

Aspects of the Contemporary Georgian Novel (Temur Babluani's "The Sun, the Moon, and the Field of Bread (Manushaka Awaits Me)")

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ABSTRACT

Temur Babluani's novel, "The Sun, the Moon, and the Field of Bread," explores the complexities of human existence through the picaresque journey of Jude Andronikashvili. Set against the backdrop of Soviet and post-Soviet Georgia, the narrative follows Jude's tumultuous life, marked by hardship, injustice, and encounters with diverse characters. The novel delves into themes of love, loss, and the search for meaning in a world often defined by cruelty and moral ambiguity. Jude's resilience and capacity for love, particularly his enduring connection with Manushaka, serve as a testament to the enduring power of human connection amidst adversity. Babluani's work offers a poignant reflection on the human condition, blending elements of adventure, social commentary, and philosophical inquiry.

Keywords: Temur Babluani, journey, Georgian novel, love, society

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most important paradigms in world literature is the journey, which equally captivates and leads the biblical prodigal son, Homer's Odysseus, Cervantes' Don Quixote, Joyce's Leopold Bloom, and many others from home with different purposes and desires. Love, in its diverse and ever-changing manifestations, is the path by which people return home: this "home" is a palimpsestic symbol. "Home" is also oneself, God, family, childhood, paradise, the universe, and life itself. Therefore, any "return" implies allusions to mythological, biblical, or literary paradigms. Leaving home to explore the world or oneself becomes the beginning of great adventures, dreams, and desires, the illusory embodiment of hopes. Returning involves overcoming and surviving many spiritual and material dangers. The artistic world of this novel by Temur Babluani is rich in adventurous temporal and spatial vicissitudes, with rogue stories characteristic of the picaresque genre. The main thing is the presentation of a person's fate, which is created, woven, and entangled in the artistic text by the hand of the disappeared author, following accidental, unexpected, or logical and regular events. The writer is well acquainted with human psychology, the abysses of his soul, which is why the reader wanders with the heroes of the novel in the realms of bright ideals and dark instincts, and thanks to anxiety, surprise, admiration, and astonishment, once again ponders existential, "cursed" questions. Together with the novel's characters, the reader will navigate the labyrinths and crossroads of life and will once again be convinced of the strength of human will and the power of love. The main character of this novel will also be saved by one simple, trampled by life, insulted by people, but still the purest and most unblemished love.

METHODS

The methodology of this study employs primarily literary analysis and textual interpretation. The analysis focuses on:

- Thematic Analysis: Identifying and exploring recurring themes such as the journey, love, home, human nature, and the impact of societal and historical contexts on individual lives.
- Character Analysis: Examining the development, motivations, and symbolic significance of characters like Jude and Manushaka.
- Narrative Analysis: Analyzing the narrative structure, including the use of picaresque elements, mosaic structure, and the role of the narrator.
- Comparative Analysis: Drawing comparisons between the novel and other works of literature, such as the Bible, Homer's epics, Cervantes' Don Quixote, and Joyce's Ulysses, to highlight the universality of specific themes.
- Contextual Analysis: Placing the novel within its socio-political and historical context, particularly the Soviet and post-Soviet era in Georgia.

- Symbolic Interpretation: Interpreting symbolic elements within the novel, such as “home,” Manushaka, and the final painting.
- Intertextual Analysis: Identifying and exploring allusions and references to other literary works and figures (e.g., Apostle Paul, John Steinbeck, Dante, Dostoevsky).

The approach is mainly qualitative, focusing on interpreting the text’s meaning and significance through close reading and critical analysis.

RESULTS

Temur Babluani’s novel once again convinces a person of the Apostle Paul’s teaching: “Love never ends.” Its infinity depends on a person’s choice. John Steinbeck concluded his Nobel Prize speech with these words: “Man has become our greatest danger and our only hope. So today it is possible to make such a paraphrase of the words of St. John the Apostle: In the beginning was the word, and the word was man, and the word was with man” (Steinbeck, 2011, p. 12). A person can become both an angel and a demon, and both are equally driven by themselves, the environment, and the world. That is why he needs moral foundations so that the struggle never stops. The writer has placed the obligation and responsibility for saving the life of modern man, who is involved in the dizzying process of technological development, who feels abandoned by God, and who is plunging into nothingness.

The hero of Temur Babluani’s novel goes through such abysses of existence that one recalls all the layers of Dante’s hell at once, and yet he remains a human being. The seemingly worn-out, hackneyed, and ashen point of view on the saving and reviving power of love in this novel will once again rise from the ashes like a phoenix, unfolding into a colorful hope. In the space of the story, full of relativity and conditionality, love is the only absolute constant, the axis, the center that binds and unites, attracts the scattered energy and forces to itself.

Temur Babluani is a well-known director whose films (“The Flight of the Sparrows”, “The Sun of the Sleepless”, “Brother”, etc.) are recognized in Georgia and abroad as humane examples that instill in viewers a belief in humanity. This novel also echoes the central message of his films. Using the expressive means characteristic of various fields of art, the author achieves the same result with equal mastery: he makes the viewer or reader empathize with the downtrodden, the insulted, the unjustly persecuted, and awakens a sense of empathy in them.

The novel is built on the mosaic principle of stories. Each piece is both independent and an essential element of a unified composition. The writer’s narrative is dizzying; storytelling is his element. One follows another, the second follows the third, and the reader, charged with expectations, tirelessly follows the author and travels in the inner world of man and in material geographical spaces.

The main character of the novel is Jude Andronikashvili, a boy from Tbilisi, born for joy and happiness but doomed to misfortune and suffering by circumstances. The writer also

pays attention to the internal and external factors that shape a person's personality. The hero of the novel passes before the reader's eyes a long way from childhood to middle age. Despite the many obstacles that appear in examples of human cruelty, savagery, intolerance, betrayal, adventure, and all sorts of unimaginable filth, he still retains his humanity. On this challenging path, the writer highlights the political and social contexts that help us understand and comprehend the spirit of the times from the 60s of the twentieth century to the present day. In his book "On the Spiritual in Art," Vasily Kandinsky singled out three critical abilities of an artist: 1. Individuality; 2. Representation of the spirit of the epoch; 3. Expression of the general (of the pure and permanent element of art, which permeates all people, nations, space, and time) (Kandinsky, 2013, p.56). In the novel, the writer's abilities are revealed, which is why all the stories he tells disturb us, excite us, and make us think once again about the meaning and purpose of existence.

In the seemingly devoid of all beauty world of the novel, the main thing is still the beauty that the love of the main character and Manushaka brings, becoming the axis, the backbone of the text. Manushaka's love will save the hero from turning into a beast, a monster, and this love will bring him back home, which, as we have noted, is equally the homeland, God, and himself. Therefore, it is not surprising that the writer made the word "I love you" a kind of tuning fork of the narration (he dedicated the novel to his wife). Manushaka's love, the love of a simple Armenian girl, like Ariadne's thread, led the main character out of the kingdom of darkness and brought him to the light. Throughout the novel, amid the unbearable conditions of Soviet prisons, the only thing that inspires the innocent hero is Manushaka's love, which neither fades nor grows old. Manushaka, who appears in dreams, is given to the main character like oxygen, providing him with the last strength and helping him find his way home. Thus, Manushaka, in the eyes of the reader, in a way and paradigmatically, is both a harlot and a saint, Mary Magdalene and Beatrice, Juliet and Laura.

The novel follows the laws of the adventure genre. Therefore, the writer keeps the main character on the bumpy roads of life for a long time, accompanying his wanderings through the streets of Tbilisi with Moscow, Leningrad, Odessa, Siberia, and the taiga, and makes the reader a participant in this dizzying whirlwind, dark and light sensations of crime and punishment, revenge and forgiveness, sin and repentance.

The novel begins in the summer of 1968. It was on August 21 of this year that Soviet tanks invaded Prague and resisted the democratic reforms taking place in Czechoslovakia. The Soviet system was at its peak at this time. The violent regime, which only pretended to care about the welfare of Soviet citizens, is well exposed and presented in many episodes of this novel. Among them is the beginning, which depicts a boy with torn trousers, trying to change his poor and faceless existence with stolen jeans. He succeeds indeed, because with the money taken from the sold trousers, he will not only buy clothes for himself but also make his girlfriend happy with a white jacket embroidered with lilacs (this beautiful jacket will resurface again in the picture depicted at the end of the novel, as a symbol that the past is never lost, on the contrary, it becomes a kind of signpost for the future).

Petty, unpunished hooliganism, street showdowns, and violence are constant companions in the life of Jude Andronikashvili and his acquaintances and friends; accordingly, their moral

values are also conditioned by the street mentality. This is a strange mixture of cowardice and courage, good and evil, empathy and cruelty. That is why there are many episodes in the novel in which the street is presented as the primary shaper of Jude's personality.

The neighborhoods of old Tbilisi in the 60s of the twentieth century are depicted through Jude's stories. The hero is presented with his passions, dreams, and his own self-defined cosmos. His world is guided by the desires of simple, unambitious people, which, at first glance, are not at all unattainable - a family created by love with its daily worries. The sun, the moon, and the stars revolve around Jude and his friends, as symbols of the flight of dreams. Here Manushaka appears, who from an ordinary silly, naive girl towards the end of the novel turns into a kind of symbol, a purity that, despite being trampled, despite the insult to her dignity, despite the dishonor and being thrown into the mud, is still the support of the main character, the only thread connecting him with life, giving meaning to existence. Although, like any sanctity, Manushaka will fall victim to a senseless accident, a granddaughter will remain, also named Manushaka, whom Jude will take away, care for like a child, and continue to live with her. While pondering again about the good and the bad of life, in one episode, the relentless reality makes Jude, who is following the flock of cranes stretching across the sky, say: "My God, why did you invent these miserable people, what do you need us for?" (Babluani, 2018, p. 34).

The writer depicts how the main character grows spiritually and physically, how he gets to know the world and his own identity. His fate seems to have been determined by this system, pre-written by an invisible hand. He is the child of a repressed family, a representative of the ancient aristocracy; his grandfather was shot by the communists in 1924. But history is only a myth and a legend, told by a neighbor woman, a descendant of Polish barons, a music teacher, Mazavetskaya, and in reality, Jude is the son of the mekhane Gogi Andronikashvili. The mekhane emphasizes the humiliating and insulting situation in which this family has fallen. By presenting the stories of Jude's family, the writer also paints pictures of recent history for the reader. His father grew up in an orphanage, becoming an unfortunate, spineless, obedient, and hardworking man. Life seemed to have only made time to trample him. His wife, Jude's Russian mother, ran away with some man. Motherlessness followed him like eternal orphanhood, helplessness, and homelessness. That is why Manushaka's image combined mother, sister, wife, and the warmth that the soul needs to grow and develop. His father, unfortunate and unpromising, made his second wife, a prostitute, raise other people's children. However, the man, somewhat ostracized by society, supported his family at the bottom with his own labor. It was his merit that Jude, who unjustly spent his youth in prisons, upon returning home, did not go astray, took up his father's craft, and decided to earn his daily bread by working.

In the novel, the thief's world cuts in as a subculture, with which Jude Andronikashvili, willingly or unwillingly, interacts. This world shapes his personality. In the Soviet era, a strong institution of "lawful thieves" was created. They were both in prisons and outside. Having authority in the criminal world gave a person privileges in street life. Rafika, Trokadero, and his cronies are depicted as such in the novel. Jude was sentenced to 12 years for confessing to the murder of two men. This "murder" was christened as self-sacrifice,

revenge for his friend Khaima, so he came under the protection of “lawful thieves” in prison. They recognized him as a worthy man and promised to help. Jude considers it a “great honor” to sit and eat with them. The writer is well acquainted with this world and presents its laws thoroughly and convincingly. This layer is highlighted as “a caste, as a union of professionals of the criminal world.” They have their own “code” by which they regulate disputed issues, judge or acquit people: “In the Soviet Union, they had a great influence on prisoners and controlled almost half of the prisons and prison camps in that vast territory. Their motto was: dignity and justice.” The novel also says that some of them cooperated with the police.

Jude was fascinated by painting because he had talent. His scattered drawings in the novel show his real spiritual existence. Jude came of age in prison. He demanded to be transferred to Siberia, to a zone where one year was counted as three. In Eastern Siberia, in the far north, recidivists would mine gold in inhuman conditions. Here, he was ordered to paint Lenin. The tragicomic thing was that Lenin’s portrait had to be painted four times a year: on November 7, December 5, Constitution Day, and May 1, and always new and different. The self-taught Jude’s first painting was rejected, with the judge saying he had painted an ugly Georgian instead of Lenin, and they locked him up in a punishment cell. He often comforts other prisoners with his unskillful drawings. The drawing with ants well reveals his despair and sense of hopelessness.

Through realistic or surreal dreams, the writer effectively shows the changes taking place in Jude’s spiritual world, who is doomed to die in prison. A dream, on the one hand, reflects the cruel reality, and on the other, it reveals his desires and dreams. In the most challenging situations, he still dreams of Manushaka, which is enough to gather his last strength, get to his feet, reflect on the meaning of life, overcome mere biological existence with moral effort, and not lose his human face.

The novel is full of fraudulent stories, which are intertwined with Jude’s adventures and, on the one hand, enrich the writer’s imaginary world, and on the other hand, create important circumstances along the path of the main character’s spiritual and moral development and transformation. Different kinds of characters, a corrupt policeman or an ideologized communist, a thief, a drug addict, a teacher and a hairdresser, a professor and a cleaner - all together and separately create the novel’s diverse, living, pulsating world of life. That a person is capable of equally manifesting evil and good is confirmed by many stories in the novel. Among them is a prisoner, nicknamed “Lullaby,” whom Jude met while working in the gold mines. Everyone was afraid of this man because he was ruthless and cruel; he had killed five people. Once, other prisoners attacked him while he was asleep, beat him so severely that they thought he was dead, and threw him into a pit. Still, he survived, suddenly appeared at night, but did not seek revenge, as if he had been transformed, sat down, and: “The beaten, mutilated mass of flesh sang in a frighteningly pure, velvety voice.” It was this man who added three grams of gold to Jude, thereby helping him be freed from this “hell.” The environment tries in every way to make the character like it; accordingly, Jude cannot resist the temptation and transforms into a swindler, but he retains enough strength not to become a murderer among murderers. This is well seen in the theft of gold, first planning

an escape from one prison, then escaping, wandering with the Chukcha, and then escaping from another prison. However, in the end, he will not be able to escape the murder and will avenge Manushaka.

His fate, of course, is intertwined with the country's life. That is why vital political, social, public, and cultural events of the past pass before the reader's eyes like movie frames. The writer also revives the tragedy of March 9, 1959, as another act of violence by Soviet Russia against Georgia. The novel includes the brutal dispersal of people who took to the streets to defend Georgian dignity, identified with Stalin's name. At this time, a Chinese marshal, named Jude, arrived. It was after "meeting" him that Joseph was "baptized" as Jude, and this nickname remained with him.

Jude, considering the street morals, confessed to someone else's murder. He was facing the death penalty for three murders that he did not commit. What didn't happen to him, he was sitting with cannibals at hard labor in the gold mines, but he escaped, then he got so sick that he was unconscious for 13 years and the monks of the monastery took care of him. He still survived, and most importantly, not only physically but also spiritually. However, he took revenge at least once, and that was for Manushaka: he killed Trokadero, his rapist, a reckless murderer. However, he managed to cover his tracks. The reader feels how the invisible hand of fate led him through the bumpy roads of life so that he would appear as a protector and patron for Manushaka's orphaned grandson. He even says: "I have such a feeling that in my past life I only participated in experiences, and no one asked me anything about the rest" (Babluani, 2018, p. 76).

You read the novel, and even for the character, so much misfortune that befell Jude seems too much. The reader will witness events from the Soviet era, in prisons and beyond. The writer paints many interesting characters with distinct, memorable traits. One of the main themes of the novel is the friendship between Jude and Khaima, a Jewish boy. The writer paints how the Soviet regime fought against private property, how Khaima's uncles were killed. Still, Khaima's relatives managed to burn millions of dollars, filmed everything on video, and managed to take the cassettes abroad. As it turned out later, American banks fully compensated the Jews for the burned dollars. Khaima did not forget his friend and gave him two million dollars, which enabled Jude to start a new life.

The novel well depicts Georgia in the 90s of the twentieth century, the rampage of criminal gangs, and the transformation of yesterday's robbers into businessmen and ministers. Jude is far from politics, but he sees how people are being terrorized, governments are changing, but the situation is the same: "A rich man in a hungry country is like a wounded wolf, around which his own kind have gathered, they smell blood and are about to eat him" (Babluani, 2018, p. 86). That is why he went to Turkey with little Manushaka, changed his surname, bought a hotel, and went on living like this. He even made a will, leaving everything to Manushaka. "I read somewhere that we people suffer because we cannot love. I don't know about others, but in my case, it's the opposite," says Jude (an echo of Dostoevsky: "Hell is the pain of no longer being able to love"). In one episode, Jude thinks: "I am surprised: why did all this happen, what happened? And why exactly like this, as it happened. What's the matter? I have no answer. Is there an answer?" (Babluani, 2018, p.

96). Finally, he concludes: "This life is strange." He will also build a workshop and begin painting childhood impressions. Still, all this is preparation for the painting, so impressively described in the novel's final episode, which should turn the dream into a colorful canvas. Above the high, barren hills, on one side the moon shines, on the other - the sun. The road crosses the hill and descends into a field of bread. Manushaka stands in the field of bread: "She is wearing the jacket embroidered with lilacs that I gave her and is looking at the road. Her face shows impatience, and it is clear that she is waiting for someone to appear on that road. That's all. If someone who knows my and Manushaka's story sees that painting, he will probably understand that Manushaka is waiting for me" (Babluani, 2018, p. 189). Involuntarily, the lines of Mirza Gelovani's famous poem come to mind: "I am a traveler, I indulge in thoughts of you / And harmlessly play with shadows. / I will return, yes, I will return, / My hair will bring me back" (Gelovani, 2006, p. 23).

Among the many riddles of the universe, literature has also made this a subject of thought: how can the heart contain the divine and the demonic, love and hate, good and evil. Rustaveli's admonition - "Neither death nor any master can master the heart" - is always relevant. For Faulkner, the main business of writing is therefore to show "the agony of the human heart," because it reveals the person who has won or lost in the struggle with himself, who sometimes leans towards God and sometimes towards the devil, as Dostoevsky says. The central theme of Temur Babluani's novel is also this, to show how love paves the way in the labyrinths of life, how its light decreases or increases to illuminate the abysses of human existence, how it fades and flickers when it collides with darkness, exhausted, but in the end, how it gathers strength and rises like the crucified Christ, because otherwise it is impossible. This is the law of life. The soul, which, if we recall Galaktion's poem, is at the same time "whiter than azure" and "more evil than a demon", through love still pushes a person towards salvation and redemption, except that for some, the circumstances of life make them so deaf and blind that they can no longer see or hear the voice of this saving force.

The novel depicts a strictly rational world, but irrational, mystical elements also intrude, prophetically hinting at the incomprehensible, inscrutable ways of the hero's demise or salvation. The writer's unexpected and witty passages, mixed with irony, sometimes present the darkened prisons from a different angle, with a kind of lightness. In the novel, the prison is depicted as a kind of microcosm that reflects all the shortcomings and virtues of a free society, as well as radically different passions and abominations: depravity, aggression, cruelty, hypocrisy, and compassion.

The vocabulary of the novel is not distinguished by its diversity, which is due to the fact that the main character tells the stories. He is a character who speaks and thinks in accordance with the "education" received in the streets and prisons, using a meager vocabulary and jargon. However, it is also essential that, despite the environmental conditions, Jude tried to self-educate and develop, which distinguished him from his street and prison comrades and friends. The love of Jude and Manushaka, like a cracked and patched thing thrown into the trash from life, will still survive and, having escaped from time and space, will continue to exist in the reader's heart as another proof of man's communion with the divine.

DISCUSSION

This analysis of Temur Babluani's "The Sun, the Moon, and the Field of Bread" highlights several key aspects of the novel and offers a compelling interpretation of its themes and narrative strategies. The focus on the "journey" motif, particularly the return "home," provides a valuable framework for understanding Jude's trajectory. The article effectively connects this motif to broader literary and mythological paradigms, enriching the reading of Jude's personal odyssey. The emphasis on love as the central, redeeming force in the novel, amidst a harsh and unforgiving world, resonates strongly with the text. The comparison of Manushaka to iconic female figures (Mary Magdalene, Beatrice, Juliet, and Laura) illuminates her multifaceted character and symbolic importance.

The article's discussion of the novel's structure, particularly the "mosaic principle" of storytelling, is insightful. It effectively captures the episodic nature of Jude's experiences and how these seemingly disparate stories contribute to a unified whole. The analysis of the political and social context, particularly the depiction of Soviet and post-Soviet Georgia, adds depth to the reading. By situating Jude's personal struggles within the broader historical landscape, the article reveals how larger socio-political forces shape individual lives. The exploration of the "thief's world" as a subculture within Soviet society offers a nuanced understanding of the moral complexities faced by Jude and others.

However, some points could benefit from further exploration. While the article acknowledges the "fraudulent stories" within the novel, it could delve deeper into the implications of this theme. How does Jude's involvement in these stories affect his moral development? Does it compromise his humanity, or does it ultimately serve as a means of survival in a corrupt world? Furthermore, the article briefly mentions the novel's "irrational, mystical elements." Expanding on this aspect could provide a more complete picture of Babluani's narrative strategy and its potential connection to Georgian folklore or spiritual traditions.

The article's conclusion, while powerful, could be expanded further. The image of Manushaka waiting in the field of bread is indeed evocative, but what does it ultimately signify? Is it simply a symbol of hope and reunion, or does it also suggest a more complex reconciliation with the past? Connecting this final image back to the earlier discussion of "home" as a palimpsestic symbol could further enrich the interpretation.

Finally, while the article provides a strong analysis of the novel's themes, it could benefit from a more detailed examination of Babluani's writing style. How does his use of language, imagery, and narrative voice contribute to the overall effect of the novel? Exploring these stylistic elements could further illuminate the artistry of Babluani's work.

Overall, this article makes a valuable contribution to understanding "The Sun, the Moon, and the Field of Bread." It offers a compelling interpretation of the novel's central themes and effectively situates it within broader literary and historical contexts. By exploring some of the points mentioned above, future analyses could deepen our appreciation of this complex and moving work.

CONCLUSION

The article concludes that Temur Babluani's novel "The Sun, the Moon, and the Field of Bread" explores the journey of Jude Andronikashvili, a man marked by hardship and misfortune. Despite the bleakness of his experiences, including prison, betrayal, and loss, the enduring power of love preserves Jude's humanity, specifically his love for Manushaka. This love becomes the central constant in his turbulent life, a "tuning fork" that guides him through the "abysses of existence." The novel uses the picaresque genre to depict Jude's adventures, highlighting the social and political context of Soviet and post-Soviet Georgia. Babluani's narrative emphasizes the duality of human nature, the struggle between good and evil, and the importance of moral foundations. The novel's mosaic structure weaves together diverse stories and characters, showcasing the complexities of life. Ultimately, the article argues that the novel, like Babluani's films, evokes empathy for the downtrodden and reaffirms the enduring power of love to redeem and save, even in the face of immense suffering. The final image of Manushaka waiting in the field of bread symbolizes hope and the promise of return, echoing the idea that love transcends time and space.

Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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