

The Wishing Tree by Giorgi Leonidze: World of Heroes

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Abstract

“The Wishing Tree” by Giorgi Leonidze – a truly prosaic masterpiece is a result of great artistic experience. Giorgi Leonidze depicts the fascinating ethnographic picture of the 20th century Kakhetian life. The writer presents the picture not only in order to preserve the memory of characters depicted, but also intending to show that the way of life shown in the novel was nurturing and making young individuals’ lives subtle. For a poet, The Wishing Tree was blossoming in Patardzeuli and it still does so. Patardzeuli is the very place the author confessed his love to when he was still young and dedicated quite a number of his verses to the place, but as this great feeling of passionate love towards his fatherland and his own people did not fade with time, he could not control his feelings and thoughts within his soul and mind that have gathered throughout his lifetime as they were trying to manifest themselves in different form. You can find any type of personality in the “The Wishing Tree”; those ones who will remind you many of your acquaintances and those ones, who are different from other as well.

Keywords: Giorgi Leonidze, heroes, novels, Patardzeuli, prose

Introduction

In his novel entitled “The Wishing Tree” Giorgi Leonidze depicts the fascinating ethnographic picture of the 20th century Kakhetian life. The writer presents the picture not only in order to preserve the memory of characters depicted, but also intending to show that the way of life shown in the novel was nurturing and making young individuals’ lives subtle.

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The space of acting of Giorgi Leonidze’s characters is the traditional Georgian countryside. They have fully inherited traditions and original ways of life from their ancestors, they follow those traditional ways, are afraid of superstitions and carry heavy burden of a countryside life.

Heroic Leaders of the Novel

In the village depicted by the author himself, he discovers the same set of life rules that exist in the entire universe. In general terms, this is the contradiction between Good and Evil. Here, people of different social

backgrounds, with different fates and characters carry the heavy burden of this life within the pre-determined life-time. The writer loves them all, no matter who they are – the ones who look up and gaze at the sky and those ones who stare at the earth, those that are fortunate, and those, that are not. The author is trying to make us feel compassion towards his characters too. Basically, he awakens the feeling of compassion in readers from the very first page of his book where he expresses his profoundly tender feelings and thoughts regarding his mother, expressing one of the sayings that he had memorized in his youth: “Violets grow in places where Mother’s tearsdrops fall” (Leonidze, 1962).

As the author recollects: “...on the forest sides of my village, during springtime, earth surface was full of violets, the whole area was covered with dark blue. I used to think – as the whole place was covered with violets, all the mothers of the world must have cried here. My mother has awakened the love of violets in me as she, herself was innocent, like a violet!” (Leonidze, 1962).

You can find any type of personality in the “The Wishing Tree”; those ones who will remind you many of your acquaintances and those ones, who are different from other as well. The author expresses their inner worlds and aspirations in the most profound manner using the literary method of contrasting.

While creating the image of one of his characters – Eliozi, who is the man in search of his destiny, Giorgi Leonidze uses one of the prototypes of the folk story. A strong faith keeps Eliozi alive: “If you go to the forest in the coldest and darkest night of January and witness

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the opening of the sky, then you will see marvellously blossoming magic tree. Nothing compares to it in beauty". This is the primary reason why Eliozi is doing his best to see that unseen beauty. The same kind of magical tree is the main theme of the folk tale about a step-child and a stepmother. Other folk tales have a theme of magic gardens where some fruit trees blossom, some have fruits and some are ripen. Giorgi Leonidze assigns all the above mentioned characteristics to one magical tree: "That tree blossoms in one hour, gives fruits and if you get one of its fruits and bite that fruit, that is it! All the woes and difficulties will disappear from your life! For the author, the Wish Tree is identical to the Talisman, different from the character of the folk tale who transforms his whole environment and condition with only one movement of his hand. Giorgi Leonidze's character is a child of a real life and real time and that is the reason why his dream is initially doomed to failure (Abuladze, 1976).

Giorgi Leonidze still follows his dreamer character step by step: "The poor man had chosen such a beautiful tree... he had decorated the tree with different colored cloths, laces, rushes, flowers..." (Leonidze, 1962).

It was the place where Eliozi was to meet his dream: "Who said that story to him, who inspired him with that faith, I still do not know" – rhetorically asks the author, however, he knows that it is the fairy tale that inspired Eliozi (Leonidze, 1962).

Miller Rajden is obsessed with staring at the sky full of stars. Rajden thinks: maybe in the realm of stars the existence is just like the one on earth, maybe a human hits the bottom of poverty there as well, like he does here on earth. Rajden wishes to send his message to the sky just like the fairy tale character: "Should I have wings and fly to the Mother Sun to complain about the harshness of life on earth!" What will Rajden tell the goddess of justice – Mother Sun? Many things about the injustices happening on earth and one more thing – that he could not find his star of happiness, just like many others could not. Rajden is dealing with this self-inflicted contradiction just like the wise man Mindia, who knew the language of nature: "How did the dirt and filth or poverty and deprivation appear on the Sun while my soul is covered with flowers?" (Leonidze, 1962).

Here, we are being introduced with another character – Garsevani, in order for us to see how much of a burden people like him are for this earth of ours – those, who carry masks on their faces. These are the ones who pretend to be kind and with good deeds, but in reality they are just ordinary egoistic individuals. People like them have no ability of contemplating a poetic beauty of a human soul, nor do they have any compassion towards other people's sorrows.

Another negative character – Kadori is no less selfish than Garsevani. For him time has stopped in the feudal era where there were masters and their slaves – peasants. Deprived and left without a child, Kadori does not acknowledge any of the modern day changes and novelties that come with life's course. He still regards all those grazing fields that were confiscated as being his

own property as well as his past sins that he constantly remembers.

Tsiskore is an identical character with Garsevani and Kadori, however, he is more fierce and aggressive, self-proclaimed head of a village who interferes in others affairs constantly. Everyone is afraid of this bad man. As an unrecognized authority of a village, he was against everything that represents light and progress. Author takes his life by making him sick – he catches the flu and dies of it: "the night Tsiskore died there were no falling stars, no roaring waters, nor there was a blowing wind" (Leonidze, 1962).

While a pseudo-patriot Tsiskore walks around the village and secretly sows the seeds of evil, staid Chorekhi shows everything in its true essence, without the pathetic, as it is in reality. "He was a kind, but an old-fashioned man with mossy eyes and dark inner world. He used to live in the shadows of the past as he could not see the present. He was one-sided personality who saw the world in black and white, with no shades of grey. Chorekhi, lived his life agonizing about Georgia's fate and left a good name after him, which is more important, than leaving a big wealth after one dies.

Giorgi Leonidze tells us a story of two men – Lagora and Khvedia. Lagora, as told by him, was putting some sugar on his tongue before leaving his house as he was trying to be nice with everyone. As for Khvedia, he was a foul-mouthed man as he hated not only humans, but even birds...

Cabman Lagora had a senility full of sadness as he was left on his own, lonely, nobody needed him. He was nice to others, but lived in sorrow himself as he was like an object that has no use whatsoever. He left his village when he was very young and lived the city life. He became successful but then lost everything that he had acquired. Then he decided to return to his village and found the joy of life living there – eating meat that was not weighted, enjoying his neighbor's sensitiveness, but as time passed, his excitement with the life in the countryside has faded away, he found the mud and dust of the village depressing, could not get used to going to bed with the fall of darkness... His main problem was that he could not find the link to reconnect with his village again and as a consequence of this, lost his goal in life. The moment he realized all these, he hung himself on the willow tree, the tree that was giving him the sense of joy during the springtime.

The short story "Khvedia" is built on the principle of contrasting: Khvedia himself was the same person by his outer appearance as well by his inner world: rude, ignorant, malicious, slasher, poisonous... However, he had kind relatives. His wife was a woman of dignity, joyful and free who ended up being desperate, hopeless and emaciated.

The author reminds us: we leave this world only with four pieces of wood and three meters of soil. There is no need to be desperate and sorrowful, but the paradox of life is that joyful and free individuals like Lagora do not achieve happiness either. What are humans to do? What possible solution is there for them to achieve hap-

pininess in life? These are fundamental questions that the author poses and leaves them without an answer.

Image of Marita

Marita's appearance in the village seems to be the light at the end of a tunnel, a seed of hope in a desperate and depressed environment but as it turned out, only few individuals could truly appreciate this profound beauty. Few could contemplate the greatness of her grace and as it usually happens in life, the beauty became an object of profanation.

Giorgi Leonidze not only easily expresses an excitement with Marita's beauty, but he also presents to us the very live image of her. She is miraculous like a pomegranate flower, with her diamond like face and eyes of a roe, she walks like a rainbow...

People were blinded by Marita's beauty and grace. They used to say: how can a peasant woman be that beautiful? Here the author recollects that Eteri herself was not of her kind.

Marita's external beauty was accompanied with an appropriate spiritual greatness as well. As she grew up she acquired many virtues. When time came, she experienced the true and profound feeling of love but adults took her from her beloved one Gedia, who was a poor young man and forced her to marry the wealthy man Shete, against her will.

Gedia's burning heart and crazy love that is left without a response does not represent the hidden conflict within the story. The strong feeling of love and compassion between Gedia and Marita is being channeled towards the hidden layers of intimate relationships by the author as he brings the motive of destiny to the front scene. As a rule, the coincidence of conditions in such cases naturally brings us to the result. Logically, such kind of love does not disappear without any trace. In fact, Gedia and Marita were unsuccessfully struggling their strong feelings each on their own. By someone's suggestion Shete has chosen Gedia as a godfather of his son. When Shete's mother died, Gedia went to their house to join the ceremony. There was only Marita at home.

"Long live those two drops of honey that are going to mix today! – laughed neighbor women" (Leonidze, 1962). Neighbor women spread the gossips about Gedia and Marita's secret meeting and the self-proclaimed head of the village immediately appeared on the scene: what a disgrace, what a blasphemy! They have insulted our community, they have shaken the moral foundations of our society! What a despicable act of immorality! Shame on them, no mercy for the sinners! Let the justice prevail! ...And this very immorality is happening in my time, when I am in charge! I will be held responsible for this by God, by her husband, by the whole village and all the descendants!

The elderly held a meeting to discuss the issue where Tsirikore has initiated to hold an old Oriental ritual of putting a cheater wife on a donkey the wrong side, in her

night-dress and carrying her through the village, throwing mud and stones on her. Giorgi Leonidze's artistic skills make this unpleasant scene even more obscene:

"... grey day of a Summer has started, rainy, cold, with parts of dark clouds still floating in the sky. Heavy presence in the air, like the nature was conscious about the despicable act of violence of crowd against an individual was going to happen. The whole environment has sunk in dark grey constituting one scary site. The raindrops were falling silently from the sky..." (Leonidze, 2011).

The author depicts a depressing meanness of the crowd, its mercilessness: "the crowd was marching silently, flurry, furious, full of hate, like it was going to conduct something terrible against the one who was guilty by their own moral standards. People had no compassion, no mercy, no remorse... waiting for innocent life to be taken away... they all shared one feeling – punishment of a young girl who was unfortunate enough to resist the social pressure, not having her true feelings suppressed, being courageous enough to live her true love, dedicate herself to her beloved one ignoring what others would say..." (Leonidze, 2011).

The author develops the scene of Marita's funeral referring to the parable of the sinner woman from the John's Gospel and convicts the guilty villagers in the following manner: "people who have unjustly punished Marita were serried towards her coffin. Suddenly, they were all stricken by the condemning fear as they stepped back like they have seen something more obscene than that, what they have done. They nearly stamped on each other... no one could even throw a handful of soil into the grave of a godly beauty punished by them... no one..." (Leonidze, 1962).

Conclusion

The author separates the biggest sinner among the crowd that is burdened with the crime against the innocent one, and that is Tsirikore himself and makes him throw a handful of soil into Marita's grave.

By the means of Tsirikotes's cynical act Leonidze shows us that those who are evil are shameless, dishonest and powerful at the same time and that the world is full of people like these! Marita's memory does not disappear together with her burial. As the author refers to a very old folk expression: "Marita's soul flew away like a butterfly". After this the author refers to the Christ's resurrection motive: "Christ took a rag as he was going to put it on her face and resurrect her, but she was so heavenly beautiful that Christ did not want to send her back to sinful earth..." Here, the author points to the notion of revenge. An earth full of sins is not worthy of heavenly grace. God sends a sinful earth with its evil inhabitants a great danger however, the author cannot allow desperation take over the situation even in such hard conditions. Here, the author introduces a poetic motive of Metempsychosis as he is trying to convince us that even in "dust and trash" there is a hope for such a heavenly beauty as Marita to appear as a symbol of hope.

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