

**THE PROBLEM OF LIBERTY OF FEMALE SEXUALITY
AND ITS EXPOSURE IN HAGOP OSHAGAN'S PROSE**

Key words – women, morals and customs, inner world, lust, sexual love, self-awareness, problem of love and sex, instincts, subconscious impulses, sexuality and heredity, sexuality and social environment, religion

Introduction

The problem of sexual liberty and its exposure, without any veils, in Armenian literature was first put forward by Diaspora Armenian writer Hagop Oshagan in his collection of short stories titled “Khonarhner” (The Humbles) in 1921 and was later developed in his novel “Tsak-Ptuky” (The Holey Saucepan, 1928). In this novel the key principles¹ of Oshagan’s perception of reality and its exposure are distinguished and one of those principles, as he mentioned, refers to the absolutization of sex; “At least to me art is the sex.^{2*}” This was a new approach of perceiving and depicting literature in the traditionally conservative Armenian literature.

Due to inner psychological developments of real-life characters Oshagan brought to light the lives of Armenians living at the end of the 19th and the beginning of 20th century Turkish town of Bursa and surrounding villages thus proving that not only national but also universal features are something peculiar to Armenians. Oshagan drew his attention to the psyche – inner human world, and interpreted the psychological drama and actions of the characters proceeding from the “biological starting point”. With the collection of “Khonarhner” Oshagan became a sort of “Divergent” like his characters, who deviated from the village customs and traditions in the same way as he deviated from the direction of Armenian literature thus also igniting a rarely spoken topic – the problem of free expression on the topic of sexuality.

But which is that bold and important step with which Oshagan entered bravely into the traditional Armenian literature? It is the depiction of corporal love, especially the depiction of feminine sexual love and lust and the affirmation of women’s right to love. This problem starts with the characters of Eva (“Madmoiselle Eva”), Soghmen

¹ See Lusine-Lilit Seyranyan, Oshagani Tiezerky Sharzhogh Uzhery (The Powers behind Oshagan’s Universe), Literary Journal, Yerevan, 2011.

² Mayrineu Shukin Tak (Under the Cedar), Beirut, 1983. p. 21.

* We are inclined to interpret this idea by Oshagan proceeding from two perspectives. First, with this expression Oshagan adheres to one of Freud’s views, according to which neurosis emerged as a result of sexual repression lies in the base of an artistic work which is compensated by sublimation, that is to say libido converts it to a work of art and the writers are neurotics. (See **Kalantaryan J.**, Knnadatutyunn ibrev Gortsnakan Grakanagitutyun (Criticism as Practical Literary Criticism), Yerevan, 2017, p. 158). And secondly, Oshagan’s purpose is to depict real life, and for him “...the main torment of life flows with semen and blood” (Mayrineru Shukin Tak, Beirut, 1983, p. 21).

("Mad Soghmen"), Shoghik ("Shahbaz") and develops in Nazik's character, the protagonist of the novel "Tsak-Ptuky".

My objective is to study the internal-psychological and external causes that precondition the behavior of characters. I have conducted my research applying the method of comparative hermeneutics seeking to combine Freud's psychoanalysis with feminist criticism. The choice of such methodology is conditioned by the influence of Freud's theories on the artistic mindset of Oshagan and the uniqueness of the author's artistic view. The questions below contributed to the perception of the characters in full and have been under scrutiny.

The Problem of Love and Sex

Oshagan's works profoundly reveal the feelings of Armenian women. His works start a study of the female element and represent to readers the emotional world of women without concealing the problem of sexuality. Oshagan's characters are strong individuals – characters who have broken free of the conventionalities of village norms and restraints. During the entire process of their actions the author strived to reconcile sex and love proving that no human being can live only with spiritual love and that corporal love is as natural as it is and that the perfect human happiness is preconditioned by the harmony of these two – the spiritual and the corporal. Here Oshagan uncovered his view on the perception of sexuality which according to him is a natural and necessary aspiration and contributes to the reconstruction of human archetype (androgen) that is to say sexuality helps humans to feel complete connecting with another halves of theirs and becoming complete.

Oshagan has works where in some scenes the characters are represented under the spell of lust but on the whole and especially in case of women characters the phenomena of love and sex are represented as a whole. For instance, in the novella "Shahbaz" which basically bridges the main problems of short stories and novels, in the characters of Shahbaz and Shoghik the elements of Eros – love and sex are already reconciled. Both of the characters had entered matrimonial relationship by their parents' compulsion, however, they felt happy only with their beloved men and even death in the laps of the beloved is happiness for them.

But neither in "Khonarhner" nor in "Tsak-Ptuky" Oshagan had absolutely no purpose to substitute human spiritual values with corporal. In his works we see not only women who try to reveal the secrets and pleasures of corporal love but also loving women ready to make sacrifices for the ones they loved. Women having aspirations going beyond lust and are endowed with self-consciousness and their individual way of thinking.

Instincts of Sex and Death

In the novel Oshagan chose the approach of penetrating into the psyche and the inner world of characters via the "flow of consciousness" and the method of novel construction with the story of family generations. Both the novel and the short stories unfold with the psychological actions of the characters and everything links to two rudimentary instincts, that of sex and death (Eros and Thanatos). The images of love and death alternate one another in the short stories and especially in the novel.

Oshagan believed that it was impossible to eliminate the sexual instinct from the psyche of human and as Denis de Rougemont claimed it had the same effect on human as the nuclear energy in 1939¹. In his work “Hamapatker Arevmtahay Grakanutyanyan” (Overview on Western Armenian Literature) Oshagan noted, “... Our life has not yet freed itself from the animal life – I would even state from the pressure of **bestial**”². Perhaps this is the author’s opinion, and this is the reason that the novel ends with a scene that depicts necrophilia. However, there might be different answers to this.

There are no evocations of bestial instincts in the cases of Eva’s and Soghme’s characters. In this sense Shoghik’s and Nazik’s characters are of particular significance. Shoghik, after all, manages to take control of her corporal desires. Whereas Nazik’s character seems to split into two; in the first pages of the novel we see only a woman totally under the spell of lasciviousness while in the following pages we have a woman ready for sacrifice. Nazik had three men in her life, two of them had ailments and while consummating with them she wished only to satisfy her sexual instincts. However, she loves and strives for Zakar – the healthy one. This is also significant as the ill-instinct combination is in contrast to healthy-love combination.

Subconscious Impulses

Oshagan’s works demonstrate Freud’s notions on the unconsciousness and the subconsciousness, “Sometimes our senses have impulses which we are unfamiliar with or we do not ponder over them. But they resurface with an unexpected fury within us in the moments of spiritual torments.”³ To acquire certain psychological solutions Oshagan resorted to the complexes of Oedipus and Electra. In some passages of the novel he pictured Nazik’s unconscious sexual fondness with her father which Freud called “Complex of Oedipus”⁴. And the daughter in turn, “And she began to think of things that she had seen before but had abandoned the thought of which without understanding. And in the deathbed this is how she explicated her father’s enchantment over women”⁵.

Sex as a Key for Self-Cognition

Oshagan had an interesting observation about literature; the extraordinary individuals and events constitute the material of literature. His female characters of the village were of extraordinary beauty and behavior with mysterious past and consciousness. Endowing his female characters with higher intellect the author prompted them to self-cognition. He represented his characters in the role of researchers and explorers as a result of which they rise gradually from the sensual level to that of cognitive and reach self-cognition. This is the very particular reason to revolt against the village moral norms.

¹ **Rougemont D. de**, *Essays on Myths of Love*, Yerevan, 2009, p. 17.

² **Oshagan H.**, *Hamapatker Arevmtahay Grakanutyanyan* (Overview on Western Armenian Literature), Vol. 10, Antelias, 1982, p. 170.

³ **Oshagan H.**, *Tsak-Ptuky*, Antelias, 1996, p. 153.

⁴ The expression is borrowed from the tragedy “*Kind Oedipus*” by Sophocles, where the protagonist kills his father and marries his mother.

⁵ **Oshagan H.**, *Tsak-Ptuky*, p. 153.

Each of them lived through their tragedy caused by the forbidden love in their own way. And in the village it was forbidden to talk about love and especially sexual love as it was regarded as base and improper and it was better to leave it concealed and uncovered¹. In their solitude, away from people and shame and dishonor each of the female characters tried in their own way to deal with the tragedy of sex and love. Some of them managed to reign over their body and soul, to take control of their instincts while others failed. Novella “Shahbaz” and novel “Tsak-Ptuky” Oshagan unfolded step by step the scene of “narcissism”². Oshagan wrote in the novel, “Thus grown up and mysterious and imbued with sexual frequency so early she never felt ashamed of herself and of playing with the still non-existent heads of her nipples.”³ The protagonist of the novella Shoghik was in the same psychological situation, “Her hands incidentally touched her own breasts which had grown to become solid as rock. She played with their shapes but didn’t feel ashamed. Why? She had no clue herself.”⁴ These scenes reveal another artistic side of women’s psychology: one of the characters was ashamed while the other was not. If we put aside the fact that besides their common features they also had different psyches we then may explain the question of shame and the lack of shame in the light of whether the character had previously experienced the sexual pleasure and if she had been familiar or unfamiliar with that. Shoghik knew what excited her and she knew what she was fighting for and under the pressure of that struggle she was trying to restrain herself. While Nazik was still a young girl who was still unfamiliar with those feelings and that very unknown was what she desired to discover.

Sexuality and Heredity

Oshagan was the first in Armenian literature to give ethno-psychological description of an individual and to explain the wakening of sexual instinct at the delicate age in the female character of the novel by the factor of heredity. He wrote, “Everyone was scared to death of this family that descended from Devil where the children would shed blood for their pleasure and the daughters would speak even with their fathers”. And the father saw the beauty and charm of his long dead wife in his daughter. And it was not quite by chance that he insisted her to dance with half-naked concubines during the party. Of course, incest was described in the Armenian traditional fairy-tales⁵, however, Oshagan’s novelty was that he explained that phenomenon with the factor of heredity.

¹ Oshagan’s works provide a huge opportunity to study the sexually restrictive Armenian culture which I consider to be a subject for another research.

² Freud connects the notion of “narcissism” with sexual inclination (borrowed from P. Nikke) which is demonstrated in those cases when the object of sexuality is missing. In such cases a person treats his/her own body with such tenderness as they would treat other sexual objects (**Kalantaryan J.**, *Knnadatutyunn ibrev Gortsanakan Grakanagitutyun*(Criticism as Practical Literary Criticism), Yerevan, 2017, p. 152.

³ **Oshagan H.**, *Tsak-Ptuky*, p. 32.

⁴ **Oshagan H.**, *Works*, Yerevan, 1979, p. 353.

⁵ See **Hayrapetyan T.**, *Arenapghtsutyuny Haj Zhoghovrdakan Hekiatnerum* (Incest in Armenian Folk Fairy Tales), “Voske Divan” *Journal of Fairy-tale Studies*. Materials of International Conference, vol. 1, 2009.

Sexuality and Social Environment

Nazik's lust and lasciviousness is not only a matter of heredity. She was born and grew up in a district that due to its strange and profane morals had notoriously earned the name of Sodom and Gomorrah. The avenue described in the novel and the moral behavior of its inhabitants reminds of a place cut off from Armenian reality where the daily life was redolent of pagan orgies full of pleasures and celebration of body strength. That avenue was connected with Turkish villages. Thus it can be assumed that Oshagan believed the behavior of Armenians was preconditioned by Turkish environment.

Nazik was the bearer of traits she had inherited from her mother who had mystical past and death (whose name also was Nazik) and from her father of licentious morals and she was oftentimes the witness of his father's rake behavior who had turned their home into a place of pleasure, parties and brawls. The enchanting dances of skilled women and their bodies made unforgettable impact on Nazik's soul as well as in the scenes of witnessing those women absolutely naked in her father's arms, "...she sneaked into her father's room, where the drunkards had ceased to brawl and she saw in the light those young women in her father's arms, with the curves of their lustful breasts on his body. It dawned on her with terrible and resolute sense of loss. That night the innocent girl was dead in her heart."¹

Along with Nazik's fast-paced psychological development the search for her own body and facts that would prove the normal physical state become necessary. All these mysterious and unrecognized inclinations give rise to strange thoughts. The girl satisfied her desires with consumption-stricken Tumas who was doomed and to whose house she had been sent by her grandmother's order to prevent the girl from seeing her father's immoral behavior. According to some literary critics Nazik gave in to sick Tumas's soliciting. But I think that the 12-year-old girl consummated with Tumasik to have experience and to discover something new being very well aware of the consequences of her actions. And even if Nazik was not sent to Ovak's house but somewhere else the consequences would still be the same.

Gender and Sexuality

In 1928 with Nazik's character Oshagan brought the right of equality of sexual love between two genders and raised the problem of satisfaction. On the first wedding night when Nazik is consummating with her husband Zakar she realized that Tumasik was unable to kindle the real woman inside her, "She saw very clearly that everything that was woman inside her had not been awakened yet and had not been taken. Her husband, the "male element" was still out of her. And with the emotions of that night and being so close and feeling the male element she understood that during the previous caresses she had been both the husband and the male."² This fact also speaks of Nazik's consciousness; she is meant not only for being taken but also for taking, she is not merely an object of love. The author, affirming women's right for sex also

¹ Oshagan H., Tsak-Ptuky, p. 31.

² See the same place, p. 66.

confirmed the rights of a woman who wanted to handle her own destiny. Nazik breaks the stereotype that the pleasure of love is reserved only for men. This is, according to feministic literary criticism¹, an act of unveiling the stereotypes in a male dominated culture by a male author who made the liberty of female sexuality and its depiction one of the key topics of his literature. In “Hamapatker” Oshagan, considering Arpiaryan’s, Zohrap’s, Sibil’s, Tusab’s works as merely ideological, wrote that they “had no impact on the problem of liberating women.”² Oshagan’s works, and especially his novel, can be considered an act of unveiling of phallogocentric stereotypes.

The Problem of Sex and Religion

The author who was a follower of Christian ideology tried to explain the problem of sex also on the religious level reconciling it with Christianity. Especially the novel has scenes of obscenity and impure lasciviousness as well as naturalistic scenes of evocation of instincts; however, the characters are out of the power of lust. They want to get married, which ensues sexual relationship. And since marriage is accompanied by ecclesiastic ceremony Christianity does not deny sexuality. In this Oshagan can be opposed to Berdyaev who claimed, that “Christianity did not transform the sex, did not spiritualize the body but on the contrary, it made a chaos and polluted it beyond repair.”³

Therefore, the short stories by the author can be considered as ode to sexuality which involves the problem of procreation tribes. After all, all the characters wish to start a family and have children. In this sense this is a wish that brings them all together.

Conclusion

After observing the sexuality problems of female characters I may claim that Oshagan was the first in the Armenian literature to bring the recognition of sex which was so important for the overall depiction of a character. What was considered as blemish Oshagan regarded as a precondition for the continuity of life. For the first time in the Armenian literature Oshagan depicted women in all the aspects of their lives making his works a broad sphere for researches on the role of women in the given culture. His works attached a new meaning and role to Armenian women leading the reader “To a new psychology” (J. Miller)”. Oshagan’s steps are directed toward finding the element of woman in the outcome of which he realized that woman’s essence is the wisdom in the shape of love and sex. With “Khonarhner” Oshagan began the problem of depiction and expression of sex, then with “Tsak-Ptuky” he raised the question of equal rights for both genders. The author’s works widely dwell on the feelings of Armenian women, it’s not only a matter of lust and sexual relationship, first of all the Armenian woman feels and recognizes the feelings given to her by nature and wishes to become the one who is in charge of those

¹ See **Turisheva O. N.**, *The Theory and Methodology of Foreign Literature*, Yerevan, 2017, p. 234.

² **Oshagan H.**, *Hamapatker Arevmtahay Grakanutyanyan*, p. 170.

³ <http://grapaharan.org/index.php>.

feelings. He tried to prove by the example of his characters that besides all sorts of love, the sexual love as well is peculiar to Armenian people and it is natural and he built his works on the free depiction of that phenomenon neglecting all the stereotypes. This is nothing less but a human right to express one's feelings which in my opinion is Oshagan's claim for free speech as an artist and his objection against artistic thought in the depth of which love and lust are divided.

Մարինե Ղազարյան – *Կնոջ սեռականության ազատության և դրա պատկերման խնդիրը Հակոբ Օշականի արձակույթում*

Հողվածում համադրական հերմենևտիկայի մեթոդով քննարկվել են սփյուռքահայ գրող և քննադատ Հակոբ Օշականի «Խոնարհները» ժողովածուի և «Ծակպտուկը» վեպի հերոսուհիների սեռականության ազատության և դրա պատկերման խնդիրները: Հերոսուհիների վարքագիծը և գործունեությունը պայմանավորող ներհոգեկան և արտաքին պատճառները լուսաբանվել են ֆրոյդիզմի և ֆեմինիստական քննադատության տեսանկյունից: Հաշվի են առնվել նաև Օշական քննադատի տեսակետները իր իսկ երկերի վերաբերյալ: Միրո և սեռի մասին մինչ այժմ օշականագիտության մեջ եղած արձարձումները քննարկվել են նաև գենդերի այսօրեական եզրաբանության մեկնակետից և տեսական այն հիմնավորումներով, որ այսօր շրջանառվում է գիտական գրականության մեջ: Քննությամբ պարզվում է, որ Օշականի նպատակն է խորությամբ բացահայտել հայ կնոջ հուզաշխարհը, ապացուցել, որ նրան ևս բնորոշ է մարմնավոր սերը, և մարդու կատարյալ երջանկությունը պայմանավորված է հոգու և մարմնի ներդաշնակությամբ:

Марине Казарян – *Проблема свободы женской сексуальности и ее проявления в прозе Акопа Ошакана*

В статье методом сопоставительной герменевтики рассмотрены проблемы свободы сексуальности героинь и ее проявления в сборнике «Покорные» и романе «Дырявый бурдюк» писателя и критика из диаспоры Акопа Ошакана. Внешние и внутренние психологические мотивы, обуславливающие поведение и деятельность героинь, были освещены в аспекте фрейдизма и феминистской критики. Были также учтены взгляды Ошакана-критика относительно своей страны. Вопросы любви и пола, обсуждавшиеся до сих пор в ошакановедении, были рассмотрены также и с точки зрения современной гендерной терминологии и современных научно-теоретических обоснований. В результате исследования выяснилось, что целью Ошакана было выявить эмоциональный мир армянской женщины, доказать, что ей также свойственна плотская любовь, а полноценное счастье человека обусловлено гармонией души и тела.