

EPIC REALITY IN KHACHIK DASHTENTS'S NOVEL "THE CALL OF TILLERS"

Mythologism has a peculiar manifestation in Dashtents's epic novel "The Call of Tillers". It's an organic interpermeation of a realistic narrative and epic aesthetics. On the historic substance the author unfolds events that recount the deeds of legendary and heroic Armenian volunteer warriors.

The novel depicts the Armenian national-liberation movement at the end of the 19-th and at the beginning of the 20-th centuries. Teacher Melkon, who was teaching his pupils the poem "The Call of Tillers", assigned them to read "The Mad" by Raffi and "Narek." It's no wonder as the characters in the novel continue Raffi's heroes' struggle against the Turkish tyranny.

The novel is dedicated to the guerilla (fidayakan) movement. The heroes are real people: real were their deeds, too. However, in the novel one witnesses exploits that seem to extend beyond the ordinary and real in scope and size, and the courageous insurgents (hayduks) transform from earthly mortals into god-like epic heroes. Arabo, Aghbyur Serob, Gevorg Chaush, Machluto, Andranik and many others are people having power and features characteristic of legendary giants. They are prefigured by the heroes in the Armenian epic story "David of Sassoun". The powerful energy of their forefathers pours out in the mountain-based brave rebels who are as naive and kind and honest as their legendary ancestors were. They, too, take their strength and vigor from the soil and waters of their land. "Such a generation did exist. Hardly ever could there be such a generation. So improbable and legendary were the people of that generation and their exploits; and though the whole material of the novel is real, it might seem unreal and incredible to some. The names and deeds of these people are woven to legend and fairy-tale and pass from one generation to another".(Kh. Dashtents, "The Call of Tillers", Yerevan, 1984, p.10).

The novel has some elements of the fairy-tale. Dashtents is a story-teller, and his story is a folkloric narrative. The boundaries between the real and legend disappear, "legend becomes reality, and reality becomes legend," writes M. Galshoyan in the preface of the book. "It should have been like that. Dashtents tells of the world of his childhood, and childhood itself is a fairy-tale: it tells of a country that comes from a legend and has transformed into a legend, and what's a legend but a fairy-tale; ultimately that was a fairy-tale-like world with its nature, history and fabulous primordial life of its indigenous people."(M. Galshoyan, "Seekers of the Brabion Flower," "The Call of Tillers," Yerevan, 1984, p. 522).

The legendary features of the Armenian insurgents were conditioned by the ultimate goal they had set themselves: to serve the idea of Armenian liberation and to be martyred for that sacrosanct goal. Hayduks swore an oath on the Gospel, sword and cross. The ritual of making an oath on the sword and cross had been introduced by Karair, who led the group of guerillas in their fight against the Sultan's tyranny. "The Armenian fidai (warrior) is the highest point of human virtue," he used to preach. "Neither glory, nor peace, nor gain. The recruits should be self-denying. The Armenian fidai has only one ideal: to serve the Armenian freedom by suffering torments. He must die from a bullet, on the gallows or in prison if he is true to his oath." His moral values and powerful will push him to commit supernatural feats and exploits. And here arises the legend. Their battles resembled those of folk epic heroes and like them they took their power from the soil of the Armenian Wonderland.

Folkloric elements, legends, myths and ethnographic realities are incorporated in the texture of the novel and become the inextricable part of the narrative. They tell of the wonders of nature and take the heroes back to the depth of history and past. The legend of Mount Tsismak tells of a legend about priests and priestesses who transformed into partridges the moment the pagan temples of Mush were destroyed.

According to another legend the first dwellers of Mush were Sim Patriarch's generation, that settled in the mountains of Mush after the flood and were named Sim after him.

Another legend tells of the existence of heathen stone records before Mashtots's letters. "When

the enemy intruded Taron and started breaking them all the letters in the records transformed into bees in the blink of an eye and flew away from the stone records with a humming sound, swarming on the rocks Tsismak and Tsirnkatar."

The legend of "Meghraget" (Honey River) relates that in olden times there used to be a tonir (a big jar dug in the earth in which fire is made, used for breaking bread) in the place of the water spring. The priest's wife was baking bread. A poor man approached and asked her for bread for Christ's sake. The hostess gave him bread. The beggar asked for cheese. The priest's wife gave it, too. Then the beggar asked for a kiss for the sake of Christ. The hostess allowed the poor man to kiss her pretty face for Christ's sake. At the very moment entered her husband. He got cross with his wife. She explained everything to him. The priest told her wife to throw herself into the tonir. She did as she had been told to. Immediately the tonir filled up with water tasting honey. The priest's wife transformed into a fish, sank deep into the water and from that moment on the river was called Meghraget (Honey River). The legend reveals the moral values and virtues of people living in the mountains, who were far from committing a sin and sacrificed themselves for the sake of faith.

Myths and legends in the narrative often serve as allegorical interpretations to this or that event or idea. A legend relates that on returning from Kesaria Grigor the Illuminator fought a war with priests from Taron and defeated them with his wooden cross. Part of the priests transformed into partridges, part of them were thrown into the gorge. People in Sassoun believe that the salt-rocks found in the hollows of the mountains were the heathen stone records of the Msho Valley that the Illuminator had thrown after the escaping demons. The villagers believed that their water-mill was made of those rocks and went down to the gorge to take the valuable stone from the abyss. Dashtents illustrates the moral of the legend: "Only the power of faith can lift the wrecked flour-grinding stone from the bottom of the canyon. And I unwillingly compare our nation's fate with Miro's idea. The atrocious flood of history has thrown the water-mill stone of our nation's fate into the gorge. Who will lift the stone from the canyon and put it back again in its place?"

Dashtents weaves the narrative in a way that reality and tale go hand in hand. The boundaries of fiction are pushed toward epic poetics. Nature and people are cloaked in a mythical veil. Still in their life time Andranik and many other courageous warriors became folkloric characters and legend. Time seems to be measured by space, and the mountains, plains, rivers and springs mark time sequence. The interpolation of the "magic" and real plays wonders and the improbable becomes probable.

In the legend "The Fire of Taghvdzor" the tale and reality are in syntagmatic relation with each other. The heroes find themselves in the legend and act in "magical" reality. The fire in the hearth burned by Hovnan from Khnut has become something sacrosanct and with its enigmatic power redeems people's vices and faults.

"The Bursting Spring" is another tale interwoven to reality. "A full spring erupts from under Mount Andok. It was called Bursting Spring. They say there were fiery horses in the waters of the spring, but not everyone deserves to see them." Mose Imo, who was a brave warrior, appeared in the legend, saw the fabulous fiery horse and told him his dream. "I have always dreamt of you. This is Sassoun, the village of Geli and these are the elders of Sassoun. The Sultan has wrapped himself up all around us like a dragon and has put his head on our breast. How can we kill the dragon so that the bird with its nestlings could be rescued?" The fiery horse said to Mose Imo: "You touched my mane. The old tribal chief gave a mare to Shapinand in the field of Seven Spoons. Once you hit him on the back three times he'll become as powerful as I am and will live longer than an earthly horse. Only then will its rider be undefeatable, the dragon be killed, and the bird and its nestlings be free". Thus Mose Imo appears in the legend, and the plot evolves as follows: Shapinand's mare came up to the Bursting Spring, and when Mose Imo hit the horse twice on the back, the latter transformed from an earthly mare into a fairy-tale blood-horse. Undoubtedly there is something symbolic in the fact that the blood-horse deceases

"beneath the ocean waters and sky". Born from waters it again disappears deep in water and joins its mythical element.

The legend of the Brabion flower has a special connotation in the narrative. A very old gospel relates that in the mountains of Bingjol grows the legendary flower that brings happiness to people. The main characters in the novel dreamt of being in those mountains and finding the flower. But those looking for the flower were thought to be "crazy". "Since there is no such flower in the world. Andranik, who was on the verge of death in far-away America, said to his devoted warrior, "I have looked for the Brabion flower all my life. Both you and me sought that flower. Both of us were crazy and had crazy dreams. Nobody has ever found the flower. They say there is no such flower. But there were people who long before us had found the true way to that flower." The tale of the legendary flower ends with the symbol of homeland. Shapinand told Makh'luto that the dream-flower was Armenia, a small beautiful country blooming on the banks of the Araks River, "the anchor of our hopes." In Makh'luto's visions and dreams, too, the mysterious flower is identified with the Armenian land. "He had seen many fields and blossoming valleys, but only one plain remained in his visions, the Msho Valley, and a rare and unattainable flower, the land of Armenia." The nostalgic yearning for the Brabion flower had accompanied him throughout his life.

In the epic story "David of Sassoun" Poqr Mher (the last offspring of all Sasna giants, who locked himself in the rock) agrees to come out of the rock only when the wheat grain is the size of a dog-rose. It is likely to happen when the good has victory over the evil and a new world is born. In Dashtents's epic novel the defeat of the evil, the aspiration for renaissance and resurrection are associated with the last Urartean wheat grain found in the Msho Valley. One of the hero's dream is to spill the last Urartean seeds in the liberated Armenian soil.

Legends and tales in the narrative are conditioned by the writer's epical-folkloric world outlook. Armenia herself is wrapped in mythical realities and becomes a peculiar symbol. "Your paramour is Armenia. She is in chains. You must smash these chains and set her free. Armenia is a legendary mare, that has been enchained in a dark dungeon. You must let her out of the dungeon like the mare that is locked up in the cellar of the Arakelots Monastery," Gevorg Chaush told Makh'luto. Armenia is identified with enchained beauties in fairy-tales and myths, who in the end are rescued by legendary giants. The epic novel ends with the image of the unchained Brabion-flower-Armenia.

The prominent literary critic S. Aghababian writes: "putting the worldview of tillers at the core of the narrative, Dashtents exposes the democratic essence of the liberation movement, by this conditioning the heroic contents of the movement and the beauty and nobleness of the spiritual aspiration of famous historic heroes. It's a worldview that comes from the Armenian epic story, with an extremely fair and precise

interpretation.” (S. Aghababian, “Khachik Dashtents and His Epic Novel “The Call of Tillers”, Yerevan, 1984, p.6).

Dashtents narrates a real-fantastic story about real-fantastic people. The author marvels at the courage and valor of his heroes: so legendary and outstanding were they and their feats that they might seem unreal and unusual to coming generations. Together with his characters the writer weaves a story that is both magical and real. The novel is interpolated with mythological stories and tales which tell of wonders of nature and human spirit and link the heroes with their courageous ancestors.

Առասպելականն ու իրականը Խ.Ղաշտենցի «Ռանչպարների կանչը» վիպակում

Խաչիկ Ղաշտենցի <<Ռանչպարների կանչը>> վիպասքում միջոլոգիզմը ներդրված է պատումի ռեալիստական ոճին: Վեպի հերոսները հայդուկ-ֆիդայիներ են: <<Այնքան արտասովոր ու առասպելական էին այդ սերնդի մարդիկ և իրենց գործերը,- գրում է հեղինակը,- որ թեև այս վեպի ամբողջ նյութը իրական է, կատարված եղելություն, բայց ոմանց կարող է թվալ անիրական և հեքիաթային>>: ԵՎ որովհետև վեպում պատկերված հերոսների մասին ժողովուրդը ստեղծել է առասպելներ, ուստի Ղաշտենցի պատումը ներառվում է բանահյուսական ոլորտի մեջ, ուր իրական դեպքերը ընդմիջարկվում են առասպելներով և ավանդություններով: Դրանք պատմում են բնության հրաշքների մասին, հերոսներին վերադարձնում դեպի պատմական անցյալը, ուր նրանք հայտնաբերում են իրենց նախնիների ոգին: Ղաշտենցը հանդես է գալիս որպես ասացող, և նրա վեպը նույնանում է ասքի, որը և պայմանավորում է պատումի էպիկականությունը: