

The Unknown George (Giorgi) Papashvily

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Abstract: The paper deals with the Georgian born well-known American sculptor and writer George (Giorgi) Papashvily. His works are preserved in state museums and private collections. His book "Anything Can Happen", written in co-authorship with his wife Hellen Waite Papashvily, was acknowledged a best-seller and called an unprecedented event: George

Papashvily's works constitute a landmark in the history of Georgian-American culture.

Key words: *Giorgi Papashvily, Hellen Waite Papashvily, Georgian emigrant*

George (Giorgi) Papashvily is entered in such serious publications as *Who's Who in American Arts*, as well as *Who's Who in American Literature of the 20th century*.

In Soviet space Papashvily belonged to "banned culture." In parallel to this there also was the phrase: "unknown culture". Although rarely, yet opportunities arose of familiarizing oneself with this culture.

The biography of one man in emigration turns into the "biography of all": with the same sorrows, misunderstandings, expectation of help, lack of money, blaming one another, and even abuse ... Giorgi Papashvily's case is absolutely different.

I want to single out one author: Svetlana Allilueva, with an unusual biography and representative of an unusual family. Her father – Joseph Jughashvili-Stalin played an enormous role in the lives of men living not only on the vast territory of the former Soviet Union but in world history as well. The book I have in mind was written in England in English, and was published in India in 1983.

Its name is "The Faraway Music". Its Russian translation was made by the author in 1987 – this time in the USA. Before publishing this book, she had written and issued two collections of biographical character.

In 1967 Allilueva was allowed "entry" into America. From the vantage of time she compared these two states, finding both similarity and difference, the two extremities that are characteristic of these; on the one hand, Soviet oppression, and on the other, total freedom. The Russian emigration met the book not very favourably, considering that the "Princess of the Kremlin" wished to live in luxury after her father's death.

Allilueva got acquainted with America, more precisely with the American way of life. At any rate, she believed so. In the Preface she notes that she accepted America as her "own" in the same way as she had done with respect to India, giving a place in her heart to the latter country as well as to Russia and Georgia. She is sincere in her statement that she has so far not got accustomed to living in dazzling colours as is implied by the American way of life. The reader's attention is claimed by many interesting episodes; she speaks about the photographer, about the shop-assistant of a small shop, her black and Italian neighbours, Pavle Chavchavadze.

A red carpet happened to be laid on the floor of the Publishing-house Harper and Row, and the room was jocularly called "the Kremlin". They worked much, leaving the office by 10 pm and visiting a small restaurant. By this time there were few people at the place. A blind pianist played various improvisations in a low voice, while his huge dog lay at his feet without producing any sound.

Allilueva recalls these days as "unusual time". She had an opportunity of normal work with the publishers, no one paid any attention to her either on the bus, the street or any shop that she entered in New York... Naturally enough, due to her identity she was everywhere at the centre of attention. This is understandable! Who learnt her father's name did not let the opportunity slip of meeting his "live" daughter... But here, in America, no one took interest in her. As she recalls, no one watched her, no one stopped her with silly questions; as if she walked with an invisible cap on her head, and what is most important, here is an excerpt from her text:

„ - А впрочем, никому нет никакого дела до других в Америке. Можно пройтись по Бродвею на руках (если умеешь), вверх ногами, и никто не удивится. Всё может случиться – как написал в своей книге грузинский эмигрантский писатель – Папашвили, и никому нет до этого никакого дела. Прошло значительное время, прежде чем я поняла эту истину.” [1, 25]

She speaks in such casual way as if she is sure that many will understand what she is saying and whom she refers to. She herself has left her home country; reference to a Georgian emigrant with an American reader is an interesting case: the reader holds a book written by Stalin's daughter – of a man whose political activity made many a Georgian lose Georgia, and she quotes George Papashvily – again a Georgian – about American opportunities.

“Anything can Happen” - this was the title of a book by George and Hellen Waite Papashvily, which was issued 15 times in the US from October 1944 to January 1948. “An unprecedented event” they wrote after 600, 000 copies of the book were sold. The fact was that the book turned into a best-seller. This did not need official confirmation, yet the journal “Bestseller”, for its part, in January 1946 produced a multi-thousand print-run of the book. There were no “differing” assessments, nor a discussion ... The book was unanimously submitted for the title “Book of the Month Club”, as a highly successful work (I make use of the data given in an essay written by a well-known Georgian emigrant, Mr. Givi Kobakhidze in Washington-TomPark [2, 4-5]. The work was translated into about fifteen languages and published in French, German and other European languages; into Japanese and Chinese (it is interesting to know what the print-run was in the latter enormous country); there exists a translation of the book, “including Urdu” we read in a paper by a foreign writer (Urdu is a language spoken in South Asia – in such countries as Pakistan, Bangla-Desh, Sri Lanka, and partly in India, and the majority of the people of Arab countries can understand Urdu). At the time the book was read by a million and a half readers... The scale is doubtless very impressive.

In the 20th century I know of no similar analogue of success by a writer of Georgian extraction.

“Anything Can Happen” was published in Georgia in 1966, though under a slightly differing title: “A Country in which

Anything Can Happen". It was translated from the English by Anduqapar Cheishvili. Apart from the translation being good and interesting, it is significant as a literary fact. I shall add here that he also produced a highly professional translation of another book by Papashvily and Waite: "Thanks to Noah"(1971). "Anything Can Happen" came out in later years too: 1948, 1961, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1969, 1973, 1985, 1990, 1995 ... The last edition came out on 26 December 2009. "Only 1 left in stock - order soon (more on the way)" – this is a reminder in red letters in the Internet for those who wish to buy the book.

No matter how extraordinary it may seem to you, even George (Giorgi) Papashvily's "Bookgram" has been compiled.

Under the same title, a film was made at Hollywood in 1952. The well-known Director George Seaton was its director and script-writer. The film lasts 107 minutes. Its premiere was held on 3 April 1952 in a New York movie. A year later, on 26 February it was awarded the "Gold Globe" at a film festival in Los Angeles, California, in the nomination "Best Film Promoting International Understanding".

Apart from this work, jointly with Helen Papashvily George (Giorgi) wrote other books as well. "Yes and No Stories; A book of Folk Tales" (20 Georgian folk tales, told in stylized manner) and some other works: "For the defenders of Stalingrad and Sevastopol - Folk heroes of tomorrow", "Thanks to Noah" "Dogs and People", "Russian Cooking (Food of the World)", "Home and Home Again".

According to the material at hand Papashvily's emigration coincided with the period when the Georgian Menshevik government was leaving Georgia in 1921. The country is in confusion, the government gone into exile..., the regular army and the national guard in disarray... Later, when George (Giorgi) buys a farm in Pennsylvania, he names it "Ertoba" ("Unity") and they know this Georgian word there to the present day (*not its meaning but the name*).

"The Papashvili family lived in Pennsylvania. They had a yard; behind – a garden, some facilities. Stones, big stones. With representations on them: bear, seal ... He found a special stone, bought it and brought it home. He later arranged a large exhibition"

[3, 201] – this is Mr. Aleksandre Putkaradze's reminiscence in a conversation with me.

Both successes – of a writer and a sculptor – happened without planning, by themselves. He was a real citizen (*not a character*) of the country where “Anything Can Happen”.

Papashvily was first of all a sculptor. Over six hundred works – a model of gift, industriousness, taste. Primitivism and modernism became the hallmarks of his style. Here is a fragment of one appraisal: “His early pieces are not tentative beginnings from which his style developed. They are mature skillfully executed creations... For those of us who had to be taught to design, this quality in George is recognized for what it was - the touch of genius”[4,10]. This is an example of high assessment.

In a book published in 1979, and entitled “George Papashvily: Sculptor” we read: “George Papashvily's work is represented in many private collections and public buildings . He executed commissions for the West Oak Lane and Fox Chase Branches of the Free Library of Philadelphia, the Baltimore County Public Library, Hanford (California) Public Library, Beverley Hills Public Library, Bucks County Public Library, Allentown Public Library and the Cascades Conference Center, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia” [4, 8].

Papashvily had no academic education in fine arts. He was a self-taught, talented creative worker; his materials were wood and sand. Arriving in Georgia on a visit, he recalled the following happening: He worked on the construction of a big house as a manual worker. A break was announced. He sat down, not knowing what to do. To while the time, he began to carve a doll out of a piece of board, fiddling with his knife... Suddenly he heard a voice; looking up, he saw the supervisor ... Looking at his watch, he found that the break had ended long ago. Yet, the superintendent did not think of reprimanding him, as Giorgi quite naturally expected. Taking the half-finished figure from him, he looked at it for some time and said to him sincerely: “ – One of such skill ought not to work as a manual worker” [5,2].

He was not only the first foreigner who liked the unfinished work but “with his support I began to whittle dolls and became skilled in it”. This was probably the first step on the way to a big

sculptor... Neither did Papashvily lack setbacks and nervousness. The transportation of huge sculptures occasionally proved unfeasible even with the use of ropes, wheels, sledge runners, blocks and tackles and beams. The rope snapped, the stone broke and crumbled, the beam broke... This was nothing... Patience, love and the ordinary feeling of beginning "everything anew"...

The new workshop altered many things.

Papashvily never left his initials on his works. Moreover, he believed – was even sure – that "the signature lies in the work of art itself". The sculptor seems to have believed that the viewer must himself guess the identity of the author of the piece, rather than from the inscribed name. Reviews, articles, as well as studies were written on his works, and in general, exhibitions were held.

He frequently exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Reading Public Museum and Art Gallery, a number of Universities (Lehigh...), Woodmore Gallery. The William Penn Memorial Museum showed sixty of his works at a retrospective show in 1971.

I have had the opportunity of familiarizing myself with the invitation cards for Papashvily's exhibitions preserved in the "private fonds of Aleksandre N. Zhghenti, Merited Worker of Culture of the Georgian SSR", kept at the Department of Literature and Art, in the Central Archive of Recent History, National Archive of the Georgian Ministry of Justice.

Merited Worker of Culture of the Georgian SSR Aleksandre N. Zhghenti for 35 years served selflessly, conscientiously and with profound professionalism towards the popularization of Georgian culture abroad. As the leader and member of the delegation of the Georgian Society for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, he worthily represented our culture in many countries of the world" [6, I].

It transpires that from 1949 Zhghenti was Head of the Department of the Georgian Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, and from 1952 Deputy Chairman of the Presidium. The fonds is interesting from the aspect that it contains a letter sent by George and Helen Papashvily and a few invitation cards to the sculptor's exhibition. Here is one of them:

GREYSTONE GALLERIES. CAMBRIA

George Papashvily is a natural and rare talent. Unhampered by formal training, his powerful sense of form has guided him well during the past thirty years of his professional development into one of our most distinguished sculptors.

Utter simplicity of style, great economy of means to create artful forms - these often delude layman into feeling the stone was really this shape - just nudged into sculptural life by the deft use of a few chiseled lines and textures. This is a magic delusion, seldom true.

"All sculpture should be carved on a high hill" suggested a Renaissance master, "then rolled down the hill. All that breaks off should not have been there - the stone is then finished." Perhaps apocryphal, but the principle is sound. Papashvily's sculpture is sound. The stone must be integral - monolithic. Other mediums such as bronze, steel and wood permit complex modeling, flying and flailing forms, but not stone - the eternal material.

The fast and easy way to synthesize carvings and modelings is dominant in our contemporary mores; plaster models - cut and try with easy putty then simulate the surface of stone or metal - not the way for George Papashvily. He works directly on the stone with a clear vision and sure control; only enough of the waste stone is removed to allow the living sculpture to emerge unharmed.

Nephrite, Jadeite, Red Granite, Porphyry - the stone is very important to Papashvily. He searches the continent for them at the quarries, the sea, the desert and river beds. The mere mention of an unfamiliar stone rouses the hunter instinct in George - distance is no challenge in the quest. He stockpiles them at his Pennsylvania Farm Studio or at his winter home in Cambria. His ideas and his stones must be mated; stones range from hardgem to the relative softness of marble. He stalks and ponders his stockpile for the right stone to contain each vision.

Cus-cus, Coney, Cocomixel, Alpine Marmots, Brahma Bull, Polar Bear (Papashvily had his own pet bear as a lad in Tiflis, Russian Georgia) - all animal life in the wild fascinates him and many become his friends. His own animals are only suggestive of the wild ones - his creatures live in stone and have their own identity.

Papashvily has been a well-known sculptor on the Eastern Seaboard for many years. His works are widely held by museums.

colleges and private collectors. He has also expressed his talent in other forms - in collaboration with his wife Helen as a writer of delightful books about animals and folklore. "Anything Can Happen", a story of his early experience in America became a national best-seller, Book of the Month selection and a major picture production.

Since establishing a winter studio and residence on the West Coast, his works are becoming well known and well received here. A number of important and unique pieces have been acquired by Western collectors during the past several years. By invitation, his entire collection was exhibited recently at Scripps College and the new Pomona Library. We are favored to represent him on the West Coast, and feel you too will be as you visit GREYSTONE GALLERIES and become acquainted with the world of George Papashvily, Sculptor.

Gallery Hours

Daily 1 P.M. To 5 P.M.

Closed on Tuesday [6]

I should like to add here that a documentary film has been shot for him as a sculptor.

One could speak about Papashvily's works only by his descriptions and illustrations for the "simple" reason that nobody had seen them in Soviet space. Yet his works are to be found in his homeland. Three of his pieces are preserved in the depositories of the fonds of sculpture, ceramics and applied art of the Department of New and Modern Georgian Art, Sh. Amiranashvili National Museum of Art. Namely in depositories, for they have been there since 1961 when, while visiting Georgia the sculptor presented them to the Museum, about these pieces nothing has been written (until recently); no invitation card or booklet has been issued.

Papashvily died in March 1978 at the age of 80. And finally, Papashvily ends his story with a significant statement in the subsection "Toast". Here is an episode with the characters Giorgi and Helena recalling Easter at Eliko's: "Somebody proposed a glass for him - 'for the man who did so much for his country' and he said, 'I thank you for your words but whatever I did for my country was not

smallest part of what my country did for me.' A good said answer."
[7, 193]

What do you think, for whom was this question written? Don't you think that the main character asks not the other but an American writer and sculptor of Georgian extraction but it is addressed to numerous persons round the world, reminding them with a thoughtful, warm smile: "A good said answer."

Papashvily's legacy is a significant landmark in the history of Georgian-American culture.

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