



“Within the Borders of a Monastery” by Ekaterine Gabashvili: The Representation of Female Desire and the Feminine

Nana Abuladze

Master of Comparative Literary Studies, Ilia State University, Georgia

Abstract

Within the Borders of a Monastery is a story by Georgian feminist writer and activist Ekaterine Gabashvili (1851-1938). The goal of the paper is to explore the representation of female desire in the story. As Georgia was the part of the USSR, the humanities in Georgia were ideologized – the scholars would analyze literary texts from strictly Marxist point of view. Therefore, the process of reviewing Georgian literature from feminist perspective has started only recently. The paper contributes to the process and suggests an innovative reading of Gabashvili's story. As Gabashvili thematizes hysteria and psychosis from feminist-psychoanalytical perspective and challenges gender roles, the paper uses the methodology of the Feminist Literary Criticism with French Feminist and the Gender Performativity Theories. The paper argues that the story depicts female desire as a destructive, uncontrollable force which is pre-oedipal, opposes the Symbolic (i.e. the patriarchy) and manifests itself either through hysteria/psychosis or through the semiotic metaphors (e.g. dance). It transcends the female body and is connected to the feminine: the female and male protagonists (Salo and Tevdore, respectively) who love each other, experience and express their desire identically. The feminine is shown as a performative phenomenon through the androgenous male protagonist Tevdore. The opposition between the Semiotic and the Symbolic is reinforced through the semantics of space. The end of the story (the protagonists committing a suicide) reveals the theme of the story: banishing the female desire and the feminine from the symbolic order.

Keywords: Feminist Literary Criticism, Georgian Literature, Female Author, Symbolic, Semiotic

1. Introduction

Under the Soviet system the academic fields in Georgia including the Literary Studies were ideologized. Thus, it did not witness the change of paradigm in the 1960s and did not uphold new theoretical approaches such as Feminist Literary Criticism or Postcolonial Theory. Georgian literary scholarship has started to use these frameworks recently. This has led to a debate on the legacy of Georgian women writers. The paper contributes to the debate

and examines *Within the Borders of a Monastery* – a story by Ekaterine Gabashvili – from the perspective of the Feminist Literary Criticism. Its goal is to explore the representation of female desire through answering these research questions: how is female desire expressed? What is the connection between the female desire and hysteria/psychosis? What is the relation between the female desire and female body and how is its manifestation related to the semantics of space? Since Gabashvili thematizes hysteria and psychosis from a feminist-psychoanalytical perspective and questions gender roles, the paper uses the methodology of the Feminist Literary Criticism and draws on the theoretical approach by Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Butler.

Ekaterine Gabashvili (1851-1938) was a feminist, a writer, and a public figure. Her works have two main directions: children stories and the stories with feminist, social and political focus. She also wrote about the importance of women's education.¹ Gabashvili's memoirs and letters to her contemporaries also provide significant information about the problems that women, especially, women writers faced: the lack of personal space, the family obligations that hinder women from working in the public realm (Melashvili, 2018).

Unlike her contemporary women writers, she was never forgotten. However, as her children's stories were actively taught at school, she was mostly celebrated as the representative of children's literature (Kiknadze, 1982, pp. 10-11). Her other stories, which feature feminist focus and subversion were either ignored or read from Marxist perspective (see *The Literary Scholarship*). The paper addresses this gap in Georgian Literary scholarship, suggesting an innovative reading of the story by Gabashvili.

The paper consists of three chapters: the three following chapters review the literary scholarship on Ekaterine Gabashvili, the methodology and the theoretical approach, respectively, while the final chapter comprises the analysis and interpretation of the story. The final chapter is organized into the subchapters: the female desire and hysteria/psychosis, the female desire, the female body and the semantics of space, the female desire and the feminine.

2. The Literary Scholarship

The literary scholarship about Ekaterine Gabashvili from the Soviet era is one-sided, strongly influenced by the political regime: all scholars read her works from Marxist perspective and consider her a realist and a "peopleist writer" who concentrates on class struggle and the peasants' rights (Ghambashidze, 2020, Gagoshvili, 2016, Kiknadze, 1982, Karelshvili, 1980, Botsvadze, 1976, Tavzishvili, 1963). The scholars, however, disagree about which of these two movements is primary in Gabashvili's works: while Nestan Ghambashidze (2020), Nino gagoshvili (2016) and Ineza Kiknadze (1980) think that the elements of realism are equally important as peopleist ideas in Gabashvili's texts, Ioseb Botsvadze (1976) and Giorgi Tavzishvili (1963) consider her to be primarily a peopleist writer and view her texts from strictly Marxist focus. Eremia Karelshvili (1980) and Ineza Kiknadze (1980) in contrast, think that the main theme of Gabashvili's stories is an individual and their misery.

As for the form and genre, the scholars state that Ekaterine Gabashvili is the founder of Georgian short story (Gagoshvili, 2016, Eristavi, 2007, Tavzishvili, 1963). Two of her stories *The Dream* and *The Fantasy* are the examples of rhythmic prose (Kiknadze, 1982, pp. 84-90,

¹ One of her articles is available online: <https://nateba.webbreeze.net/videos/282-gabashvili1-rcheuli>

Tavzishvili, 1963, p. 41). Her language is eclectic, rich, often she uses dialectical and archaic forms (Kiknadze, 1980, pp. 88-90, Tavzishvili, 1963, p. 59).

Although none of these scholars read Gabashvili's works from a feminist perspective, some of them focus on women representation: Karelshvili (1980) and Tavzishvili (1963) state that Ekaterine Gabashvili writes bravely about the oppression of women, criticises patriarchal traditions and false religious believes. Ghambashidze (2020) and Tavzishvili (1963) stress the representation of a woman writer in Gabashvili's stories and her view of the conflict between family chores and intellectual work in *The Tornwinged* – a partially autobiographical play about a female writer. Tavzishvili (1963) notes that the protest of peasant women characters in Gabashvili's stories is passive – they commit suicide instead of rising in revolt. He analyzes *Within the Borders of a Monastery* from this perspective too: he states that the story shows how religious norms restrict the true love, the protagonists of the story commit suicide in the end as an act of protest, but they also feel guilty for defiling the sacred space of monastery (Tavzishvili, 1963, p. 55).

Ekaterine Gabashvili's works have been read from a feminist perspective only recently – a book *Time, Space and Gender in the works and personal letters of Georgian Women* by Salome Pataridze focuses on Gabashvili's work among that of the other Georgian women writers. Pataridze (2023, p. 71) considers Gabashvili to be the representative of critical realism, she states that Gabashvili depicts the conflict between values through the binary oppositions: the good/the evil, the rich/the poor, the honor/the money, a town/a village. Her women characters fight against the denial of their personality and struggle to construct their identity, i.e. to combine the society's view on their roles and responsibilities with their own (Pataridze, 2023, p. 72). A woman's voice in the text is a voice of the marginalized, a voice of protest against the patriarchy (Pataridze, 2023, pp.75-76). Also, there is a contrast between how men and women express their desires: there is nothing shameful in love for Pavle, the male protagonist of *The Romance in Did-Kheva*², however, frustrated he still kills Maro, thereby he destroys her body full of taboos and conventions, with the hope that they will be happy together in the afterlife (Pataridze, 2023, p. 80).

Pataridze (2023, pp. 81-83) also focuses on Tina from *Tina's Dance*: an old woman who refuses to fulfil her responsibility as a grandmother – to raise the grandchildren. Pataridze (2023, p. 82) views Tina's danse as an expression of her protest and "the collective representation of the invisible, marginalized bodies". Through danse Tina also confirms her own, personal identity (Pataridze, 2023, p. 82).

Although Pataridze's book is crucial for the Feminist Literary Criticism in Georgia, there is still a significant gap in reading Gabashvili's stories from feminist perspective: Pataridze does not analyze *Within the Borders of a Monsatery* in her book. Moreover, none of the earlier scholars have paid much attention to the story and if they have, not from the feminist perspective. Therefore, there is a need to reread the story to have a comprehensive view of the feminist aspects of Gabashvili's works. The paper aims to fill this gap.

3. Methodology

The paper uses the methodology of the Feminist Literary Criticism, i.e. the main focus of the analysis are the gender aspects of the text, in this case the representaion of female desire and the Feminine. This implies examining the relation between the two and exploring their relation to the female body and the space. To achive this goal, the paper applies the

² Did-Kheva is a village in the eastern part of Georgia.

framework of French Feminism (Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva) and the Gender Performativity Theory (Judith Butler) to the text through the technique of close reading, i.e. focusing on the relevant details to expose their deeper meaning.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1. Female Desire and Female Body

Both for Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva the Lacanian Symbolic is the starting point for their theories. They, however, view it and women's relationship to it differently.

Cixous (1981, p. 165) quotes Freudian-Lacanian notion of women being outside the symbolic, i.e. outside the language, the culture and its law and order. This order is based on hierarchical oppositions in which women always have a passive, submissive, less important role (Cixous, 1981, Cixous, 1988). The Feminine, therefore, has been subjugated to the Masculine and the opposition Men/Women serves as a basis for all hierarchical systems (Cixous, 1988). Women have been deprived of their bodies the same way and for the same goal as they have been deprived of the language (Cixous, 1976, p. 875). Thus, in the culture which Cixous calls "Masculine Economy" there is no place for female desire, and it is for this reason that women do not know how to deal with it, how to express and fulfill it (Cixous, 1988, p. 291).

Women's desire, therefore, is pre-cultural, pre-symbolic, pre-norm, for Cixous it is exactly that subversive potential through which women can reappropriate the language (Cixous, 1981). It is also incontrollable and infinite (Cixous, 1976).

For this reason, Cixous perceives hysteria as a form of protest and an impetus for men to control women: hysterics are silent, but their bodies speak (Cixous, 1981, p. 171). As men do not understand the language of the female body, they try to minimize the disturbance caused by a hysteric (Cixous, 1981). They do this through an attempt to rationalize her speech, thus subduing her (Cixous, 1981).

Unlike Cixous, Kristeva understands the Symbolic in broader terms – according to her, the Symbolic is interwoven with all other hierarchical structures and serves as a basis for them (Kristeva, 1981). As Ann Rosalind Jones (1984) puts it, for Kristeva the Symbolic is a synonym for patriarchy. The Sociosymbolic Contract (the language) through which we enter the culture is sacrificial, i.e. it assumes the separation of a child from their mother, it also assumes the repression of one's desires as one enters it against one's will and as it serves the paternal function, women remain alien to it (Kristeva, 1981, p. 25). Women, therefore, have two choices in relation with the Symbolic order: either assimilate with it or experience themselves as "different, other, fallen" (Kristeva, 1985, p. 142). The revolt against the paternal leads either to cultural revolution or to violence (Kristeva, 1981).

The reasons for hysteria and psychosis lie in the sacrificial logic of the Sociosymbolic order, i.e. in the denial of the paternal function – the denial of language and social codes (Kristeva, 1981, p. 24). The language as a means of communication disappears, the hystericals exalt in their dissatisfaction, because they seek for maternal bond that can never be regenerated (Kristeva, 1980, p. 166).

It is in psychosis and hysteria that one can trace what precedes the Symbolic and what Kristeva calls the Semiotic (Kristeva, 1980, p. 136). The semiotic originates from instinctual drive, it is that archaic phenomenon which still invades the language through the rhythm and intonation and reactivates the maternal element repressed by the Symbolic (Kristeva, 1980, pp. 133-136). In poetic language it leads to the rejection of grammatical rules, to syntactic

elisions which make the meaning of the text equivocal (Kristeva, 1980, p. 134). It can also generate "metaphors of non-language" or images which does not correspond to the linguistic communication (Kristeva, 1985, p. 143).

Since Semiotic or the Maternal is only heterogenous to the Symbolic, but not subversive to it, motherhood and pregnancy are ambivalent experiences for women (Kristeva, 1981, p. 31). Pregnancy is a liminal state between nature and culture, it enables a woman to access the ethical, to turn nature into culture (Kristeva, 1985, p. 149). She, however, risks of destroying her intellectual and professional personality too (Kristeva, 1981, p. 31).

A substantial body of criticism followed to the theories of Cixous and Kristeva.³ Nevertheless, as Ann Rosalind Jones (1981) and Leslie W. Rabine (1977) note, the concepts of Cixous and Kristeva have had a significant impact on feminist theory and can be effectively integrated into a feminist reading of literature.

4.2. Gender and Its Performativity

According to Judith Butler (1988) gender is not a static phenomenon, rather the repetitive acts produce and reproduce it. Gender identity forms through these acts and those who fail to perform are punished (Butler, 1988). In this process the body is not only a material reality, but also the cultural entity (Butler, 1988). Its materiality is only possible within the norm (Butler, 2011). This in turn means that sex is also a social construct, as we can perceive it only through gender (Butler, 2011). In other words, sex is not a condition that we have, but a process "which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (Butler, 2011, p. XII). The sex/gender matrix precedes the existence of a human, for this reason, if someone does not comply to it, "it is their humanness that comes into question" (Butler, 2011, p. XVII). Since the materiality of the body depends on this matrix too, the bodies which do not correspond to the matrix, are not considered to be bodies any more (Butler, 2011).

5. The Representation of Female Desire

5.1. The Female Desire and Hysteria/Psychosis

Within the Borders of a Monastery was first published in 1923. Its plot is simple: a young woman Salo suffers from psychosis after childbirth. Her family decides to leave her in the Green Monastery of Theotokos⁴. They hope that the grace of the Virgin Mary will cure her. Her husband Beso leaves her with her grandmother until the Dormition. Salo meets Tevdore – a young novice who has also come to monastery for cure from his mental illness and is now eager to become a monk. They fall in love, but unlike Salo, Tevdore is scared to accept his feelings and commits suicide. Salo, attempting to save him dies with him as they both fall into a ravine.

That Salo is hysteric is clear from the dialogue between her grandmother and the Hegumen of the monastery. As the grandmother notes, her illness started after childbirth and

³ The focus of the criticism is that both Cixous and Kristeva reinforce the stereotypes and binary oppositions which their theories aim to confront (Jones, 1981; Dane, 1994; Rabine, 1977; Butler, 1989). There is no scientific evidence that the pre-oedipal exists and its primordality is also questionable, since we know about it only through theorizing, i.e. through the language (Butler, 1989; Wallace, 2000).

⁴ The Orthodox Church tradition refers to the Virgin Mary this way – "Theotokos" is a Greek word and means "the mother of God".

its symptoms are uncontrollable laughter and tears, also speech that lacks any logic or rationality (Gabashvili, 1960, pp. 167-168). In a talk with Tevdore the grandmother farther reveals that Salo might have been married against her will, that she is a beautiful and educated young woman who has been brought up at the estate of the landlord's daughter-in-law (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 371). Although her husband Beso has a wealthy family, he is "a poor, ignorant peasant man"⁵ and Salo might have not considered him suitable for her (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 371). She never said anything against the marriage, but "would cry a lot and was rather sorrowful" (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 372).

Therefore, there are two reasons because of which Salo's psychosis has evolved. The first reason is the repressive and sacrificial logic of the Symbolic which Salo could not openly oppose but could not accept either. This logic works hand in hand with the capitalistic one – Salo's illness is a problem for the family, because they have a lot of work to do. Her grandmother emphasizes this in a dialogue with Tevdore (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 372). Salo's husband also cares about her only because he views her as a work force. When he comes to the monastery to bring his wife back home and sees that nothing has changed, he is angry with her:

I thought God had saved you and you'd come back to the family. What shall I do now? [...] the summer is almost over... The harvest is ready, shall we let it spoil, or what?! – the husband grumbles at her – I'll take you tomorrow... I can't wait anymore! I'll tie you up with a rope if need be! (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 381)

The second reason of Salo's illness is maternity. To put it in Kristeva's (1985) terms, pregnancy and motherhood did not serve Salo to approach to the Ethical, instead, she returned to the pre-oedipal, pre-rational state. Her pregnancy and childbirth are mentioned in the story four times (Gabashvili, 1960, pp. 368, 370, 371, 372), however, there is no mention of the child or of Salo longing for the baby. The emphasis is on the labor being hard and on "spiritual chaos that the torture and fear of her first labor brought to her." (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 370) Thus, Salo accomplished the maternity only as a social norm, but not as an emotional and transformative act that would connect Nature to Culture and liberate her according to Cixous (1981, pp. 175-176) and Kristeva (1981, p. 31). On the contrary, she calls her family life a "yoke" (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 378). It is while thinking about her family life she tries to articulate her desire:

Beso will make me lie next to him, he will hug me and if I refuse... Oh! No, no! I'll pull out his hair, I'll pull his eyes out... I'll break the harness, I'll run, I'll run to the forest... -- and here Salo's thoughts would stir, and weave and the fire flakes would flash in her eyes and her soul trembled and she felt that she was losing her mind again. (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 378)

Thus, the relation between female desire and hysteria/psychosis in the story becomes clear: hysteria/psychosis is a way for the protagonist to manifest her desire and frustration. It is also clear that she does not know how to manifest them otherwise – note the gaps and unfinished sentences in her speech. This is because, as Cixous (1988, p. 291) noted, there is no place for a woman's desire in the Symbolic, women, therefore, do not know how to express or fulfil it. From Salo's monologue it is obvious what this desire is like too: she despises her husband and is forced to have a sexual intercourse with him. While thinking of it

⁵ Since there is no English translation of the Gabashvili's story available, I have translated the quotes from the story here and elsewhere.

her desire becomes destructive ("I'll pull out his hair, I'll pull his eyes out... I'll break the harness...") and then turns into psychosis/hysteria ("[...] her soul trembled, and she felt that she was losing her mind again").

The female desire thus is represented as a force that creates destruction and rupture instead of connection and unity. The following subchapters will elaborate on the reasons for such representation.

5.2. The Female Desire, the female body and the Semantics of Space

In the story the female desire is connected to the body and to the space. There are three spaces with a specific connotation: home or the family space, which is a part of the sacrificial Sociosymbolic Contract, the monastery, and the forest which belongs to the monastery and at the same time is in semantic opposition with it.

The monastery is a man's space, the masculine economy, as Cixous (1988) would put it: it is characterized by strict discipline, hierarchy, and predictability. Moreover, Salo is taken there to be cured, i.e. to keep her hysteria under control and to make her the part of the rational realm again. Hence the monastery represents the Symbolic. This is why, Salo gradually avoids the church and goes to the forest, even though in the beginning she feels better in the church (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 370).

The forest is a part of the monastic territory, but semantically it corresponds to the Semiotic, to the archaic force to which Salo returns. The bathing scene below is not a mere poetic passage, but the description of Salo's revival, her liberation from the shackles of culture:

The powerful music of the waterfall awoke her, casted her sadness away, revived her. She felt the blood of her youth rushing in her veins. suddenly she threw off her clothes and jumped under the waterfall. Then she turned, clapped her hands and a loud outcry of pleasure followed this gesture. The nakedness of the young woman made the beauty of nature more vivid, merged with it into the harmony of movement. (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 374)

Thus, returning to nature Salo returns to her body, her body is free and becomes one with nature. This in turn frees her desire: "Salo was feeling utmost pleasure and jiggled like a child, laughed loudly and trembled, shivered and shrugged at the same time." (Gabashvili, 1960, pp. 374-375). Therefore, the bathing here is a semiotic activity which allows Salo to experience and express her desire without psychosis or hysteria.

Danse is another semiotic metaphor. As salo's family returns for her, there is a church holiday which quickly becomes the village holiday. Salo initially stands shyly and is fidgeting, "nervously squizzing the ends of her skirt" (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 379). However, as soon as she notices Tevdore, she goes to dance with the first person who asks her. Thus, it is the sight of the object of her desire that triggers her to express it and experience pleasure: "The gracious movement of her body, the bowing down of her neck, the opening of her arms, the swirl of her belt and the smile of beatitude on her face distinguished her dance from that of others." (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 379)

But the liberation of Salo's desire is short-lived: she collapses suddenly and becomes hysteric. The contrast between the two forms of the desire expression is observed in the text through her body too:

It was a horrible sight: the young woman who a second ago had been swirling around like a butterfly and had been full of beauty, was now lying with her face turned into blue, her eyes rolled over, her hands into seizure. Whole body of hers was petrified, her mouth foaming. (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 380)

Therefore, Salo's life and her expression of desire is ambivalent: it is either manifested through the primordial, pre-oedipal impulses (hysteria/psychosis) or through semiotic activities such as dance and play (as in the bathing scene). In both cases Salo's desire is an uncontrollable and destructive force, because it is a way of protest against the paternal and as Kristeva (1981, 28) argued, the refusal of the paternal leads to violence.

However, as Kristeva (1981, p. 25) states, one can never escape the Symbolic, no matter how one resists to it and relies on Semiotic, it is for this reason that the life of a woman is ambivalent – she turns to the Semiotic and opposes the Symbolic but has no choice other than to live within the latter. Thus, it is not by accident that on the church holiday Salo is wearing a wedding dress with all the jewelry (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 278) – this is a reference to the everlasting character of the Sociosymbolic Contract.

There is a third, liminal space too, a border between the Symbolic and the Semiotic – the belltower. Here Tevdore and Salo first meet (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 369) and here they commit suicide (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 382). In other words, this is the place where the love story starts and where it ends – the androgenous space where the opposites unite.

The space in the story, therefore, also has a gender aspect in terms of being connected to the presence of a certain set of norms, which ban the female desire (home, monastery), an absence of them that allows female desire to be (the forest) or the liminal state between the two (the belltower). Such semantics of space further emphasizes the tension between the Symbolic and the Semiotic, thus stressing the contrast between them.

5.3. The Female Desire and the Feminine

The relation between the female desire and the feminine is represented in the story through the novice Tevdore. He is an androgenous character. There are three ways in which the text shows his androgyny. First, he has feminine features: "A white linen dress embellished his body, which was slender as a cyprus tree. [...] A newly appeared mustache stared upon his lips and shyly lowered wide blue eyes were the crown of his virgin-like beauty." (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 373)

Second, the duties that he has in the monastery are also typical women chores (as considered in patriarchy): to prepare meals, to tidy the territory, bring flour and bake bread, take care of the sheep and cattle (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 370). In the hierarchy of the monastery, it is Tevdore who is obedient and "listens and helps everyone" (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 370). Third, Tevdore's similarity with Salo – as a character he is a male version of Salo, with features like hers: like Salo, he has come to monastery to be cured from psychosis (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 368). Both Salo and Tevdore wear white in the monastery (Gabashvili, 1960, pp. 366-369) and for both their beauty plays a fatal role. The grandmother while telling Tevdore about Salo's illness and its reasons, adds: "Truly, cursed is the beauty." (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 372) Tevdore avoids answering the grandmother's question about the reasons of his illness and his stay in the monastery and replies with a vague phrase: "Please, don't ask me, granny, I can't tell you... Beauty sometimes perishes a human and he wants to hide it. I've even changed my name." (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 373)

This sentence features what Kristeva (1980, p. 134) called a “syntactic elision” – it is not clear whether “it” refers to the “beauty” or to the fact of being perished because of beauty. Although it remains unclear from the phrase what exactly Tevdore wants to hide, it is obvious that this has made him deny a part of his identity – his name. There is no farther reference to Tevdore’s life outside the monastery, but we learn from the text later what he endeavors to hide – his desire:

When he first sees Salo approaching him in the belltower he is scared (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 369) Then when Tevdore accidentally hears Salo bathing in the forest, his desire manifests itself into psychotic symptoms:

The novice startled, turned completely pale. For a past couple of weeks he had been feeling his body crumbling, old superstitions had come back to him, he had been hallucinating, he couldn’t sleep, would hear a loud laughter. Now too he thought he witnessed whatever his insane mind imagined. (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 375)

Also, note the flipped gender dynamic between the two: upon seeing Salo naked Tevdore faints and it is Salo who brings him some water and helps him come to senses again (Gabashvili, 1960, pp. 375-376). The man, thus, is represented as weak and hysterical and the woman as a strong savior.

Therefore, Tevdore falls on the feminine spectrum of the traditional patriarchal dichotomies that Cixous (1988, p. 165) has identified: he is passive and submissive and expresses his desire through a psychotic/hysterical trance. He is attracted to Salo, but also fears her. A semiotic metaphor (Salo’s danse) frees him like Salo. This inverts the dynamic in their relation: this time Salo collapses while dancing and Tevdore helps her to come to consciousness (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 380).

There is also a contrast between how Tevdore treats Salo and how her husband does: for her husband she is a workforce, while for Tevdore she is the beauty (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 380). Moreover, Salo does not perceive Tevdore as a man, for her he resembles to the archangel Michael in the icon, she calls him “the angel”: “Only the grumbling of the monks! Why can’t I hear the voice of the angel singing? He is not here? Maybe at the belltower again?” (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 381)

This passage stresses that Tevdore does not belong to the masculine economy of the monastery. Due to his androgyny, i.e. because he violates the sex-gender matrix, as Butler (2011) calls it, he is not perceived as a human either. The simile with the angel can be also read as a sign of the divine unity and perfection that the Symbolic order fails to recognize – it is only women characters in the text (Salo and her grandmother) who see the unusual beauty of Tevdore, while for the Hegumen he is a mere novice who “has renounced everything of this world” (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 368).

The finale of the story farther unfolds the dynamic between female desire and androgyny. It ends at the belltower – the same place where Salo and Tevdore first met. Tevdore finally articulates his attraction towards Salo. His desire like that of Salo has a destructive character: “Kiss! I’m going mad with the desire to kiss... I’ll burn myself, I’ll burn the monastery, I’ll destroy it... Yes, yes! I want to kiss! I must kiss, I must hug her... Salo, Salo! I want you, I want you...” (Gabashvili 1960, 382) Hearing this Salo also articulates her desire: “This is what I want too, my love!” and embraces him which terrifies Tevdore, he almost falls from the belltower, but Salo manages to hold him on time (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 382). She is firm in her decision: “You can’t go anywhere from me! And if you do, you’ll bring me with you!” (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 382) This calms Tevdore, but he becomes psychotic when he hears the

wind moving the bells (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 382). Then he jumps before Salo manages to grab anything to hold them, even though she does not intend to die with him – her last exclamation "What are you doing?!" indicates this (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 382).

Note that the end resembles to the finale of *The Romance in Did-Kheva* as interpreted by Pataridze (2023). However, in this case Tevdore does not kill Salo, but commits suicide, i.e. he aims to destroy his own body in the first place. The end, thus, shows the complete dismissal of gender roles: the woman is represented as strong and brave, willing to fight for her desire, while the man is fearful, psychotic and prone to suicide. Tevdore and Salo experience and express their desire in the same way: ambivalence, destruction, Semiotic metaphors, and hysteria/psychosis. In other words, they both experience themselves as "different, fallen, other" (Kristeva, 1985, p. 142). Therefore, their suicide has nothing to do with a passive protest or the guilt as Tavzishvili (1963) thought – it is a semiotic act committed under psychotic state of mind, an act of escaping rather than fighting against the Symbolic. But Tevdore fails, since their death is not depicted as an act of liberation but as that of devastation: "And the two shattered dead bodies plunged themselves in the ravine." (Gabashvili, 1960, p. 382)

In this story, therefore, female desire transcends the female body and is linked to the Feminine, which to put it in Butler's (1988, p. 519) terms, biological males can also perform. The Feminine is desired, despised and feared in the Symbolic order (Tevdore's attitude to Salo). It is stigmatized (Salo brought to the monastery to be cured, Tevdore changing his name) and has nothing to do with a biological reality of being a woman (Tevdore's androgyny).

6. Conclusion

Analyzing Gabashvili's story from feminist perspective has unveiled new aspects of the text, overlooked by earlier scholars. First, *Within the Borders of a Monastery* depicts female desire as an ambivalent, uncontrollable and destructive force. It is also a primordial, pre-oedipal force which is manifested through the irrational states of mind (hysteria/psychosis) or through non-linguistic, semiotic metaphors which free the female body (danse, bathing naked in the forest). Although it is connected to the female body, it is not restrained to it, rather it is an inseparable part of the subjugated reality of being a female, the Feminine. To show this Ekaterine Gabashvili uses the parallelism in characters: the female (Salo) and the male (Tevdore) who both have feminine features and roles: their beauty is fascinating and stigmatizing at the same time, they both serve as a workforce for the masculine economy, both are marginalized and experience and express the desire in the same way.

Second, the end of the story inverts the gender roles and shows two paths for the fulfilment of desire: the path of active protest through Salo's resistance and firmness and the path of escapism and despair through Tevdore's suicide. The pessimistic end of the story can be read as an act of banishing the female desire and the Feminine from the Symbolic.

Finally, to reinforce the contrast in the Semiotic-Symbolic interplay, Gabashvili creates semantic oppositions with spaces: family space/ home and the monastery represent the Symbolic, while the forest represents the Semiotic. The belltower is a liminal space between the two which unites the opposites: the desire and restriction, the bravery and fear, the protest and despair, the life and death.

This study also lays the foundation for the future research. There are two new research directions that need to be addressed: 1. what the pattern of the representation of female desire

in Gabashvili's works is, and 2. how female desire is connected to female body and the semantics of space in her other stories.

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