

MYTHOLOGIZING POETICS IN THE ARMENIAN FICTION OF THE 1970'S-80'S

Mythologizing poetics and mythical imagery in the Armenian fiction of the 1970's-80's were on the one hand conditioned by national traditions, on the other hand by general typological processes in foreign literatures. However, unlike the latter, the loneliness and frustration mythologema wasn't the featuring characteristics of Armenian mythologism. It was a desire to go back to one's origin and ethnic roots and resurrect national values. Heathen mythological motifs and Christian myths permeated Armenian aesthetic thought and in this synthesis national myths were projected into universal myths, confirming the unity and permanence of moral beliefs and standards.

The Armenians had their own mythical system and rituals which are still alive in their ethnic memory. In the 5th century, after the Bible had been translated into Armenian, Christian outlook penetrated into the Armenian aesthetic thinking, creating a new symbolic system in the Middle Ages. Literary mythologism became a definite artistic doctrine in the works of classicists and romanticists. Mythical motifs were largely employed by Armenian writers at the beginning of the 20th century, connected with the "Heathen Movement" and stylistic quest of symbolism and neoromanticism.

In the Armenian fiction of the 1970's the myth-metaphoric system as a means of artistic expression had its peculiar manifestation in the works of H.Matevosian, A.Aivazian and Z.Khalapian.

Hrant Matevosian's power derives from his myth-making ability which itself is a yearning for the epical wholeness of being. His characters grow out of the poetic fabric of Armenian Lori, however, they are not solely realistic exemplars of rural life. They are larger than life and carry with them a primordial implication in the saga of the real-mythical setting of Ahnidzor-Tsmakut.

In the poetics of the novelist the mythical isn't an "open" text, i.e., a myth-parallel, myth-analogue or folkloric plot. A more complicated synthesis of artistic allegorization features his mythologism, in which a single image encompasses different gnostic levels and multilayer insights.

Matevosian's aesthetic system integrates the biblical past and present and is basically connected with the racial memory of the Jungian type. It's a symbiosis of allegorical imagery and the analytical element of classical realism.

In most of his stories and novels the usual setting is an imaginary-realistic village of Tsmakut, a lesser model of the world, which he inhabited with a definite number of people. The legendary village is a perfect artistic

incarnation of the writer's native place, the village of Ahnidzor, with its landscape, people and customs.

In this sense there is a typological affinity between Matevosian's and Faulkner's fiction. Faulkner's characters act in the invented town Jefferson in the imaginary Yoknapatawpha county. Like in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha saga, in Matevosian's Tsmakut-Ahnidzor saga the stories and novels, though being not an immediate continuity of one another, are interrelated thanks to the continuity of place, time and people. The writer is concerned with such problems as man and morality, man and nature, nature and civilization, past and present, human and animal psychology.

M. Cowley's observations about Faulkner that he "is not so much a novelist... as he is an epic or bardic poet in prose, a creator of myths that he weaves into a legend of the South", can as well be ascribed to Matevosian, who "weaves" myths into a legend of his native Lori.

From novel to novel one sees the same people and animals, the same paths and forests, which form a saga about the earth, nature and striving of people, living on the borderline of idyllic ancient times and social changes of the 20th century and acting in a timeless fusion of past and present.

Mythologizing is best demonstrated in the stories "The Buffalo" and "The Green Field". In "The Buffalo" the nature cult obtains a vigorous expression, where mythically employed scenes convey an epical largeness to the story. This power is discernible if we read the story as a nature myth. It opens with a scene, which reminds of the creation of the world. It is spring and nature is spellbound with incarnation. The buffalo's sensations are filled with the sweet smells and scents of the green field. Longing for self-creation and driven by a powerful call of blood the buffalo goes forward to its biological instincts. This primal impulse is nothing but myth and pagan worship. The quiet forest, smell of the mushrooms, delicately scented dogroses – everything in nature is in harmony with the sensations of the buffalo. It's a mystical feeling of rejuvenation and mythical participation with the universe and all beings. In the story the buffalo is roaming within a mythological system. In the end when the self-creation is accomplished myth vanishes and the buffalo becomes an ordinary creature.

In "The Green Field" the scene, where the horse and wolf fight, is a ritual demonstration of the struggle of the good and evil, which has occurred for uncountable times since the creation of the world. The animation of nature isn't a simple folkloric personification. It implies a deeper perception of man-nature unison and goes back to prehistoric consciousness.

In Matevosian's fiction the real life and tale, legend and modern plot interpenetrate. In the essay "Metsamor" myth, history and contemporary world are synchronized and inter woven, Armenia's five-thousand-year history is mythicized and the biblical legend about the flood is regarded as the beginning of history.

In "A Transparent Day" the fate of Armenia is projected as a sad legend. The sorrowful myths of Armenian history pass one after another and in the end it is followed by a resurrection myth. The story is a retrospection on the past and prospectus of the future.

If in Matevosian's poetic perception the mythical is a strong feeling for the epical, in Aghasi Aivazian's fiction the mythical features as a close system, in which the writer is experimenting with his characters. Experimental mythologism borders on parabolism, which is a symbiosis of two levels of artistic deduction: realistic and symbolic-allegorical. This type of fiction is characterized by tense emotionalism and philosophical in-depth revelations, with moral aspects prevailing in the sublayers of the narrative. Ethical problems of the Homo Sapiens underlie Aivazian's works, with the following categories functioning in his aesthetic system: on the one hand the good, which is identical to light, reason and God, on the other hand the evil, which is paralleled to guilt, passion and devil.

While shaping the psychology of his characters Aivazian mythicizes the biological origin and blood. All human actions are provoked by the blind power of blood, which is an apt metaphor for passion. Most of his protagonists are overwhelmed by the brute and destructive power of blood.

In the novel "Where do you come from?" the writer relates Tata's fate to her genetic fetus, which she has inherited from her mother and grandmother. Tata's grandmother was a beautiful woman and used to attract all men. A clergyman fell in love with her and took her away into a small temple. One day he killed her out of jealousy. Her daughter Eve was left alone. She bore the same vicious instincts in her blood cells as did her mother. She stole the treasures of the church she was staying at and made love with a policeman. After being aware that she was pregnant she began to look for a husband. Her daughter Tata was as perverted as her mother and grandmother. The latter's fates continued in hers; Tata had a son who was her mother's transformation and was driven by the same perverse subconscious instincts. Vice and evil were rooted in his biology and consequently he became a criminal.

Aivazian mythicizes the genetic beginning. There are neither fantastic scenes nor mythological allusions in his fiction. Through everyday events and human relations he touches the most general problems of morality and truth. Almost all his works represent metaphysical and metaphoric states of human bonds. The writer's sophisticated fiction considers the matter of eternal antinomies between reason and passion, spirit and body, the good and evil, God and devil.

Most of his characters are possessed by passion and appear in the grip of dark instincts. The only way to avoid a sin and overcome a temptation is to decline the physical lust, which is identical to dark powers and which, however, most of his characters fail to do.

In the novel "Arminus" the events took place in a sinful town, dating back to the 11th century. Arminus had spent his childhood in poverty, begging and committing sin. His boyish experience and impressions were merged with the body smells of an old woman. Gradually he began to realize that pleasure was disguised in anguish and dissatisfaction. Seduction and lust were caused by the devil. "The body is the devil itself". Yearning and passion always end up in guilt and treachery. Arminus's reason fought against his biological instincts and blood. Willing to repent he left the sinful town in search of God and light. But this time the cunning devil seduced him with the mischievous woman Sase. Arminus was more and more immersed in delinquency and depravity. Realizing his fall he appealed to God: "I pitied that woman just for Your sake. So my guilt derived from my kindness. I'm guilty because I have mercy... Aren't mercy and crime identical and of the same origin?" Contemplations about the devil convey a demonic aura to the narrative, where the historical plot and Christian religious themes are woven into an indivisible structure.

In almost all his works Aivazian seeks some moral truth. That truth is the perpetual search for the good and light on the way from a tiny cell to the infinite universe.

Zorair Khalapian's novel "Dying-Reviving" is a typical mythological piece of fiction. The writer introduces a mythological motif in the very title of the novel. The "death-resurrection" mythologema lies imbedded in the structure of the narrative and models human life and nature. The mythical has aesthetic and philosophical submeaning and is the integral part of the novel. Past and present are archetypally related and his characters are patterned after pagan mythical heroes.

The "death-resurrection" ritual complex, invented by the anthropologist James Frazer, reflects reiterative processes in the universe. Ancient man created a god, who died in autumn in harvest and came back to life in spring. Everything dies and resurrects. Nothing is everlasting, but everything is in constant movement and recreation.

The earth has a definite connotation in the philosophical system of the writer. It's the place where the symbolic rite of death-resurrection takes place. A grain arises from the ground, towns and villages also arise from the ground and a human being is made of clay, too. The grain goes back into the earth again, towns and villages raze to the ground and man transforms into soil. This concept is rooted in archaic chthonism according to which everything eventually returns to the maternal loin of the earth.

The writer explores the ethnic memory of the Armenian people, assuming that they carry the heathen primordial notion as a basic instinct. He goes back to the beginning of things, i.e. to ontology. His ultimate aim is to discover the Armenian ethnic gene, which can be found everywhere: in the ruins of an old

town, in architecture, in old habits and ways. In Armenian mythology and folklore Khalapian uncovers the biography and psychology of the nation.

The writer interprets modern life in the light of archetypes and by drawing parallels between the present and olden times. The characters in the novel are modeled on pagan mythical gods. Many scenes duplicate old Armenian myths.

Anahit, an ordinary country girl, is swimming with her mules in Lake Metsamor in the night. The country boys make a fire on the shore in the dark to see the naked girl. She comes out of the lake in the moon and makes love with Tavros, who has been swimming in the lake, too. In the scene the girl hints on the Armenian pagan goddess of love and orgastic worship. Mythical impulses pass into the characters through "the collective unconsciousness" and prefigure their behaviour. Paradigmatically the couple acts the roles of the goddess of love and death-resurrection god. Myth permeates the real life and the past resurrects in the present.

There is no point to distinguish the mythical from the real, since every now and then things do create their own mythology. Life at large is a legend after all. The writer has thought up a philosophical essay in a folkloric structure, which comprises mythical, historical and real images.

In the poetics of 20-th century literature mythmaking was not merely an artistic means and aesthetic method, it was a world outlook and conceptual perception. Myths came to restore the shattered wholeness of being and human spirit in technologically advanced societies, enabling to transcend social, historical and spatial boundaries, thus once again asserting the permanency and timelessness of existential values.