

STUDIES: GEORGIAN LITERATURE

Some Humanistic Motifs in the Lyrics of Vazha-Pshavela

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In Georgian literary criticism Vazha-Pshavela's feel for nature, style, folk background etc. is widely spoken of. However less attention is paid to two humanistic problems which are represented in the lyrics of Vazha-Pshavela and presented in an original aspect at that. This time we will focus on the literary interpretation of death in the lyrics of the poet.

"Georgian writers avoid the subject of death", - notices Georgian researcher Kita Abashidze. Titsian Tabidze interprets this as something quite significant which reveals the national essence of our literature. This means that even if Georgia placed in her coffin she never thinks of death. Only Vazha-Pshavela and K. Maqashvili might say that they did justice to this problem [12, p. 305]. The phenomenon of death through the prism of Vazha-Pshavela's lyrics implies the predecessors' spiritual wealth of experience, culture and potential charge of the whole nation's mentality. Conceptualization of death in Georgian literature began in ancient times. Each era added different nuances to the problem of death.

In hymnography and hagiography tragicalness of death did not exist. It was the beginning of an eternal life, thus the door to happiness. The concept of death was replaced with the word passing which heralds the birth of a new, superior life. Saint Shushanik viewed the night of her torture as the beginning of joy and impatiently waited for the day of her death. The beatific Abo calmed people saddened about his fate by invoking them to pray and be cheerful.

In "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" Rustaveli broadens the notion of death, characterizes it and enriches it with details. Death is inevitable, it visits everyone. The knight prefers glorious death to shameful life. By his good deeds he must strive to leave a good name in life and overcome difficulties on the way to heaven.

David Guramishvili's conceptualization of death - although linked with church writings and folk traditions - basically follows the Rustaveli's path. It must be stated that Guramishvili differs from Rustaveli in strengthening the subjective factor, which reveals itself in the poem: "Dispute and dissension of man and death". One can't run away, hide or fight death. This poem combines Rustvelian and Christian motifs. The author believes that

death is the matter of God's will and intention. According to Guramishvili the theme of life and death is connected with limited lifetime and an eternity of spiritual existence.

The motif of death is overlapped by the idea of eternity in the lyrics of romantic poets. Immortality is love for them.

While analyzing Vazha-Pshavela's lyrics it is not sufficient to deal only with Georgian literary or folk sources. One should also take into account that while studying in Saint Petersburg the poet gained knowledge of works and ideas of the world's philosophers and writers.

According to the 19th century philosophical understanding, death is not an amorphous essence, but acts as a catalyst which makes people strain, adjust their vital forces. Fear of death – notes Spengler – is the most creative feeling of all. Men should be grateful for this feeling of the deepest and most sufficient images and icons.

Bearing in mind the foregoing, death in the lyrics of Vazha-Pshavela is a puzzle: in line with all the other mysteries of life. Life and death are parts of existential structures. The lyricist isn't trying to aestheticize life or death.

In his lyrics we see many artistic symbols of death: "the darkness", "sleeping side", "mighty kingdom", "black dominion", "human life taker" etc. In this article we will only deal with one aspect of analyzing death in the lyrics of Vazha-Pshavela, in one specific poem.

The feature of ephemeral human life in European iconography, allegoric subject of art and literature, is known by the name of death dance (dance macabre).

This motif is shown in the lyrics of Vazha-Pshavela's poem "The Darkness" which echoes this concept. Death is diluted with mythological elements. The poet describes the dreadful scene of kingdom come; the only thought of which is frightful.

The poet's words: "you will be stoned" again echoes the death iconography mentioned above. Bare skeletons are dancing while people dressed according to their rank are standing stiff. The skeletons' gay rhythm and the stiffness of people are in great contrast. The main coryphaeus in "dance macabre" is death itself that was human once. The main idea of this motive is the equalizing force of death which formed the basis of more complex and deep allegories.

For the history of death iconography we should mention that drama and dance in Europe during the Middle Ages were not separated from each other, which gives account for the name of "dance of death".

Vazha-Pshavela's poem "The Darkness" transfers the plot to the nether, underworld while "dance of death" progresses in the real world - the realities which attribute those scenes make us believe in that. On the other hand, in the analyzed poem the place is specifically identified and it is the netherworld. "The grabbing hand of the netherworld" is an interesting poetic icon that resembles once again dancing skeletons and people. The colour symbols are appropriate: everything around is coal black.

The vision of death is strengthened referring to an image of a mower, who is nowhere to be seen. This image is very interesting and carries double symbolic meaning. His weapon – sickle is crescent-shaped which is the symbol of fertility and abundance. As a result, the

sickle according to Christian symbolism may represent fertility and be an allegory of death as well. For instance, in the apocalyptic visions angels carry sickles. In folk poetry, specifically in Pshavian folklore the image of a mower carries the function of death (“Death said”). This image also prevails in the lyrics of Guramishvili with the symbol of death.

The following couplet is distinguished for water symbolism, which is associated with death, mourning and tears. Tear lake is found in many Georgian tales. However, in this very poem the tears in the lake are tears of the dead, not of the living. This proves once more Vazha-Pshavela’s creative attitude towards folklore and not only.

The typical frame of “dance macabre” is a characteristic of dead people: in the netherworld there is no jealousy or hostility. Everyone is equal. The subsequent stanza shows the whirl of the dead. The dead in one line are hand in hand with no trace of living. Thus it is only the dance of the dead. This novelty towards the dance of the dead is followed by one more original detail: whereas in most pictures, engravings, verses or iconography death is the winner; in Vazha-Pshavela’s poem death is mourning. The dead are crying and praying for the living, who have honest and fair lives. The deceased are driven by real world emotions: sorrow, sympathy... In general the dead in the lyrics of Vazha-Pshavela are actively involved in everyday life. They think, talk, care and mourn about the living. The motif of connecting two hypostases of existence – echoes the thoughts of medieval thinkers. According to them the dead are connected with the living: they come back to earth to finish what they started in their lifetime.

Johan Huizinga, while researching Middle-age thinking systems, came across the “dance macabre” phenomenon and was surprised why Europeans couldn’t make one more step from decaying towards life. Transience of life is the leitmotif of “dance macabre” - though this process doesn’t last forever: it ends on the spot, in front of our eyes and the remains turn into ashes, ashes into soil, and soil feeds life again. We think that the step forward mentioned by Huizinga was taken by Vazha-Pshavela. Otherwise, the dead couldn’t bless the living. Vazha-Pshavela’s lyrical world knows another type of death, apart from Europeans. According to Georgians, death is not a curse or horror. It is a passing, a beginning of a new life. Honorable death motif and responsibility for your conscience, realization, justification of one’s own existence, its moral development is important.

Vazha-Pshavela’s lyrics and thinking style shows the eclectic nature. Death is not something that stands alone but it is included in the essence of life. The subjective moment towards death is strengthened – through the fiction form of dialogues and conversations. In Vazha-Pshavela’s lyrics mortality grants humans moral responsibility, in the core of what lays not the fear of punishment for one’s sins but self-conscious responsibility. The phenomenon of death doesn’t turn our lives into nonsense, but underlines its unalterable value.

...One more motif which is reflected in the lyrics of Vazha-Pshavela is the playful nature of poetry. This motif was especially developed in the 20th century literature and philosophy. The essence of play was historically connected with singing in Georgian folklore

and literature. The lexeme “singing” carries double semiosis. Singing – chanting and singing – playing.

The term “singing” is significant in terms of the history of Georgian poetry. In “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” this word is treated polysemantically. For Rostevan “singing” is connected with playing backgammon and for Avtandil “singing” is chanting, caroling.

In the lyrics of Vazha-Pshavela many poems are given the heading “singing”: “Pshav’s Song”, “Children’s Song”, “Song of the Conscience”, “Shepherd’s Song”, “Song of a Kingdom” etc. This type of heading is quite common in the poet’s lyrical works. 121 poems have the first line as a heading and are named as “songs”.

The first to notice those prominent lyrical works by the name “song” was Grigol Robakidze in his work “Engadi”. He talks about Pshav-Khevsurian “songs”. It is a well known fact that “songs” are a big thematic core in the lyrics of Vazha-Pshavela. Those “songs” are nourished by Pshav-Khevsurian folklore [10, p. 64].

According to Akaki Shanidze, one field of Khevsurian poems “simghera” (“song”) represents chanting of heroic deeds on *panduri* (musical instrument). The researcher adds that *singing historically meant playing and not chanting* [11, p. 022]. Playing and chanting is also distinguished in the lyrics of Vazha-Pshavela. Therefore singing gave the poet more freedom. Shanidze pays attention here to the fact that “songs” doesn’t capture poetry in musical rhythm. That is the nature of folk songs which is important to take into account while discussing the lyrics of Vazha-Pshavela. The nature of folk songs determines polythematicity of Vazha-Pshavela poems. The same accounts for the limited freedom of chanting in Pshav-Khevsurian songs.

In Georgian literary criticism monorhymed “songs” of Vazha-Pshavela are also noted. Generally highland poetry is characterized by monorhyme. A big amount of Khevsurian “songs” is written in one rhyme. In Khevsurian poetry the majority of “simghere” i.e. heroic-historical poems are sung [1, p. 63].

We should also take into account one characteristic of Vazha-Pshavela’s poetry. It is the so-called dialogue, conversation, and exchange form. Such poems are quite frequent in Guramishvili’s works and they vividly reflect the so called “playful mind”. This topic is widely discussed. It is frequently called – “Game Theory”. The feeling of poetic play is felt in the poems of Vazha-Pshavela: “Frog’s Song”, “Song of the Conscience”, “Rabbit’s Song” and so on.

Besik Kharanauli considers eternal problem of playful minds to be quite significant: “if a child equips his stick horse, armchair or a pillow, in this never-ending game he enriches the concrete image of a knight. But adults - have they said farewell to games? I doubt it!” [8, p. 171]

“Game Theory” is reviewed in detail in the work of Huizinga “Homo Ludens” (“playing man”). We must note that “playing” by Huizinga represents the ferment of freedom, which creates culture – i.e. it turns human lives into something more rather than the instinct of self-preservation and struggling for the next generation [5, p. 6]. Behind any abstract thing there is a metaphor and each metaphor is playing with words. Thus we create a second,

imaginary world, with its advanced forms. The game is overflowing with rhythm and harmony. The connection between poetry and playing is not based only on the interior. More important is its influence on artistic imagination and motifs, on their ways of expression. The conscious or unconscious goal is always hidden behind them: to create tension with the words to capture the reader's or listener's attention [5, p. 162]. As we have already mentioned before, Vazha-Pshavela sometimes talks as a frog, as conscience and as a shepherd. The source of this is again a playful function of imagination. Vazha-Pshavela's poem "Bird's song" serves the same purpose.

In the song, "The Moon Rises behind the Mountain" is shown the tendency mentioned before. In this poem Vazha-Pshavela talks from the sun's point of view and inspires this brightest star with his thoughts. Static picture of a dawn is shown in this poem which creates the feeling that the sun is never going to rise again. The moon is put in the enemy's position as the opponent of the sun.

The most poetic works of Vazha-Pshavela justifies the name "playing" given to it in Pshavian folklore. As if by his lyrics the poet suggests a peculiar type of game. It is a puzzle, or riddle which requires a careful observer to solve.

In the sample of his love lyrics, "I Wish to Know" the poet tries to understand the nature of a woman. The poet mentions the word "riddle" at the very beginning, which develops into a real puzzle in the last verse. It seems like the last verse of this poem is from another "song" and doesn't fit in with the natural flow of the piece, but that's from the first sight. We think that the poet compares woman's nature to a charade, when the eyes tell one thing and the action – something else. The woman's temper is merciless towards a loving heart, but the eyes are filled with sorrow. "The wild sea that doesn't hear the boatmen crying" – is the woman's attitude and the crying boatmen are the woman's eyes; double, mutually contradicting essence of woman. The poet thinks about all this and says: "I wish to understand".

One more typical aspect of Vazha-Pshavela's "songs" is ending them with a rhetorical question. He addresses the reader, God and himself.

According to Paul Valery, the artist performs his/her role in playing. In his works something playful exists. He creates his own opponent: "men" versus "substance" and "time"... that is his creative creation [14, p. 151].

We can identify many styles of "playing" in Vazha-Pshavela's lyrics: playing by words, by thoughts, by cultural heritage; playing with the recipient and what's more important with his own ego. The best sparring partner for Vazha-Pshavela is Vazha-Pshavela himself in the rank of a poet. That is the main starting point, a source of his playful mind.

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კვლევები: ქართული ლიტერატურა

ვაჟა-ფშაველას ლირიკის რამდენიმე ზოგადსაკაცობრიო მოტივი

ლინდა ციციშვილი

თსუ ფილოლოგიის მაგისტრი, საერთაშორისო ბაკალავრიატის ორგანიზაციის (IBO) და საერთაშორისო სახლის (IH) ინგლისური ენის მასწავლებელი.

ქართულ სალიტერატურო კრიტიკაში ბევრია დაწერილი ვაჟა-ფშაველას ლირიკაზე: ბუნების, სტილის, ფოლკლორული წყაროების და სხვათა კუთხით. ამ მხრივ, შედარებით ნაკლები ყურადღება აქვს დათმობილი ორიოდე ზოგადსაკაცობრიო პრობლემას, რომელიც ვაჟა-ფშაველას შემოქმედებაში ჩანს და თანაც ორიგინალური ასპექტითაა წარმოდგენილი. ამჯერად ყურადღებას შევაჩერებთ სიკვდილის პრობლემის მხატვრულ ინტერპრეტაციაზე პოეტის შემოქმედებაში.

„ქართველი მწერლები გაურბიან სიკვდილის თემას“, - შენიშნავს ქართველი მკვლევარი კიტა აბაშიძე. ტიცთან ტაბიძე ამ საკითხს ასე განმარტავს: „...მე მგონი, ეს ფაქტი ფრიად მომასწავებელია და ამჟღავნებს ჩვენი მწერლობის ნაციონალურ ბუნებას; ეს იმას ნიშნავს, რომ საქართველო თავის კუბოში ცოცხლად რომ ჩაიჭედოს, სიკვდილზე არ ფიქრობს: ჩვენი მწერლობის ვალი მხოლოდ ვაჟა-ფშაველამ და კ. მაყაშილმა გამოისყიდეს“ [13, გვ. 305]. ვაჟა-ფშაველას ლირიკით აღქმული სიკვდილის ფენომენი წინაპრების უმდიდრესი სულიერი გამოცდილების,