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**SYMBOLICS OF “DEER” IN GODERDZI CHOKHELI’S NOVEL  
 “GIVE ME BACK MY DEER”**

**Annotation**

*Fiction needs special perception and comprehension. This is the sixth sense that every ordinary reader should have while reading any works, and especially, that of Goderdzi Chokheli’s unique, thrilling, versatile, and at the same time, complex literary creations. Perhaps this is the reason why his works have not been properly studied and/or researched yet, and why I have chosen his short story “Give Me Back My Deer!” in which the author in his usual way takes us to the mystical world.*

**Keywords:** *symbol, deer, psalm, Lord, temple.*

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**СИМВОЛИКА «ОЛЕНЯ» В НОВЕЛЛЕ ГОДЕРДЗИ ЧОХЕЛИ  
 «ВЕРНИТЕ МНЕ МОЕГО ОЛЕНЯ!»**

**Аннотация**

*Художественная литература требует особого восприятия и понимания. Это шестое чувство, которое должен иметь каждый порядочный читатель при чтении любых произведений и особенно – при чтении уникального, глубокого, многостороннего и в то же время сложного творчества Годердзи Чохели. Возможно, именно поэтому его работы еще не изучены и не исследованы должным образом, и точно по этой же причине я выбрала его новеллу «Верните мне моего оленя!», в котором автор как обычно ведёт нас в мистический мир.*

**Ключевые слова:** *символ, олень, псалом, Господь, храм,*

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## ГОДЕРДЗИ ЧОХЕЛИДІҢ «МЕНИҢ БҰҒЫМДЫ МАҒАН ҚАЙТАРЫҢЫЗ!» НОВЕЛАСЫНДАҒЫ «БҰҒЫ» СИМВОЛИКАСЫ

### Аннотация

*Көркем әдебиет ерекше қабылдауды және түсінуді талап етеді. Әрбір оқырманның кез-келген шығармаларды оқығанда алтынышы сезімі болуы тиіс – әсіресе, Годердзи Чохелидің бірегей терең, жан-жақты және сол кезең үшін күрделі шығармашылығын оқыған кездегі сезімді айтуға болады. Осындай ерекшелігіне байланысты, оның еңбектері әлі терең зерттелмеген, сол себепті жазушының бізді мистика әлеміне жетелейтін «Менің бұғымды маған қайтарыңыз!» новелласын талдау үшін таңдалды.*

**Түйінді сөздер:** символ, бұғы, діни өлең, Құдай, храм.

“At the end of everything there is a beginning. Each essence seeks its own end.

This is the goal...” – let me start talking about Goderdzi Chokeli with these words.

Goderdзи Chokheli was born in one of the small parts of Georgia, in Gudamakari, namely in Chokha, in beautiful mountains cut off from civilization. Like Vazha-Pshavela, his main teacher – the mountain taught him the language of nature, and amazing colors gave birth to his creations. The creation that has no boundaries, since all the problems in his works are universal and timeless.

Goderdзи Chokheli, a pure man himself, shares the idea of unity and perfection of the world in simple words. A gifted writer, poet, and director with an unmatched talent, seeks to penetrate the inner world of man and pave the way for the Lord. I must mention an excerpt from one of his small, amazing story called “Toast of the Valley man”:

“Children are born pure, people’s souls are corrupted afterwards ... because gradually we join to the dirty life of sins ... while we have pure souls, pure hearts, we do good deeds and do not plunge into a ruined life, I want to drink for us, who we were before this time! Cheer for us before this time!” [1, p.141].

The critic Guram Benashvili wrote: “And so these geniuses are born from our life, and yet completely different surprisingly original spiritual landscapes are created. He is creating sharp-wittednesses of mountain sacred rituals and a vivid embodiment of the highly poetic nature of artistic conditioning. This definitely raises readers’ awareness... The world of Goderdзи Chokheli is completely new and therefore enchanting ... It fills our worldview with such emotional information that is surprisingly unique ... The artistic world of Goderdзи Chokheli is magnificent ... beautiful and very natural – this is its most important feature... [1, p.5].

Peter Rolberg, the professor at George Washington University in the

United States writes: “In the 1980s, Goderdzi Chokheli became one of the most original writers and directors. The intensity of the philosophical search and the originality of his worldview will undoubtedly preserve Goderdzi Chokheli’s place in the community of modern and future readers. The analysis and study of the unity of his work presents a real and worthwhile challenge for scholars of Georgian culture. “(Rollberg Peter, *The Natural: Goderdzi Chokheli in the 1980s*” International Scientific Conference “Goderdzi Chokheli - Creation without Borders”. [2, pp.37-51].

My work relates directly with Goderdzi Chokheli’s small but significant novel - “Give me back my deer.” Of course, thanks to his usual style of writing we find ourselves in the mystical world of the author... Surely, the questions arise: What is the meaning of the deer? What does it symbolize?

“The symbolic meaning of deer was originally used in is the psalm 41: 1. “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul longs after You, O God” Thus, the deer became a symbol of godliness and religious aspiration. Deer are known to find freedom and refuge in the high mountains. Because of this characteristic, in western medieval Europe, this animal also served as a symbol of purity and asceticism. On some emblems there was a crucifixion between the deer horns.”

This is an excerpt from the book of George Kenchoshvili “Symbols in Christian Art”. Based on this and other materials, the main meaning and purpose of the novel became readily available, and the interest of the author is understandable. Who kills deer, in other words, who kills piety and religious desires in the hearts of people.

Vakhtang Guruli writes in his book “The Righteous Goderdzi”: “Goderdzi Chokheli was distinguished by the fact that in every film, in every story he created his own world. Each word and phrase of the writer served the creation of this world. In the world of Goderdzi Chokheli, the line between people, animals, birds, plants was erased. All of them are integral parts of one whole; their main rule is to exist in one entire and in harmony. Goderdzi Chokheli erased the distinction between worldly and otherworldly, between life and death, between “to be human” and “not to be human.” “Vakhtang Guruli, who personally knew the writer, continues: “Even in his youth Goderdzi Chokheli had heart problems... Goderdzi’s heart could not withstand what was going on around him. Goderdzi’s heart was dying: when the deer were killed, the eagle was being trapped in a cage, the tree was being cut, the flower was being cut, and the bull was being slaughtered. Goderdzi very often worried about events that were completely indifferent to others. No matter how many times he traveled to Zhinvali, Goderdzi Choheli always remembered the “old Zhinvali” with its “small churches” that were flooded under the reservoir [3, p.11]. This is proved by the novel “Give me back my deer,” the author’s heartbreaking

novel which is, full of sadness and mysticism:

“If you remember, in the Aragvi gorge, below Ananuri, there was a floodplain. Now, there, the restless river has turned into an artificial sea, which waves quietly. If you remember, there was Jinvali, old town, with old castles and small churches.” [1, p. 400].

Of course, it is interesting to see what happened in the gorge, which so upset the writer and made him write this story. A little research is needed to understand why the author writes: If you remember, there was Jinvali, old town, with old castles and small churches. “Or why did Vakhtang Guruli saying that “Goderdzi very often worried about events that were completely indifferent to others”. No matter how many times he traveled to Zhinvali, Goderdzi Choheli always remembered the “old Zhinvali” with its “small churches” that were flooded under the reservoir.

On July 4, 2012, the Public Religious Internet Magazine “Ambioni” published an article by Theon Nozadze “The sunken Georgian churches.” In the article the professor of Tbilisi State University, geographer George Dvalishvili, talks about the monuments of Georgian cultural heritage flooded in reservoirs.

The article says: “The Church of the Name of the Christian Cross, built in the 12th century, came under water after the construction of the Zhinvali hydro-complex in the Dusheti district. The first power plant was commissioned in 1985. Zhinvali village has completely disappeared under the reservoir”. Georgy Dvalishvili says: “The Zhinvali reservoir was not flooded until 1984, in contrast to the Tsalka reservoir, which began to flood in 1947. However, in addition to a temple such as a basilica, there are many ruins. Until the 80s, that means, until the territory was flooded, the church was a sacred shrine and a historical monument of great importance. When you try to free the temple from the water, its walls begin to collapse. The process of removing temple stones is so fast that even the arch, which still stands in the basilica, can be destroyed in the near future. It is noteworthy and sad that this antiquity is immersed in water for 6 months and freed from water for 6 months. It is also difficult to get to the temple at this time. “

The same information was presented on the March 26, 2012 “Kviris Palitra” website, in the article: “The Secret of the Sunken City”, authored by Eter Eradze, and on September 16, 2018, on the news portal “Ambebi. GE,” The Sunken City in the Zhinvali Reservoir “, Authored by Lali Pat-satsia.

There were many other materials on this issue that prove that the problem is still very relevant, moreover, all authors confirm that this area is a significant loss for the country.

Goderdzi Chokheli obviously knew everything, that’s why he was getting sad when he passed by. His grief is well narrated in the above men-

tioned novel: “Give me back my deer”. How the author managed to draw attention to this problem. The work is, of course, symbolic-allegorical and mystical. If the reader is not aware of epochal events and cannot read the context at the same time, he may not understand what the author is writing about, though Goderdzi Chokheli manages to surprise the faithful readers with his usual artistic skill. First let’s get to the plot:

“Here, on those fields, at night when the moon Illuminating the Aragvi valley, two deer were grazing. There, a boy was sitting on the edge of the field and playing with reed-pipe. The boy’s golden curly-hair was playing with his shoulders. He was barefooted and nothing was covering his body as well. The Deer could be seen more or less, but the boy was rarely seen by anyone. Above valley the Ananuri church stood. The deer would sometimes fell silent; they raised their heads and were staring to the church. On the Ananuri, in those times, absolutely unusual light was shone. Ananuri was standing above. He looked at the country from the top. And now the village was looking at the Ananuri from above. If you were looking to Ananuri from below, it had a different beauty, Greatness. Perhaps the two deer felt this too, and because of that they looked at them in such a way” [1, p. 400].

Horned deer and their shepherd, a naked boy with golden hair, who are the main characters of this novel, create amazing mysticism in the work. “Goderdzi Chokheli uses a parable ...” why does the author choose this animal? “It is known that a deer is the eternal soul of the forest - if he dies, the forest will die,” wrote Archil Sulakauri.

The question arises: where does the deer symbol come from? As mentioned above, this comes from the Psalms. Consider the study of Helen Gogiashvili “Symbols of deer in St. According to the list of Garejyan” by John Sinelli“ Klemax ”(H-1669) and“ Georgian Tales ”, published in 2006. The purpose of this study is to determine the function of history and the symbolism of deer.

The article says: “The Klemax” of John Sinnell has been translated five times. The Garejian list of works (ca. 1160 BC) is preserved at the Kekelidze Institute of Manuscripts. Manuscript H-1669 is an important monument to specialists in the field, as the figures on the manuscript are painted. In these images Vakhtang Beridze saw the fantasy of Georgian folk tales. All drawings are contextually related to the text and are loaded with Christian symbols --- deer (200 r), fish (187 v, 196 r), dragon (49 v, 137r, 145r) and griffins (158v, 164 v, 175 v).

From these symbolics, we are interested in deer symbols. Comparing the above excerpt from George Kenchoshvili’s book *Symbols in Christian Art*, the extract from Elene Gogiashvili’s article: “In the medieval Bible commentaries, deer is a symbol of human spiritual hunger, which derives from the well-known phrase of Psalm 41: As the deer dashes toward the

water streams, so my soul longs for you, God!”“ Psalm 41,2. In John Sinel-  
li’s “Klemax” we also find paraphrase of this quotation: “As the deer pants  
for streams of water, so my soul longs after You, O God.

Of St. Bishop of Alexandria, the place of the psalms of Athanasius  
the Great is explained in this way: “The wise deers, after their mental  
source has been broken by reason of the ungodly, are dying day and night  
for their own destruction” [4]. The full content of Psalm 41 (in the end,  
for the sake of the Psalms of the sons of Corinth) is explained as follows:  
“The sons of Korah were holy saints. They enunciate a psalm that has been  
borrowed from its companion, David, and expresses recent events in it.  
The psalm also includes the image of Israel itself, which recognizes Christ  
after repentance; Repentance, however, will be in the end of the century. “

“There is a widespread motive in the Christian literature id feeding  
by deer’s’ milk. St. One of the important episodes in David Gareja’s life is  
the appearance of deer in the desert. The theme of deer is widely covered  
in hagiography and wall painting. St. Three deer came to David Gareja  
and his disciple Lucian, willingly stopping to be milked, when all the food  
supplies in the wilderness were exhausted. “And they shall go out of the  
land of Myrrh every day, but Wednesday, and Friday, and shall feed them  
with their nourishment, and be filled with the flesh and rejoice with the  
spirit” [5].

It is well-known that the third-century Caesarean sent father grew up  
in the lap of nature and the deer were fed him with milk.

Thus, in Christian art and literature there is a clear connection with  
the folk motif of deer milk nourishment [6, p.53]. Accordingly to the fore-  
going considerations, deer symbols are no stranger as to Christian as other  
literary works and folk tales.

Giorgi Khorbaladze believes that, in Goderdzi Chokheli’s works, the  
mythical and religious elements are so perfectly merged and intertwined  
that it is almost impossible to determine where one begins and where the  
other ends; From the mythology those elements are taken that agrees and  
are transformed into biblical elements, the mythological characters are  
very much like the biblical characters and do not contradict the origin of  
the orthodoxy in its essence. Thanks to these elements, which are so close-  
ly linked to the mountain population, Goderdzi Chokheli became the only  
and inimitable writer in the 20th century and with his simple, folk Georgian  
language he approached the top of Georgian literature - Vazha-Pshavela.  
Like all great people, they remain unappreciative to contemporaries.”

As we have said above, the concealment of symbols was a social  
and public necessity and required great mastery of the writer. “Goderdzi  
Chokheli, with all his efforts, broke unbelief and spread the word of God  
through masked by symbolic analogies or psychological underpinnings”.  
[7, p. 81].

Let's go back to the content of the novel and see what the deer and the boy symbolize:

“Famous hunters lived in Ananuri, but no one ever went hunting for those deer. They only went for staring sometimes. Almost all of the inhabitants of Ananuri knew about their existence. The angels of the flood they were called, if they ever saw the by accident, they would crossed themselves and would beg for forgiveness, and they would imploring, “Save us, save the flood angels.” Some lucky hunter even glimpsed shepherd boy. Some saw the footprints of the deer and the boy in the new snow; it looked as if it had not even the weight of a bird.

On the eve of spring, before the night of angels, several believing women prepared buns with flour fried in butter, lit candles on them and left to a deer shepherd on the bank of Aragvi near the alder's forest. Of course, this happened at night, and if you could see it, it was a poorly lit floodplain, and you would think that all the stars that were in the sky come here and fall among the alders. From year to year, there was enough sacrifice to shepherd. From year to year, his heart was full” [1, p. 401].

The novel is extraordinary and mystical. The sacred face of the deer as “floodplain angels» is uniquely Christian. At the sight of the “floodplain angels,” people are crossing themselves, asking for forgiveness and for protection. The shepherd boy causes the association of the “Shepherd of Compassion”.

His body is the weight of a bird, and the sacrifice given on the angel's night is enough for him whole year. The author tells an unbelievable story, but in a way that throws us into his mystical world and makes us think. The only concern for the boy is deer care:

“One night, deer were standing in the middle of the valley and looked at Ananuri calmly than usual. And the boy did not play the reed pipe. He also seemed rather sad. The church no longer stood as strong as before. Since yesterday, the earth above him was digging, exploding. Yesterday, the cutting of the floodplain also began. Something was happening. but what?” [1, p.401].

This is where the story node is created. Something unusual is happening that hurts the most — the “floodplain angels” and the “Shepherd of Compassion.” However, in the dried-up Aragvi River, fish die, and only the Shepherd tries to help them. Obviously, the author wants to tell us that nature is destroyed and not only. Fish disappear as well. As we have mentioned above, fish is also a biblical paradigm.

In George Kenchoshvili's book “Symbols in Christian Art” Fish is explained as a symbol of Christ: “Fish is an ancient Christian symbol. Fish are often used as a symbol of Jesus Christ. If we combine the initial letters of the Greek phrase Jesus Christos TheouHyiosSoter (Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior), we get the Greek abbreviation IXOYS, whose Georgian

meaning is “fish”.

Symbol of fish was used in this sense in early Cristian art and literature. At the dawn of Christianity, when the faith of Christ was severely persecuted, the fish symbol was used as a secret symbol of faith sharing among believers. One person drew an arc in the sand, and another completed the sign, expressing his love for Christ.”

The most important is the ending of the novel. A shepherd boy loses track of deer trying to find their way into the snow. They screamed, looked for the lord, then noticed the light and fled there, though they were very deceived, now foreigners lived there who didn't know the “floodplain angels”, having different orderliness, so deer went to the working van and roared, from there a strange sound was heard:

“-Kto tam?” (Who is there? – in Russian.) - Then the door of the van opened and the man in the sortour came out. He suddenly startled from seeing deer in front of him, turned around and closed the door. The deer stood and looked to the blinking light from the van. Five minutes had passed and the door opened again, now wider, but no one appeared. Only fire occurred, once, now the second time ... The deer deceased silently in the snow.

It was snowing. Within five minutes, every trace was covered ...”

You would agree with me, the finale is gripping, dramatic and at the same time multifaceted. What the locals were caring with such caution was disrupted and buried in a matter of seconds by a stranger ...though no one thought of them except the shepherd boy who went to the wagon. “He stopped by the carriage and implored out loud: “Give me back my deer!” There was no answer, no one even opened the door. Instead, the cries of a heartbroken boy sounded all night: “Give me back, give me back my deer”.

Then almost every night his voice was heard in this place. Archaeologists in the ancient villages, where they sometimes slept, also heard this sound. This was big secret for them, who was asking for deer, or who was so heartless, could remain so indifferent to the boy's imploration. Maybe someone didn't even know Georgian...” [1, p. 403].

Some would understand what the author is worried about... The voice from the wagon “Kto tam?” makes it clear that the deer, who were called “floodplain angels” and asked for help, were killed by Russian workers. To sum it all up, it is not difficult to draw a conclusion. In the Soviet era, faith and religion was destroyed, how churches were flooded under water.

This is how Goderdzi Chokheli finishes the novel: “When a man sinks into the water slowly and calls the savior, such a doomed voice was heard by the archaeologists at the end: - “Give me back, give me back my deer! Now if you go to that place, there is only silence around. Only the sea can be seen from the valley with the glitter. As often as I come to this place



and recalling this story, my heart aches and deer screams from the depths of my soul ... “ [1, p. 404].

Maya Tsiklauri, PhD, writes that Goderdzi Chokheli is not a writer in the traditional sense. He is a thinker who generalizes his philosophy in artistic forms. The primary characteristics of his work are: originality, simplicity, morality and nationality. ”And Tamila Tsotsoria believes that she, as a writer, had a special vision. What he was writing, he was seeing as well. Even in the times of “fear of words” he was writing about the freedom of the human spirit, faith and humanism. Of course, the “fear of words” led to the writing of symbols and allegories. As we have seen, the articles mentioned above were written in the recent past, and at the time this novel was written, it was still a time of “fear of words”.

„Goderdzi Chokheli’s creations continue the great traditions of Georgian classical literature, the savior of the Georgian literature was working consequentiality due to bring to light the most painful problems of the modernity, as if passing through x-rays to the bacillus of a dangerous disease, but he also found the ways of curing. As in many eras of our history, at this time, writing became the savior of the highest ideals of the nation” [8, p. 140].

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