

Research Article

Reception of Medea's Image in Grigol Robakidze's Novel „Megi the Georgian Girl“

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Greek mythology (myth about the Argonauts) have made character of Medea of Colchis the indivisible part of world cultural heritage. For centuries character of Medea has maintained its significance and comprised source of inspiration for the representatives of various spheres of fine arts.¹ Of course, regarding the contexts of the epochs (conceptual and esthetic position) and author's intent, some motifs of the Argonauts' myth and character of the woman of Colchis have been changing.

In this respect, novel „Megi, Georgian Girl“ by Georgian modernist writer, Grigol Robakidze is of interest. Text, first published in 1932 in Germany² was translated into Georgian in 2012 and it is not properly studied till now.

¹ There are rich traditions of artistic interpretation of Medea's mythical image in the world cultural space. We shall offer only few of them here – literature: Sophocles, tragedy “The Woman of Colchis”; Aeneas “Exiled Medea”; William Morris, epic poem “Life and Death of Jason”; Franz Grillparzer's piece “The Golden Fleece”; Akaki Tereteli's poem “Media”; Levan Sanikidze, “Story of a Maid of Colchis”; Otar Chiladze “A Man was Going Down the Road”; Painting: Delacroix, “Medea about to Kill Her Children”; paintings by Veronese, Poussin, Guercino, Moreau. Research of antique literature, Ketevan Nadareishvili dedicated special article to the issue of Medea's transformation in Georgian literature: Interpretation of the Myths of Argonauts and Character of Medea in Sandro Shanshiashvili's poem “Media” against the Background of Reception of the Aeronautics Myths in Georgian Culture”.

² The foreword of the novel states: Grigol Robakidze's “Megi – Georgian Girl” was published in 1932, in Tubingen, by Rainer Wunderlich Publishing House. From the letter to Hans von Weltheim it is clear that the original text was written by the writer in Russian. Grigol Robakidze explained this fact as follows: “I wanted to have German text. My friend, Reinhold Tschaker, translator of the book, did not speak in Georgian. To avoid double work of writing the novel in Georgian and further translating it into Russian for him, I wrote original text of “Megi” in Russian. In 1934, Italian translation of the novel was published by Sperling e Kupfer, in Milan. Later the book was translated into French as well.

Within the scopes of this report we shall attempt to find out, what is Robakidze's worldview motif when returning to Medea's character; clarify conceptual relation of Grigol Robakidze's Megi, on the one hand, to mythological tradition of Medea's character and on the other – Euripides's tragedy „Medea“; find out what is the symbolic meaning of the international character of woman of Colchis for Georgian cultural tradition and what is its role with respect of national identity determination.

In early 20th century, for the purpose of expansion of cultural awareness and worldview-esthetic renovation, the process of introduction of modernist trends in Georgian literature has commenced. Georgian modernism was regarded as integral part of the European modernism and shared all its conceptual and esthetic innovations.

Both, in the world and Georgian modernist discourse the novels with powerful mythological course – so called mythographic texts have appeared, their creative structure, poetic world, sensual-emotional load are based on archetype models of mythos thinking and the style of mythic-symbolic composition acquires the form of creative method. Introduction of mythographic novel in Georgian literary space is associated with the name of Grigol Robakidze³. According to

³ Introduction of the spiritual-cultural values and conceptual paradigms of modernism into Georgian cultural space, generally, modernization of Georgian literature, cultural consciousness is associated with this Georgian thinker. Grigol Robakidze, with his course of lectures, art, articles in culture studies, cultural-philosophical, literary-criticism spheres (Gr. Robakidze, Georgian Modernism), with his unusual philosophical-esthetic ideas, became the first preacher of “Modernism Gospel” in Georgia (T. Tabidze) Distinguished representatives of Georgian intellectuals (Akaki Tsereteli, David Kldiashvili, Kita Abashidze, Niko Lortkipanidze, Dimitri Uznadze) listened to his lectures and commented them. Art and activities of Grigol Robakidze have greatly determined the creative methods of young Georgian modernists – Blue Horns (Titsian Tabidze, Paolo Iashvili, Valerian Gaprindashvili). New generation recognized Grigol Robakidze as the reformer of Georgian literature and the first ideologist of Georgian modernism. First apostle of symbolism

Konstantine Bregadze's observation: „Georgian modernism was able to create new and unique artistic-literary values through introduction of the original metaphoric paradigms, mythical archetypes, myth narrative and mythical metaphoric system, making universal the purely national themes and national problems, mythical-expressive artistic interpretation of Georgian reality, introduction of the new cultural and landscape spaces and themes“ (Bregadze 2016: 85-86).

It should be noted that the initial title of Grigol Robakidze's Mythographic novel "Megi Georgian Girl" was "Medea's Plaits". The author explained the conception of this book as follows: "My novel, "Megi", is an attempt of reviving mythical woman of Colchis, Medea in real girl".

In his novel, Grigol Robakidze indeed takes into consideration Medea's mythical experience though in his artistic transformation of the character of Colchian woman he deviates from the traditional line of the fable development and creates substantially new character from the modernist worldview position.

In the novel the action takes place in single space – Colchian Lowlands – "in the country of eastern sunny fields": this is the area where the lonely sad melodies of the shepherd's pipe are heard, the sky is gold-plated with sunrises and purple with sunsets – the world sunk in the boundless space, full of metaphysic sadness of the native land" (Karman 1996: 386). Selected location / landscape creates the new semantic field and determines the attitude, world perception of the novel characters to great extent. Colchis is interpreted as some kind of micro model of the mythical existence of the mankind, sacral area, center where there is "absolute reality". Mircea Eliade, in his book "The Myth of the Eternal Return" he explains: "it is sacral: as only sacral can be absolute, act effectively, create and grant long existence to everything." (Elade 2017: 31)

Unlike the antique tradition, in the novel the line of betrayal of the father / native country is absent. Character of Aetes is substituted by Amazon mother – Tsitsino: "Tsitsino was not like the other women, she had the blood of Colchian Amazons and therefore, she could not be a lover of anyone... she did not open her heart to anyone and she did not belong to anyone. She had the tenacious power that disarmed and paralyzed men and this was the secret of this woman." (Robakidze 2012: 52-53)

In interpretation of Medea's mythical character, there are different opinions among the researchers of antiquity. "Some antique authors show Medea as a bearer of divine hypostasis... together with divine Medea, there is significant tradition of

preached the gospel of modernism. Vivid words of Grigol Robakidze, his impressive fantasy, bright images are the valuable memories of our youth. He was the first who showed us the head of beheaded Eichanan, he was the first who brought to us Nietzsche's words (Tabidze 1916: 23) – wrote Titsian Tabidze in the first issue of Blue Horns.

describing Medea as a magician" (Nadareishvili 2011: 113), polemics among the researchers dealing with the ambivalent substance of Medea still continues with respect of Euripides's Medea. Georgian scientist, Ketevan Nadareishvili has specially studied this issue. According to her observations, in literary studies, on one hand, Medea is regarded as a magic prophet, irrational power of supernatural abilities and on the other hand – as actual character loaded with human emotions. As the researcher regards, in the tragedy the "magic wisdom is substituted by intellectual one" (Nadareishvili 2011: 117).

In Grigol Robakidze's modernist novel, similar to Euripides's Medea, Megi is a character with potentially tragic power though the author clearly isolates himself from the magic layer of the Medea's myth, the new trends appear: pagan and Christian motifs. Megi, on one hand, can be seen as proud, unbreakable descendant of the Amazons, the mythical ancestors "living in absolute isolation and burning away the right breast in young age" ⁴ (Robakidze 2012: 72-73), and on the other – as the virgin of divine origin. Her portrait - image⁵ brings expectation of miracle and makes people pray devoutly:

⁴ In his novel, Grigol Robakidze wrote about the Amazons: these women lived absolutely isolated and did all the work themselves: they worked in the field, grew the harvest, took care of the livestock and especially they loved the horses. Those who were stronger used to hunt and master martial arts... They used to burn the right breast in the young age. This allowed them to use the weapons, especially the lances freely. The Amazons were armed with the arches and arrows, axes and light shields; they made the helmets, armors and belts from leather. For two months the Amazons left their usual life, went to the mountain and met with the men living in isolation in the neighborhood. According to the customs and traditions, they performed the ritual of sacrifice and later, in the darkness they conceived children in secrecy and without love. Later the Amazons took the boys to the border and there the men met them, selected one boy each and brought them up like their own children. Possibly, these boys could be their children in reality. Amazons regarded that only girls were their real children and took care of them, thought these girls were never breastfed to prevent problems with their breasts and avoid difficulties in combat (Robakidze 2012: 72-73).

⁵ For identification of Megi's essence and find out the author's intention, the process of painting of Megi's portrait by Vato Nakashidze is of particular interest: Vato painted Megi's portrait and could not hide his astonishment as the girl's face reminded him Leonardo's portraits. He desired to show the mysterious expression on the girl's face that appeared for instance from time to time. (Robakidze 2012: 57). It is interesting that Vato could not complete Megi's portrait until he was not able to understand Leonardo da Vinci's secret, the idea of eternal return: On his paintings, beyond the individual's face the other face is hidden: this is the mysterious face looking from the picture and comprising the Eidolon of the image (Robakidze 2012: 108)

“it seemed that Megi, this perfect, innocent virgin expected that the divine light would cover her. In such moments, her face had unearthly and harmonic reflection in blue heaven.” (Robakidze: 2012: 57)

Thus, Grigol Robakidze, through original synthesis of various layers creates new, mythical image of Medea, the contradictive, many-layer character containing Robakidze’s idea of Georgian woman: “Georgian woman, as a woman, is undoubtedly a problem. I think, in her nature, there are many pieces of the ancient Amazons, the ones that rushed over the men in live... she knows nothing about love confession (she is proudly close-hearted) or sexual flourishing (she is asexual, due to the remnants of the Amazons’ fierce): Georgian woman knows nothing about romantic relations (Robakidze 2014: 398). The author clearly stated the character’s national identity in the title of the novel – *Megi Georgian Girl*. This hint of the writer acquires decisive significance in interpretation of the character of the maiden of Colchis.

From the modernist worldview position, Grigol Robakidze interprets also the cause of Megi’s/Medea’s tragedy. While Euripides’s Medea is a woman led by the disastrous powerful emotions and in the process of formation of her tragic character the decisive is the act of murder of her children, In Robakidze’s text Megi is a mother murderer of her children as well⁶ the basis of the character’s tragic nature is breaking of the original harmony and “fear of ego that had collided with the metaphysic limit” (Robakidze 2012: 29)

In the beginning of the novel Megi is a character with mythical consciousness. The text commences with the scene of Megi’s “birth”: a girl comes out of water as though she was just born of Adam’s rib” (Robakidze: 2012: 24) this is the condition where individual has not separated from the depths of his ego. First meeting with Abkhazian (prototype of Jason – Astamur Lakerbaia) is beginning of the contradictive process of coming out of the mythical being and moving to the historical time. A stranger – the Abkhazian is the metaphysical threshold appearance of which causes fear of sensing of her “self” in Megi. “Deadly combat begins between a woman and man (Robakidze 2012:70) and this forms Megi’s final coming out of her mythical being. Long way of seeking her identity in new reality starts: individual human “self” is too little and human mind is too weak to be able to fully acquire the projections returned to hum from the world (Jung 2013: 132).

Idea of eternal returning established in the modernist discourse under the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche, becomes particularly active in the mythographic texts. This conception

⁶ Megi has not killed her children simultaneously. She damages her son’s artery as though “unconsciously” and kills the accidentally conceived fetus when she is pregnant. A girl takes the heavy burden intentionally and in the evening she gives birth to a dead child. It is notable than Megi cannot understand the heaviness of the tragedy and she has no any sense of guilt.

provides basis for the novel under consideration as well. Though to determine the character of Megi-Medea, understand her essence, we should be guided not by Nietzsche’s⁷ but Robakidze’s⁸ interpretation of the idea of eternal return. Each principle contains the main principle and eternal is represented in the individual and if the individual feels the fertilizing impact of the eternal, thus it is the share of eternal; than the mortal limit is not fatal danger for him and his “self” collided with the metaphysical limit can survive” (Robakidze 2012: 38).

Idea of eternal returning determines the conceptual sense and structural paradigm of the novel: the character is identified with her mythical model and the events are integrated into the

⁷ About Nietzsche’s understanding of the eternal return Robakidze noted: “idea of eternal return has rushed to Friedrich Nietzsche as avalanche in Sils Maria. We know how he described this: what would be, of one day or night, when you are alone, the demon comes and says: this life you live and you have lived, will repeat one and many times more and this will be nothing new, rather each pain and each joy, each sense and each vain breath and will have to experience everything the smallest and the biggest in your life in the same sequence – the same spider and this night picture among the trees and the same second and me. The eternal hourglass always turns and you, together with it, a small dust particle in the dust! Would you knell down and damn with gnashing of teeth” Dostoevsky has perceived this idea similarly (devil at Ivan). For already mad Nietzsche this was the last vision. Dostoevsky saw such eternity as boredom of the “bath with the spiders in the corners” (Svidrigailov). Generally, it is notable that in both visions there are the spiders. Such interpretation of eternal return seems quite wrong. Not the individual returns to the eternal but rather the eternal, i.e. the main principle returns to the individual. This is the main myth of all that has occurred on the Earth. (Robakidze 2012: 32-34)

⁸ Compare: Any subject or action becomes real only when it follows or repeats any of archetypes (Eliade 2017: 58); In some sense, once can even say that nothing new happens in the world as everything is repeating of one and the same main archetype activating the mythical time when the archetype gesture takes place and hence it leaves the world and moves to the universal initial time. Time makes possible only appearing and existence of things but it has no any decisive influence over their existence as the time, as such, is subject to permanent regeneration (Eliade 2017: 121-122).

For an individual of archaic society what has happened *ab origine* can be repeated through rituals. Thus, knowledge of the myths is important for him not only because the myths give him knowledge about the world and rules of his existence in the world but rather because their recollection and realization give him ability to repeat what was done by the gods, heroes or forefathers *ab origine*. (Eliade 2009: 16-17)

mythical actions' category. When the magician nanny retells her the myth of Argonauts, Megi intuitively feels inevitability of revival of her mythical ancestor Medea in her: "Is not that seducer woman, full of talent of love, Medea of Colchis revived in this girl? The same idea comes to Megi but as soon as she realizes this, she starts to tremble and her face flushes" (Robakidze 2012: 45)> Megi can exist in the "historical being" only as a result of understanding of the idea of eternal returning. According to Zurab Kiknadze's reasonable remark, "Grigol Robakidze can see liberation from the terror of the history only in prostrate return of a child in father's depths" (Kiknadze 2017: 11).

Thus, in mythographic novel "Megi Georgian Girl" Grigol Robakidze created the modernist character determined by the national identity, substantially different image of Medea depicting the author's conception of the idea of eternal return.

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