character into an atmosphere of physical and moral trials. The caravan, which serves as a metaphor for

the journey and trial, symbolizes the protagonist's path to self-knowledge, but at the same time serves as a means of his isolation from society. Within the context of this symbolic journey, Dyl Mehmeti is not a traditional epic hero, but rather an antihero who faces a crisis of identity. This hero is neither marked by courage nor moral purity; rather, he appears as a figure struggling with his own internal conflicts and inability to act. In this regard, Mehmeti's image reveals to the reader a non-idealized perception of leadership, where weakness and uncertainty become an integral part of his character.

However, even in his weakness and inability to perform classical heroic deeds, Mehmeti evokes empathy in the reader. Shkreli deliberately enhances the tragic nature of this character, combining epic and antiheroic traits in a delicate balance. Dyl Mehmeti simultaneously embodies both high spirituality and his own limitations. Despite being adored by his fellow villagers, he remains a hero torn between ambition and his own imperfection. His image in the novel symbolizes the struggle between epic monumentality and inner crisis, which expresses the complexity and ambiguity of human nature.

Dyl Mehmeti, as a Rugova highlander, represents a classic type of character deeply immersed in a moral Dylemma. His life decisions, made during World War II, differ from the collective views of society and even oppose the dominant tendencies of that time. This leads to his marginalization and accusations of the incorrectness of his views. Mehmeti becomes a victim of traditional resistance to change, embodied in his highland identity and stereotypes cultivated for centuries. At the same time, he is not perceived as a classical political opponent of the regime, as his main goal is to preserve the traditional way of life, which influences his choices more than political beliefs.

Mehmeti's inner conflict significantly defines the structure and dynamics of the novel. On the one hand, he is guided by traditional values and the resistance of his predecessor, the highlander who preserves his identity in the face of external challenges. On the other hand, the political and social reality of the communist period forces him to make new decisions that place him before moral Dylemmas. This conflict between the need to preserve the traditional freedom of the highlanders and the pressure of modernity gives his character depth and ambiguity. As Robert Elsie (2007) notes, Shkreli's hero embodies a person trying to maintain their freedom and identity in a world where these values are gradually eroding. This puts him at odds not only with society but also with himself, as he finds himself in a vicious circle of struggle between the past and the present.

A key role in creating this image is played by the narrative style, which bears the character of a classic storyteller, typical of Albanian highland narratives.

Shkreli uses archaic language, rich with provincial peculiarities, to emphasize his character's connection to traditions and his detachment from modern trends. Dyl Mehmeti is not merely a symbol of an antihero in the classical sense; he is the voice of highlanders who face the threat of losing their traditional freedom. In the context of the communist regime, which limits freedom of expression and traditional values, he appears as an opponent of the system, although his struggle takes the form of preserving cultural heritage rather than direct political opposition. Mehmeti tries to resist external changes and protect his world, but his methods are often perceived as flawed. He appears as a complex and ambiguous hero, whose motives are understandable only in the context of his historical and cultural surroundings.

Dyl Mehmeti, as an antihero, remains persistent and uncompromising in a society that constantly attempts to alter his identity and perspectives. One of Dyl Mehmeti's key traits is his confidence in his own invincibility. He does not succumb to the pressure exerted on him by external forces, nor does he accept compromise positions offered as ways of integrating into the new society. This confidence, however, is not a manifestation of egoism or cruelty. On the contrary, it is reinforced by his deep belief in his traditional values, which serve as his highest moral norm. Mehmeti acts as a guardian of traditional freedom, and his unwillingness to change his stance emphasizes not so much his personal protest against a particular system but rather his defense of his cultural heritage.

The antihero Dyl Mehmeti occupies a special place in the literary canon precisely because of his role as a counterpoint to traditional heroes. Shkreli intentionally places his hero on a pedestal that other characters, as well as part of the readership, perceive with ambivalence. For some, he is an example of resilience and indomitability; for others, a symbol of stubbornness and conservatism. However, it is important to note that his character is revealed not through active struggle against external forces but through internal resistance and unwavering faith in the rightness of his decisions, even when they are not accepted by others. This trait makes him an "antihero," as he acts contrary to expectations while maintaining inner integrity.

The literary and historical aspect of Dyl Mehmeti lies in the fact that he represents his time and place, a bearer of the ideals of Rugova highlanders who did not succumb to global trends of modernization and political transformation. In Shkreli's novel, he not only lives according to his convictions but also represents a larger context – the conflict between traditional values and the new order imposed from the outside. His loneliness on this path is not only the result of personal isolation but also evidence of the rupture between past and future, between

traditions and modernity. Mehmeti cannot change because his goal is not individual success but the preservation of the moral and cultural heritage of his people.

As Dean Brink (2013) notes, characters like Mehmeti demonstrate the “turning inside out” of dominant ideologies, offering both critical and active participation in this process. Despite the fact that the 1960s are often criticized for uncritical thinking and ahistoricism, Shkreli managed to create a novel that is not only a reflection on the past but also a complex critique of societal processes. Thus, Mehmeti is not only an antihero but also expresses the postmodern idea of resisting any forms of authority, questioning all dogmatic structures.

Through this novel, Shkreli expresses cultural criticism of what many viewed as the rise of postmodernism in the 1960s. The literary image of Dyl Mehmeti can be seen as embodying resistance to power systems imposed on the individual, who stands as a guardian of his freedom and cultural identity. In Dean Brink’s concept of “turning inside out”, Shkreli aptly highlights the postmodern character’s ability to criticize without rejecting participation in the criticized system, making Mehmeti a perfect example of such simultaneous involvement and resistance. Shkreli successfully introduced critical elements characteristic of postmodernism into the context of historical and cultural events, making his novel an important contribution to the development of literary thought of that time.

This study has explored the figure of the antihero in Azem Shkreli’s *The White Caravan*, with a specific focus on the protagonist, Dyl Mehmeti. Dyl embodies the key characteristics of the postmodern antihero: moral ambiguity, psychological conflict, and resistance to societal transformation. Unlike the classical hero, who often seeks to reconcile with society or adapt to external challenges, Dyl’s stance reflects a deeper, postmodern critique of the shifting socio-political landscape of postwar Kosovo.

Dyl’s journey is characterised by internal moral conflicts and psychological ambivalence – essential traits of the tragic antihero. Dyl’s opposition to modernity and his reluctance to adjust to the evolving landscape of postwar Kosovo arise from his steadfast commitment to traditional values, in contrast to the cynical antihero, who often exhibits disillusionment and detachment devoid of profound inner conflict. His weakness is his failure to align his aspirations with the demands of a swiftly evolving society. This self-sabotaging resistance, resulting in his isolation and eventual demise, exemplifies the archetype of the tragic antihero, whose trajectory is marked by an unavoidable deterioration due to his shortcomings.

Although a cynical antihero may dismiss society’s standards and morals due to disillusionment, frequently exhibiting a detached or ironic perspective, Dyl’s internal conflict is far deeper and intricately linked to his emotional and psychological

distress. His defiance is grounded not in a detached or sardonic perspective but in a profound moral commitment that conflicts with the surrounding changes. This tragic struggle between his adherence to tradition and the pressures of modernity leads to personal anguish and societal estrangement, characterised by him as a tragic antihero.

For instance, when Dyl faces societal development, he reacts not with cynicism or sarcastic detachment but with profound loss and resistance: “The world outside has changed, but I have not. They call it progress, but to me, it is nothing but the loss of all that is true and pure. Am I to abandon everything I know for a future I cannot touch?” (Shkreli 1975: 178). This chapter highlights Dyl’s inner complexity and his sad reluctance to embrace change. His repudiation of modernity stems not from cynicism but from a deep emotional attachment to his cultural identity and a moral conviction that eventually results in his solitude.

As Sakineh Hozhabr Lake et al. (2023) have discussed in their study of post-modern antiheroes, such figures are often symbols of protest and inner conflict, reflecting the collective anxieties of their respective cultures. Dyl Mehmeti shares these characteristics, embodying a resistance to modernity that transcends personal conviction and engages with broader cultural shifts. His internal turmoil and alienation from the world around him align closely with the postmodern archetype, where the character’s self-doubt and moral ambiguity form the core of their journey.

Shkreli’s work also parallels the postmodern antihero archetype discussed by Michaela Wolf (2023), who examines the intersection of traditional values and modern challenges. Dyl’s character embodies this duality, rooted in cultural heritage but constantly threatened by the pressures of modernity. Much like how Michaela Wolf emphasizes the need to understand characters within their specific historical and socio-political contexts, Dyl’s resistance should be seen through the lens of Kosovo’s cultural upheavals. His rejection of societal changes is not a mere existential choice; it is deeply connected to the struggles of postwar Kosovo, a society in turmoil, caught between the weight of tradition and the demands of progress.

Albrecht Classen’s (2022) analysis of the mediaeval critique of heroes in literature matches the portrayal of anti-heroes in Azem Shkreli’s work, namely Dyl Mehmeti in *The White Caravan*. Both emphasise protagonists who undermine conventional heroic values through irrationality, disobedience, or neglect. In Huon de Bordeaux, the protagonist’s persistent neglect of cautions propels the narrative and reveals shortcomings, which contrasts with Dyl Mehmeti’s opposition to societal transformation and his adherence to tradition in post-war Kosovo. These activities, despite criticism, are crucial in furthering the story and examining

greater societal tensions, whether the instability of mediaeval knights or the conflict between tradition and modernisation in Kosovo.

Senem Üstün Kaya's (2023) comparative perspective examines post-war anti-heroes such as Mehmeti, Mümtaz, and Jimmy, who eschew traditional heroism due to disillusionment and internal conflict. Their emotional disengagement, reluctance to evolve, and fixation on the past exemplify communal trauma and identity problems, illustrating the fragmented human condition in postmodern literature. In *The White Caravan*, Shkreli's Dyl Mehmeti personifies these characteristics, contending with terror and solitude in a nation ravaged by violence. His psychological distress and unpredictable conduct mirror those of Mümtaz and Jimmy, highlighting the post-war antiheroes' endeavour to reconcile their past with the present and accentuating the war's influence on human feeling and the transformation of heroism in literature.

The comparison between Dyl Mehmeti and other antiheroes, such as the protagonist of *Vagabond*, Shinmen Takezo, illustrates the universal appeal of the antihero archetype (Dewan 2022). Both Dyl and Takezo share characteristics of moral complexity and internal conflict, as their journeys reflect a profound alienation from the world around them. However, while Dyl's path is defined by his refusal to engage with the changing world, Takezo's journey is more about spiritual growth and self-actualization, which highlights the particular cultural dimensions of Shkreli's antihero. Unlike Takezo, whose character evolves through a process of reconciliation, Dyl's character remains rooted in defiance, underscoring his tragic nature.

In conclusion, the study of Dyl Mehmeti as an antihero in *The White Caravan* reveals the complexities of postmodern antiheroism, where the figure is defined not just by personal resistance but also by the societal and cultural forces that shape their existence. Dyl's journey exemplifies the moral ambiguity, psychological conflict, and tragic resolution that characterize postmodern antiheroes. Shkreli's portrayal of Dyl is a culturally grounded exploration of how individuals, caught between tradition and modernity, navigate the struggles of identity, loyalty, and resistance in a rapidly changing world.

Conclusions

This research study examines Azem Shkreli's depiction of the antihero in *The White Caravan*, concentrating on the figure Dyl Mehmeti. The research examined the function of the antihero in postmodern literature, specifically via the perspective

of Albanian literary traditions. Dyl Mehmeti is a multifaceted individual, symbolizing resistance to society's transformation while grappling with an internal ethical dilemma between conventional ideals and social influences. The essay emphasizes Shkreli's employment of the antihero as a mechanism for social critique, portraying Dyl as a symbol of alienation and a mirror of the cultural and political difficulties in post-war Kosovo. The study also examines the structural and psychological characteristics of Shkreli's antiheroes, enhancing the comprehension of character typology in postmodern literature. Subsequent study ought to build upon these findings by examining a wider array of Shkreli's oeuvre and additional Albanian literary antiheroes.

This research establishes a framework for the systematic analysis of antihero characteristics, facilitating further investigation into character typology in contemporary literature. Nonetheless, the study's concentration on a singular book and author constrains the applicability of its findings. Future research should encompass a wider array of Shkreli's work and more instances of antiheroes in Albanian literature. Furthermore, analyzing the reception of antiheroes in contemporary culture may yield significant insights into how current readers see moral difficulties and their impact on societal standards.

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