International Journal of Language and Literary Studies
Volume 8, Issue 4, 2026
Homepage : http://ijlls.org/index.php/ijlls

Body, Sacred Language and Poetic Form in Contemporary Albanian Poetry: The Case of Ledia Dushi

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v8i4.2682

APA Citation: Gjergji, S. (2026). Body, Sacred Language and Poetic Form in Contemporary Albanian Poetry: The Case of Ledia Dushi. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies, 8*(4).262-272 https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v8i4.2682

Received: *06/05/2026]*

Accepted: *26/06/2026]*

Keywords: *Ledia Dushi; Albanian poetry; Gheg Albanian; body; sacred language*

Abstract

This article examines the poetry of Ledia Dushi as a distinctive case of contemporary Albanian poetic expression in which body, sacred language, and poetic form are closely interwoven. Focusing primarily on Ave Maria bahet lot [Ave Maria Turns into Tears] and selected later developments in Dushi's poetry, the article argues that her work does not use bodily, natural, and liturgical imagery as decorative material, but transforms them into a coherent poetic system. Her authorial use of Gheg Albanian—understood here as Dushi's individualized and formally organized use of the dialect rather than as a fixed technical category—functions not merely as a dialectal marker, but as an aesthetic structure that shapes rhythm, intimacy, sound, and embodiment. Through close reading, the article analyses how images of the body, animals, natural elements, sacred figures, and liturgical objects produce a poetic universe in which the boundaries between the sensual and the spiritual, the human and the natural, and voice and silence remain deliberately unstable. The study also considers Dushi's movement from early figurative intensity toward a more restrained consciousness of form, fragmentation, and poetic silence.

1. Introduction: Ledia Dushi and the Poetics of Embodied Language

Contemporary Albanian poetry has often been read through the categories of historical transition, national identity, gendered experience, and linguistic experimentation. Within this literary field, the poetry of Ledia Dushi occupies a distinctive position because it brings together an intense bodily imagination, a highly individualized use of Gheg Albanian, and a recurrent transformation of sacred and liturgical language. Her poetry does not simply describe inner experience; it produces a poetic world in which body, nature, language, and sacred memory become inseparable.

Dushi's early collection *Ave Maria bahet lot* [Ave Maria Turns into Tears] (Dushi, 1997) already reveals the central features of this poetic universe. The title itself suggests a transformation of the sacred into embodied affect: the Marian and liturgical phrase is not preserved as a stable devotional formula, but becomes tear, voice, sensation, and poetic matter. Throughout the collection, religious figures and objects do not function as fixed doctrinal signs. They are reactivated within a language of flesh, breath, rhythm, and natural imagery. At the same time, the body is not merely a private or psychological space. It becomes the place where the world is registered, where desire and fear take form, and where the sacred is made sensorially present.

This article argues that Dushi's poetry should be read as a poetics of embodied sacred language. By this phrase, I mean that her poems do not separate spiritual vocabulary from bodily experience, nor do they treat nature as a decorative background. Instead, they construct a poetic system in which the body becomes a site of meaning, Gheg Albanian becomes an

aesthetic medium, and sacred language becomes part of a wider figurative economy. The article focuses primarily on *Ave Maria bahet lot*, while also considering later developments in Dushi's poetic trajectory, especially the movement from early figurative abundance toward a more restrained awareness of form, silence, and fragmentation.

The relevance of Dushi's poetry extends beyond Albanian literary studies. Her work raises broader questions about how contemporary poetry can use regional language, religious memory, and bodily imagery without reducing them to folklore, confession, or doctrine. In this respect, Dushi's poetry offers a valuable case for literary studies because it shows how a small-language poetic tradition can generate complex forms of modern poetic expression. Her use of Gheg Albanian is not simply a linguistic choice; it is a mode of poetic organization. Her sacred imagery is not merely inherited symbolism; it is transformed into a language of perception. Her body imagery is not only thematic; it is structural, shaping the rhythm, voice, and movement of the poem itself.

The argument is therefore organized around three related claims. First, Dushi's authorial Gheg, meaning her individual poetic shaping of Gheg rather than a separate linguistic category, is treated as a formal resource that produces compression, acoustic intensity, and a particular proximity between voice and body. Secondly, the body is read as a site where perception, desire, fear, memory, and language intersect. Thirdly, sacred language is examined as a mobile poetic material rather than as a fixed doctrinal code. These three claims make it possible to read Dushi's poetry not as a set of isolated themes, but as a system in which language, embodiment, and sacred memory continually reshape one another.

2. Method and Critical Orientation

The method of this article is close reading supported by a concept of poetics understood as the internal organization of language, image, rhythm, and form. This understanding of poetic meaning as something produced through discourse and textual relation is informed by hermeneutic and intertextual approaches to literary language (Kristeva, 1980; Ricoeur, 1976). The article does not approach Dushi's poetry primarily through biography or through a historical survey of Albanian poetry after the 1990s. This does not mean that biography, historical location, or the cultural position of Gheg Albanian are irrelevant. Rather, they are treated as framing conditions that may illuminate the poems, while the centre of the argument remains the poem as a structure of language and perception.

This approach also requires a distinction between theme and poetic function. To say that Dushi writes about the body, nature, or sacred objects is insufficient. The more important question is how these elements operate inside the poem. A fox, a hare, a seagull, a priest, an angel, a cross, water, winter, or skin does not appear merely as a symbolic item with a stable meaning. Each figure enters a field of transformation, where the boundary between external world and inner sensation becomes uncertain. The poem is therefore not a container of meanings already formed elsewhere; it is the process through which meanings are generated.

The article uses the term "sacred language" in a literary rather than doctrinal sense. It does not claim that Dushi's poetry advances a theological system. Rather, it examines how liturgical and biblical echoes are reworked as poetic materials. The title *Ave Maria bahet lot* (Dushi, 1997) is exemplary in this regard because it transforms a recognizable devotional phrase into an embodied poetic event. The sacred becomes tear, voice, rhythm, and bodily affect.

Similarly, the discussion of Gheg Albanian is not meant to reduce the poetry to linguistic identity. The use of Gheg is important, but not because it merely marks regional origin or cultural belonging. In Dushi's poems, Gheg works as sound, breath, compression, intimacy, and rhythm. It shapes the body of the line. It produces nearness between the lyrical "I" and the world. It also makes certain images materially stronger, because the phonetic and syntactic texture of the language carries the image before it is conceptually explained. The article therefore treats language as form, not simply as medium.

The article also avoids a biographical reduction of the poems. Although the literary, historical, and linguistic context of Dushi's work matters, the primary object of analysis is the poem as a structure of meaning. This is particularly important because the intensity of the body, the recurrence of sacred figures, and the use of intimate language could easily invite a narrowly confessional reading. The approach taken here is different but not contextless: it asks how those materials function formally within poems that are also historically and linguistically embedded. What matters is not only what the poem says about the body or the sacred, but how it turns body and sacred language into rhythm, image, interruption, and relation.

3. Gheg Albanian as Authorial Poetic Language

One of the most distinctive features of Dushi's poetry is her authorial use of Gheg Albanian. In this article, "authorial" does not designate a rigid term of art; it refers to Dushi's individual poetic shaping of Gheg as a chosen and internally organized medium. In Ave Maria bahet lot (Dushi, 1997), Gheg is not a decorative dialectal colour added to an otherwise standard poetic discourse. It is the very material through which the poetic world is built. Clitic forms such as "m'," "n'," and "t'," together with phonetic and lexical forms such as "asht," "mue," "kambë," and "tamël," create a language of contraction, breath, and bodily proximity. These features do not merely identify the poem linguistically. They organize its rhythm and sensuous force.

This is why Dushi's Gheg should be understood as an aesthetic structure. It shapes rhythm before it conveys meaning. The shortened forms and elisions produce a movement that often seems closer to breathing than to statement. The line does not unfold in a fully explanatory syntax; it pulses. This rhythm is central to the poems' bodily quality. The reader hears a voice that is close to the skin, not a neutral literary language standing at a distance from experience.

A brief textual example shows how bodily sensation and dialectal sound appear together. In the opening movement of *Ave Maria bahet lot*, seasonal change is not described from the outside but felt directly on the body:

> *"Stinët, / m'shkojn djersë n'trup; / pemët / kanë thithë / tamblin e borës…" ["The seasons / pass through my body as sweat; / the trees / have drunk / the milk of snow…"] (Dushi, 1997, p. 9).*

The compressed forms m'shkojn and n'trup do more than mark dialect. They shorten the movement of the line and make the body the immediate surface on which the season is registered. In the sequence "Stinët, / m'shkojn djersë n'trup," the elided clitic m' fuses the seasonal movement with the speaker's body before the line has time to unfold into explanation. The following n'trup contracts space as well as syntax: the body is not the object of description but the place into which weather, time, and sensation enter. The pauses created by the line breaks—"Stinët," then "m'shkojn," then "djersë n'trup"—produce a rhythm of short pressures rather than a smooth narrative sentence. The image of trees drinking the "milk of snow" also shows how Dushi's Gheg can join natural process, bodily texture, and acoustic softness in a single poetic gesture.

This example also shows why the dialectal forms have rhythmic effects that would be weakened in a more explanatory standard phrasing. The monosyllabic contractions m' and n' reduce grammatical distance and create a breath-like pulse. The consonantal pressure of trup, thithë, and tamblin gives the passage a tactile density, while the soft liquids and nasals in tamblin e borës slow the movement after the initial compression. The poem therefore makes Gheg operate simultaneously as grammar, sound pattern, and bodily rhythm. It is not only what is said in Gheg that matters, but the way the shortened forms cause the line to move, pause, and press against the body.

The effect is especially visible in the collection's bodily metaphors. When the speaker's body is crossed by animals, water, fire, or vegetal images, Gheg gives these transformations an immediate physical density. The language does not soften the collision between body and world. On the contrary, it makes that collision audible. The clipped prepositions, the

consonantal clusters, and the syntactic parataxis make the verse feel as though it is being pressed into shape by sensation itself.

In this sense, Gheg functions as a language of embodiment. It allows the poem to place the lyrical subject inside the world rather than opposite it. The "I" is not a stable consciousness observing nature. It is a porous body through which nature passes. The phrase forms themselves often create this porousness: "m'" attaches the world to the self, while "n'" places the self inside a spatial and material field. These small linguistic elements are not marginal. They produce the intimacy of Dushi's poetic voice.

The use of Gheg also resists a purely folkloric reading. It would be reductive to treat the dialect as an ethnographic marker or as a nostalgic return to an older linguistic purity. Dushi's language is modern precisely because it reactivates Gheg as a flexible poetic instrument. The dialect is not preserved; it is made to work. It carries liturgical fragments, erotic tensions, animal images, and broken syntactic movements. It makes possible a poetry in which inherited language becomes experimental form.

This authorial language also gives Dushi's poetry an important place in the wider history of Albanian literary expression. Albanian literature has long been shaped by the relationship between standard language, regional idioms, religious registers, and oral memory. Dushi's poetry does not enter this history by making a programmatic linguistic argument. Instead, it demonstrates what poetic language can do when it is allowed to remain materially specific. Her Gheg is neither provincial nor merely identity-based; it is an aesthetic mode through which rhythm, body, and sacred memory become inseparable.

The importance of this language becomes clearer when one considers the relation between sound and bodily perception. Many of Dushi's lines depend on contraction, elision, and abrupt syntactic movement. These features do not merely reproduce spoken language; they organize the poem as a sequence of breaths and pressures. The reader encounters language as something tactile and acoustic, not only semantic. In this sense, Gheg Albanian allows Dushi to create a poetic body at the level of form itself. The poem sounds as if it has skin, breath, and pulse.

4. The Body as a Site of Meaning

The body in Dushi's poetry is not a passive object that receives experience. It is the place where meaning is produced. Desire, fear, pain, memory, and perception are not presented as abstract states; they are registered under the skin, in the mouth, in the eyes, in the throat, in breath, and in trembling. This logic is already visible in *Ave Maria bahet lot*, where the body frequently becomes the point at which natural and sacred imagery are joined (Dushi, 1997).

In *Ave Maria bahet lot*, the body is repeatedly opened to natural and animal figures. The self becomes crossed by foxes, birds, water, fire, and vegetal textures. These images are not conventional metaphors in which one term neatly replaces another. They are events of transformation. The body does not merely resemble nature; it is invaded by it, extended through it, and sometimes dissolved into it. Such figures produce a poetic universe in which the distinction between inner and outer reality remains unstable.

This bodily opening is especially clear in one of the most concentrated images of the early collection:

> *"Prej gjoksit / m'zbërthehet nji dhelpën, / Kthehet n' 'dashuni'" ["From my chest / a fox unbuttons itself in me, / turns into 'love'"] (Dushi, 1997, p. 12).*

The fox emerges from the chest and becomes love. The point is not that the poem refuses psychology as such, but that it does not present desire in the explanatory mode associated with confessional self-analysis. Instead of narrating an inner state, the line stages desire as a bodily and animal transformation. The figure is intimate, but it is not sentimental. It gives love a living, cunning, and instinctive form, while the verb m'zbërthehet suggests an opening of the self that is both linguistic and corporeal.

The erotic dimension of Dushi's poetry should be understood within this broader structure of embodiment. Erotic imagery is present, but it is rarely direct, narrative, or confessional in the usual sense of autobiographical disclosure. It appears through fruit, animal movement, skin, trembling, heat, and touch. The result is not a confessional eroticism but a poetics of intensity. Desire becomes one form of contact between the body and the world. It does not remain confined to the private self; it moves through natural figures and sacred echoes.

This gives Dushi's poetry a distinctive complexity. The body is at once sensual and vulnerable, sacred and earthly, personal and impersonal. It does not function as a stable identity. Rather, it is a field of registration. The world writes itself upon the body, and the body responds by producing images. In this respect, Dushi's poetry participates in a broader modern poetic concern with embodiment, but it does so through a specifically Albanian linguistic and symbolic texture.

The later development of Dushi's poetry deepens this bodily logic by moving toward fracture, coldness, and silence. In the interpretive frame of *Seancë dimnash* [Winter Sessions], winter can be read not simply as a season but as an ontological condition (Dushi, 2004). The body becomes cooled, reduced, interrupted. It is still a site of meaning, but meaning is now produced through absence and restraint rather than through overflowing image.

This bodily logic also helps explain why Dushi's poems frequently blur the boundary between inside and outside. Natural elements do not remain external to the speaker; they enter the body, disturb it, or become indistinguishable from it. Conversely, bodily states are projected into animals, plants, weather, and matter. The result is not a simple metaphorical exchange, but a poetic ontology in which the self is never sealed off from the world. The body is an interface: it receives the world and gives it back as image.

5. Sacred Language and Liturgical Transformation

Sacred language in Dushi's poetry is never merely ornamental. It appears as one of the central materials through which the poems organize experience. The title *Ave Maria bahet lot* already introduces a powerful transformation (Dushi, 1997). "Ave Maria" evokes prayer, devotion, and liturgical memory, but the phrase is altered by becoming "tear." The sacred is not abandoned; it is embodied. It is brought into the sphere of crying, flesh, sound, and affect.

Religious figures such as priests and angels also undergo this transformation. They do not appear as representatives of a stable doctrinal system. They enter the poetic field as images that can be touched, displaced, and mingled with nature. Angels may descend into the body's paradise; a priest may appear inside a cloud or in relation to light. The sacred is therefore not distant. It is brought into the same sensory world as animals, fruit, water, skin, and breath.

The transformation of sacred figures into sensorial poetic matter can be seen in the treatment of both priestly and angelic imagery:

> *"N'nji re, / prifti luen urtshëm / me kokrrat e diellit" ["In a cloud, / the priest gently plays / with the grains of the sun"] (Dushi, 1997, p. 9).*

The priest is not placed inside an institutional scene such as church, altar, sermon, or ritual office. He appears "in a cloud," playing gently with the "grains of the sun." This relocation loosens the figure from ecclesiastical authority and transfers it into the natural and luminous order of the poem. The verb luen [plays] is important because it turns priestly action away from solemn ritual and toward a delicate, almost childlike gesture. The "grains of the sun" further materialize light: illumination is no longer abstract grace, but something particulate, touchable, and almost tactile. The priestly figure is therefore transformed from a representative of doctrine into an image of contact between sacred memory, cloud, light, and sensory perception. A similar transformation appears when angels descend as fruit in the "paradises" of the body, so that liturgical language becomes tactile, vegetal, and embodied rather than purely doctrinal (Dushi, 1997, p. 14).

This reading also clarifies how Dushi's sacred imagery differs from simple secularization. The priest does not disappear, nor is he treated ironically. Instead, his sacred function is displaced into poetic form. The cloud suspends him between earth and transcendence, while the grains of light bring the sacred downward into matter. In this way the poem does not reject the sacred figure; it converts him into a sensorial event and places him inside the same figurative economy that includes body, animals, fruit, water, and breath.

This does not mean that the poems secularize the sacred by emptying it of force. On the contrary, the sacred remains powerful because it is no longer locked within institutional or doctrinal signs. It becomes a mode of perception. Dushi's poetry makes religious memory available to the senses. The sacred is felt as sound, texture, movement, and interruption. It is not simply believed; it is experienced as poetic matter.

The cross and liturgical objects function similarly. They do not remain fixed symbols with a single theological meaning. They are drawn into the bodily and natural economy of the poem. Their meaning arises from contact, displacement, and recontextualization. A sacred sign may appear beside an animal image, a natural element, or a bodily sensation. This produces a poetics in which the religious and the sensual do not cancel one another. Instead, they form a shared field of intensity.

Such a relation to the sacred is important for understanding Dushi's modernity. Modern poetry often approaches religious language either through irony, nostalgia, or loss. Dushi's poetry takes a different path. It does not simply mourn the disappearance of transcendence, nor does it treat liturgical language as an empty cultural residue. It reworks sacred language as embodied speech. In doing so, it creates a poetic space where prayer becomes tear, where angels become fruit, where the divine is felt through the instability of the body and the natural world.

This transformation also has implications for the study of Albanian poetry. Albanian literary culture has been shaped by multiple religious traditions and by the complex relationship between language, identity, and spirituality. Dushi's poetry does not make these issues explicit in a programmatic way. Yet her poems show how sacred registers can survive inside modern poetic language, not as doctrine, but as form. The sacred becomes a mode of figuration, rhythm, and affective pressure.

For this reason, the sacred in Dushi should be understood as a mode of intensification. It heightens the poem's attention to the fragile threshold between speech and silence, matter and spirit, presence and disappearance. A liturgical phrase such as Ave Maria does not function only through its inherited religious meaning; it becomes powerful because the poem makes it undergo affective and material change. The sacred is not simply cited. It is made to pass through tears, breath, skin, animality, and sound.

6. Nature, Animals and Figurative Instability

The natural world in Dushi's poetry is not a background against which human experience takes place. It is an active agent of figuration. Animals, plants, water, fire, air, winter, birds, and soil do not merely decorate the poem; they participate in the making of poetic meaning. This is why Dushi's imagery often feels unstable. A fox is not only a fox; a hare is not only a hare; water is not only water. Each figure becomes a crossing point between bodily sensation and symbolic possibility (Dushi, 1997).

The same logic is visible in Dushi's brief but powerful images of birds, sand, and stone:

"pulbardhën / n' synin e ranës" ["the seagull / in the eye of the sand"] (Dushi, 1997, pp. 57–58).

Here the sand is given an eye, while the seagull becomes part of a visual field that is neither purely natural nor purely symbolic. Elsewhere, the moon is placed on the tongue of stone—"Nji hanë e rrejshme / rrin / n'gjuhë t'shkambit…" ["A false moon / rests / on the tongue of

the rock…"]—so that even mineral matter appears capable of speech and deception (Dushi, 1997, p. 50). Such images make nature a site of figurative agency.

The fox is one of the most suggestive figures in *Ave Maria bahet lot*. Traditionally associated with cunning, instinct, and survival, it becomes in Dushi's poetry a figure that moves between erotic energy and self-protection. It can emerge from the body, become love, or stand as a warning against violation. The animal image therefore does not have one fixed symbolic meaning. It changes according to the movement of the poem. This flexibility is one reason why Dushi's figurative system resists simple decoding.

The hare works differently. It often carries fragility, fear, and the trace of disappearance. Where the fox suggests instinctive energy, the hare suggests vulnerability. Yet even here the image is not merely symbolic. It appears as a sensory disturbance, a small creature that registers the instability of memory and the tremor of the self. The animal does not illustrate an emotion; it makes the emotion perceptible.

The seagull and the frog further expand this natural system. The seagull brings whiteness, distance, and fragile hope, but it is often placed in landscapes where purity is threatened. Frogs bring wetness, darkness, and sound. They disturb silence and connect the body to an amphibian environment of mud, water, and night. Through such figures, Dushi makes nature strange. It is neither pastoral harmony nor symbolic code. It is a changing field where perception becomes unstable.

This figurative instability also links Dushi's poetry to modern and surreal tendencies, though it should not be reduced to influence. Her images often resemble surrealist juxtapositions because ordinary elements are placed in unexpected relations. Yet the effect is not merely dreamlike. The images remain materially concrete. The body, animal, plant, and sacred object are not dissolved into abstraction. They keep their sensory weight. The poem's strangeness arises from the fact that these concrete things enter relations that disturb ordinary perception.

Later volumes intensify this logic by turning nature into a more explicitly structural force. Winter, water, birds, and darkness are not merely motifs. They become regimes of perception and form, especially in *Seancë dimnash* and *Me mujt me fjet' me kthimin e shpendve* [To Be Able to Sleep with the Return of the Birds] (Dushi, 2004, 2009). The poetic world is no longer simply full of natural images; it is organized by elemental pressure. Nature becomes the means through which the poem thinks about time, trauma, memory, and the vulnerability of the subject.

The ecological dimension of this imagery should not be understood in a narrow thematic sense. Dushi is not primarily writing nature poetry in the descriptive tradition. Rather, her work suggests an ecopoetic imagination in which human subjectivity is continuously unsettled by non-human presences. Animals, water, air, soil, and seasonal change do not serve the speaker; they transform the conditions under which the speaker can appear. This gives the poetry a contemporary relevance, since it challenges the assumption that the human subject stands at the centre of poetic perception.

7. From Figurative Intensity to Consciousness of Form

One of the most important aspects of Dushi's poetic trajectory is the movement from early figurative intensity toward a more deliberate consciousness of form. This should not be understood as a simple progression from immaturity to maturity. *Ave Maria bahet lot* already shows a strong poetic awareness. The later development is better described as a transformation in the management of intensity. The early poetry often works through abundance: dense images, sensory collisions, animal and sacred figures, and a language full of rhythm and bodily movement. The later poetry tends to concentrate, interrupt, and reduce.

This movement from abundance to restraint does not erase the early collection's sharp materialization of time. Even temporal experience is made bodily and tactile:

"Fmijët, ditët i shtijn n'gojë / si gishta t'thyem" ["Children put the days into their mouths / like broken fingers"] (Dushi, 1997, p. 31).

Days are not abstract units of chronology; they are placed in the mouth like broken fingers. The image is disturbing because it makes time edible, painful, and anatomically fragmented. It also anticipates the later poetry's concern with fracture, silence, and the difficulty of turning experience into continuous speech.

This change can be seen through the concepts of silence, fragmentation, and winter. In the later interpretive frame of *Seancë dimnash*, winter becomes more than a thematic motif. It becomes a regime of being (Dushi, 2004). The poem no longer moves primarily through sensuous proliferation. It becomes colder, more reduced, more conscious of interruption. This does not mean that the earlier intensity disappears. It means that intensity is reorganized through silence.

This development is significant because it shows that Dushi's poetry is not a collection of isolated images. It is a developing poetic system. The early body of the poem is sensorially open, almost overflowing. Later, the body becomes more marked by silence and interruption. The sacred, too, changes. It is no longer only embodied in lush and surprising figures; it may appear as exhausted, withdrawn, or darkened. The language becomes more economical, and the poem increasingly values what is left unsaid.

The movement toward restraint does not cancel the earlier poetics of embodiment. Rather, it transforms it. Silence becomes another form of embodiment. Fragmentation becomes another way of registering experience. The body still matters, but it is no longer only a site of intensity; it is also a site of absence. The poem still seeks contact with the world, but that contact is more difficult, more broken, and more ethically charged.

This shift also gives Dushi's poetry a broader relevance for contemporary literary studies. It demonstrates how poetic form can respond to trauma, memory, and existential pressure without turning them into narrative explanation. This concern resonates with twentieth-century reflections on witness, disaster, and the limits of representation (Agamben, 1999; Blanchot, 1995; Celan, 2001). The later poems do not necessarily "tell" trauma. They produce forms in which trauma appears as fracture, pause, coldness, and visual interruption.

The evolution of Dushi's poetry is therefore spiral rather than linear. The early concerns remain present, but they are reconfigured. Body, sacred language, nature, and rhythm continue to organize the poetry, but their relations change. The early emphasis on figurative abundance gives way to a more controlled formal consciousness. This movement from intensity to restraint is one of the strongest reasons to read Dushi not only as a powerful individual poet, but as a poet whose work reveals a coherent and developing poetics.

This transformation also changes the role of the reader. In the earlier poems, the reader is often confronted with an overflow of images that demand sensory participation. In the later work, the reader is asked to attend to gaps, pauses, and reduced forms. Interpretation must therefore move between intensity and restraint. It must follow both the visible figure and the space around it. Dushi's poetic development teaches the reader to understand silence not as the absence of meaning, but as one of the forms through which meaning is produced.

8. Textual Examples: From Image to Poetic System

A closer look at several recurring images clarifies how Dushi's poems move from isolated metaphor to poetic system. The fox, for example, is not only an animal figure. It is an image through which the body discovers its own instinctive and affective charge. When the fox is imagined as emerging from the body and becoming love, animality and desire are made inseparable (Dushi, 1997). The image does not translate desire into confessional explanation; it gives it a moving form.

The hare has a different function. It often brings a sense of fragile disappearance. Unlike the fox, which carries energy and cunning, the hare is connected with fear, memory, and loss.

When hares vanish into memory and leave behind damaged or bitten flowers, the poem turns recollection into a tactile and vegetal scene. Memory is not an archive of clear images; it is a trace left in the body and in the earth. This is why Dushi's figurative language is never purely visual. Even when the image is seen, it is also touched, tasted, or felt as pressure.

The cumulative effect of these examples is a poetics of relation. The claim that no figure stands alone should not be understood absolutely, as if every poem contained the entire symbolic network at once. Some poems in Dushi's work concentrate intensely on a single dominant image or thematic pressure. Yet even in such cases, the image rarely remains self-enclosed: its meaning is inflected by the wider field of body, natural matter, sacred memory, and sound established across the collection. The fox is connected to the body, the body to love, love to animal instinct, the animal to language, language to rhythm. The priest is connected to clouds or light, the angel to fruit or the body's interior paradise, the cross to material and sensory pressure. Dushi's poetry is therefore not best read as a sequence of separate symbolic meanings. It is better read as a network in which even apparently isolated images are modified by echoes from other images. This network produces the coherence of the poetic universe without erasing the local intensity of individual poems.

The same logic governs Dushi's use of liturgical elements. A priest, an angel, or a Marian phrase is not placed in the poem in order to preserve a devotional code unchanged. These figures are exposed to the same processes of embodiment as the animal and natural figures. The sacred becomes part of the poem's material world. It is heard, touched, displaced, and sometimes darkened. This is why the sacred in Dushi's work remains powerful without becoming doctrinally fixed. It does not tell the reader what to believe; it changes how poetic perception works.

The quoted lines therefore function as textual anchors rather than illustrative ornaments. They show that Dushi's poetic meaning is generated through the conversion of sensation into form: sweat becomes seasonal time, the fox becomes love, the priest becomes a figure of cloud and light, the seagull enters the eye of sand, and days become broken fingers. Each instance confirms that the poem's symbolic force is inseparable from its linguistic and material construction.

This relational structure is also what prevents the poems from becoming purely private or hermetic. Although the imagery is often intimate and difficult, its difficulty has a formal logic. The poem does not hide meaning; it produces meaning through association, displacement, and sensory pressure. The reader is invited to experience connections before reducing them to explanation. In this respect, Dushi's poetry is modern not because it abandons tradition, but because it makes tradition, dialect, body, and sacred memory available to new forms of poetic relation.

9. Dushi and the Wider Question of Contemporary Albanian Poetics

Dushi's poetry also invites a broader reconsideration of contemporary Albanian poetics. Albanian poetry after the late twentieth century cannot be understood only through political transition or social change, even though those contexts remain important. It must also be studied through the internal transformation of poetic language, especially through regional idioms, bodily imagery, sacred memory, and formal experimentation. Dushi's three collections examined here provide a clear case of such transformation (Dushi, 1997, 2004, 2009).

Her use of Gheg Albanian is especially important in this context. In Albanian literary history, the relationship between standard language and regional forms has often carried ideological, cultural, and aesthetic implications. Dushi's poetry does not turn this relationship into a polemic. Instead, it demonstrates that a regional linguistic form can function as a modern poetic medium. Gheg is not used to imitate oral tradition; it is used to build complex images, fragmented syntax, liturgical echoes, and bodily rhythms. This makes her work relevant for discussions of language choice in small literary cultures more generally.

Dushi's treatment of the sacred also has wider implications. In many modern literatures, religious language appears after the weakening of traditional belief as a trace, memory, or ruin. In Dushi's poems, however, sacred language is neither simply preserved nor simply lost. It is transformed. Liturgical and biblical echoes are not quoted as cultural ornaments; they are re-embodied in poetic experience. This makes the sacred available to modern poetry without requiring a return to doctrinal closure. The sacred becomes a way of making intensity, vulnerability, and perception visible.

The body, finally, provides the strongest link between Dushi's local poetic language and broader contemporary concerns. Modern and contemporary poetry often turns to the body as the site where history, gender, trauma, desire, and language meet. Dushi's poetry belongs to this wider field, but it gives the body a specific linguistic and symbolic form. The body in her poems is not only wounded or desiring; it is also linguistic. It speaks through Gheg rhythms, through animal images, through liturgical fragments, and through silence. This makes embodiment inseparable from poetic form.

For this reason, Dushi's work should not be seen as marginal simply because it comes from a small-language literary tradition. On the contrary, its specificity is what gives it comparative value. It shows how contemporary poetry can create a powerful aesthetic system from materials that are local, regional, religious, and bodily. The poems do not need to abandon their Albanian linguistic texture in order to become relevant beyond Albania. Their wider significance lies precisely in the way they transform that texture into form.

Such a perspective is particularly useful for journals and readers concerned with language and literary studies, because it shows how literary value may emerge from the internal organization of a language that is not globally dominant. Dushi's poetry asks to be read not as an example of local colour, but as a theoretically relevant case of poetic making. It brings together questions of dialect, gendered embodiment, religious memory, figurative instability, and form. These are not peripheral concerns; they belong to some of the central debates in contemporary literary criticism.

10. Conclusion

Ledia Dushi's poetry offers a distinctive example of contemporary Albanian poetic expression in which body, sacred language, nature, and form are deeply interwoven. Her work cannot be adequately understood through thematic description alone. The body is not simply a theme; it is the site where the poem produces meaning. Sacred language is not simply inherited religious vocabulary; it becomes a material of perception. Nature is not simply setting; it becomes an active force of figuration. Across *Ave Maria bahet lot*, *Seancë dimnash*, and *Me mujt me fjet' me kthimin e shpendve*, these elements form a developing poetic system (Dushi, 1997, 2004, 2009).

The reading proposed in this article has argued that Dushi's poetry can be understood as a poetics of embodied sacred language. This poetics is visible with particular force in *Ave Maria bahet lot*, where liturgical echoes, animal figures, bodily sensation, and natural elements are brought into unstable but coherent relations. The sacred becomes tear, voice, fruit, breath, and touch. The body becomes a field of perception. Language becomes a form of bodily presence.

Future research could extend this argument in several directions. A comparative study with other Albanian poets who write through regional idioms, religious memory, or bodily imagery would help clarify what is specific to Dushi and what belongs to wider developments in contemporary Albanian poetry. Further work on the later collections could also examine more closely the relation between silence, fragmentation, and poetic form. Finally, Dushi's treatment of body, animals, landscape, and sacred language invites dialogue with ecocritical and postsecular approaches, especially where the poems unsettle the boundaries between human subjectivity, non-human life, and transformed religious memory.

At the same time, Dushi's later development shows that this poetics is not static. The movement from early figurative abundance toward silence, fragmentation, and formal restraint

reveals a continuing transformation of poetic consciousness. The same central concerns remain, but they are reorganized under new conditions of expression. This makes Dushi's work important not only for Albanian literary criticism but also for broader discussions of modern poetry, regional language, embodiment, sacred imagery, and the relationship between form and experience.

For literary studies, Dushi's poetry demonstrates that small-language traditions can produce complex and theoretically significant poetic systems. Her work invites readers to reconsider the relation between dialect and form, religion and embodiment, nature and subjectivity, intensity and silence. In doing so, it shows that contemporary Albanian poetry is not merely a national literary object, but part of a wider conversation about how poetry gives form to the body, the sacred, and the unsayable.

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