

## THE ROMANTIC DIALOGUE WITH THE *BIBLE* IN ANTON STRASHIMIROV'S POEM "SONG OF SONGS"

### РОМАНТИЧНИЯТ ДИАЛОГ С *БИБЛИЯТА* В ДРАМАТИЧНАТА ПОЕМА „ПЕСЕН НА ПЕСНИТЕ” ОТ АНТОН СТРАШИМИРОВ

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**Abstract:** With his undoubtedly restless and inquisitive creativity, in the first decade of the twentieth century, Anton Strashimirov turned to the modern European drama, eagerly expecting the new century, and with it - the new man. He created dramas full of symbolism, most of which remain only as marginal texts for the Bulgarian reader. In some of them aspiration for interpretation of Biblical topics and motifs is revealed. A dialogue with the Bible can be traced in other dramatic works of his, outside the context of symbolism. One of them is the romantic "Song of Songs" (1910). Strashimirov is one of the Bulgarian authors, who chooses consciously, as an artist, and not sporadically, as a dilettante, the creative realization of biblical and mythological constructs for the Bulgarian drama.

**Резюме:** Безспорно неспокойна и търсеца творческа натура, Антон Страшимиров се обръща в първото десетилетие на XX век към модерната европейска драма в очакване на новия век и новия човек. Създава символистични драми, повечето от които остават маргинални текстове за българския читател. В някои от тях се открива стремеж към интерпретация на библейски теми и мотиви. Диалог с Библията се открива и в други негови драми извън контекста на символизма. Една от тях е романтичната „Песен на песните” (1910). Страшимиров е един от българските автори, които се насочва не стихийно, а съзнателно, като художник, към творческата реализация на библейско-митологични конструкти за българската драма.

**Key words:** romanticism, the Bible, dramatic sketch, poetic imagery

**Ключови думи:** романтизъм, Библия, драматически етюд, поетическа образност

#### INTRODUCTION

The first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which may rightfully be labelled theatrical in our cultural history, gave rise to a new artistic way of thinking and aesthetical criteria. Anton Strashimirov became an active participant in the life of the theatre, as a playwright and director, as well as drama critic. The romantic face of the playwright can be found in the dramatic sketch "Song of Songs", included in the Collective works "Song of Songs" (1910) together with "the palace of Ramadan beg", "The Lila and the Sheik" and "Sura Bir Bairaktar" – works using eastern motifs. For Strashimirov, just like for the European men of letters, romanticism was not only a literary school, but also a sign of discontent and disappointment with the grey unheroic daily rut, an escape into a sublime, beautiful and exotic world - a place where the dream comes before the sluggish flow of reality. The pursuit of the dream for some colourful world, filled with irresistible longing and romantic frenzy, immersed in an atmosphere of love and passionate desire, call for a close association with the poetic message of the Old Testament book "Song of Songs" [1].

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

Strashimirov's text has a precursor in the Bulgarian literature and quite naturally, it is in poetry. "Exegetes are reluctant to analyze "Song of Songs". This "book" – one of the shortest in the Old Testament with its 8 chapters, which have the nature of lyrical confessions – digressions, has however provided inspiration to many a world-famous poet. P.K. Yavorov is among those too [2]. The text of Yavorov's poem "A song to my Song" from the collection "Insomnia" (1907), which was admittedly considered by the poet as some measure for intimate lyrics, restructures the biblical message to the extent of a profoundly personal confession of the author. Only three years after that poem became a literary fact, Strashimirov would publish his "Song of Songs", composed in the intervenient genre of the dramatic poem, which spoke with the language of the biblical "Song of Songs". Both texts are eulogies of the tender enamoured soul, the feeling of love, its searing power; hymns of the independent man, the free bird, with their scorching, all-embracing passion. The extremely well-favoured poetic style of the biblical word from the book "Song of Songs", by Solomon\* (He spoke three thousand Parables and his Songs were a thousand and five (3 Kingdom 4:32), animated with continuous epithets and similes, reminds us of the ornate imagery of the Arabian ornament. The ancient biblical images of the two "sweethearts" are shrouded in mysteriousness, hidden in the shadows of the Nirvana. Strashimirov's text is peopled with images, born from a legend of unrequited love with a familiar motif - **Till death doth us part.**

The image of the ashik (a man in love or a bard singing love songs) stands out and through his songs Strashimirov is weaving the gorgeous carpet of a dazzling and colourful exotic character.

While the Bible text immerses the reader in its intimate atmosphere of bliss and passion, of light and appeal, the dramatic sketch, otherwise humble in its opportunities for being staged, is miserably-romantic. The legend of Love, told like a beautiful fairy-tale by Strashimirov, comes very close to the Bible text in the poetic phrasing, exalted by the song of the rose-pickers in the Rose valley fragrant with the aroma of roses. The text gets at us with the mysteriousness and sadness permeating the character of Kerim bey, with the Asian wisdom of the two elders, Ferad and Gyunie, with the playful vitality of the golden-haired Zairya. Here too we feel the pulse and the urge of the concealed passion in the animated image and features of the beloved, in the key metaphors and symbols of intimate intercourse. The closeness between the two texts is easily discernible through comparing various excerpts.

Peering into the symbols of the captivating dialogue between the beloveds, we are absorbed by the utmost intricacy of the imagery of words. Among the images incorporated in both texts are those of the Moon, the Sun, the Stag and the Doe. Metaphor-similes reflect the feminine beauty, placing it among the eternal concepts of human thinking and conception of the world. Most often the Moon personifies the passive femininity. But its image stands for female deities mainly. The everlasting female beauty is measured by the cycles of its appearance and disappearance, and it is perceived as a realization of the time concept. In this sense it is a symbol of transformation in general, and the transition from life to death and vice versa, in particular. The moon is also a personification of chastity. "According to the Islamic astrological symbols the Moon is a synthesized personification of cosmic intellect." [3]. Its zodiac corresponds to the 28-day moon cycle. This cosmic symbolism underlies the Arabic alphabet, which consists of 28 signs. The crescent is the emblem of Islam, meaning might, power and prosperity. According to the two texts the woman is like the Sun – a symbol of creative energy, the light of the world, life-giving force, everlasting youth. The images of the Stag and the Doe symbolize the masculine and the feminine nature, respectively; they are positive images, symbolizing the spiritual enlightenment, the revitalized beginning, grace and

light. The lexemes used, which denote preciousness (gold, topaz, ivory, sapphires and silk, diamond, pearl), mark exceptionality, preciousness, uniqueness.

**БИБЛЕЙСКИ ТЕКСТ: Песен на песните**

1)Коя е тая, що блещи като зора, хубава като месечина, светла като слънце, страстна като войнство със знамена? (5:10)

2)... бузите му – ароматен цветник, лехи с благовонни билки: устните му – крин, от който капе чиста смирна. (5:13)  
... Смирнова китка е моят възлюбен стои нагърдите ми ... (1:12)  
... Каквото е крин между тръне, това е моята възлюбена между момите ... (2:2)  
... тази твоя снага прилича на палма, и твоите ненки – на гроздове (3:8)  
Помислих си: да се качех на палмата, бих се хванал за клоните ѝ; и твоите ненки биха били вместо гроздове, и мирисът на твоите ноздри – като мирис на ябълка. (3:9)

3)Моят възлюбен прилича на сърна, или на млад елен ...  
Моят възлюбен принадлежи на мене, аз пък – нему, той пасе между кринове (2:9; 2:16)

4)... Главата му чисто злато ... (5:11)  
... ръцете му златни валяци, обсипани с топази, коремът му като изваяние от слонова кост обложено със сапфири. (5:14)

**АНТОН СТРАШИМИРОВ: Песен на песните**

1)Луна си нося ти, слънцето деня – мечта и мисъл, скръб и радост, живот и смърт – самата вечност си ти (с. 108)

2)Да посрещнем зората с майски песни, розоберки!  
С звънливи глас на ранни славей, с мириса сладък на цветята, с ефирни лъх, с росата бистра ... (с. 100)  
... И колко, шейхо наш, познавам аз в Багдад лалета, лилии, рози, срещу оная чужденка робиня – зюмбюл увяхнал в скута на баща ти. (с. 106)  
Аз съм роза – славей пее в моите сенки.  
Аз съм сочна – вихри вият моите вейки.  
Ох, славеят – ми откриши връшна клонка! (с. 112)

3)Елен пие сълзата, опива се от сърната. –  
Елено мой, сладко жален, красиви мой, яви се на сън! (с. 111)

4)Тез сърмени коси – чии ги пръсте на слънце плели, на луна къдрили?  
И тез странички с луници игриви кой ги в пурпура на зората къпал? (с. 102)  
... Елмаз на пръстен е ашикът!  
На гърло бисер е ашикът!  
Но е и обичка ашикът за ушенце – хо-хи! (с. 100)

The specific national character in Strashimirov's text is outlined in the choice of images-similes, connected with the semantics of flowers. Tradition has determined the hyacinth as a flower of fiancées and brides. Once in the Orient girls would put a hyacinth in the bunch as a sign for their beloved. The rose is a symbol exceptionally laden with symbolism. Some of its semantic meanings are life and sensual beauty, passion and inclination. The rose personifies the feminine beginning. In the Islamic mysticism it is a sign of chastity and divine

love. In Iran, for example, the legend about the nightingale that fell in love with the rose is popular, where this flower personifies poetic inspiration.

The tree and its branches, twigs, personify the suppleness of the woman's body. In the biblical text this tree is the palm – a symbol of the feminine nature, a personification of spiritual power and height. According to the beliefs of some Arabic peoples, the palm is the tree of life.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Thus, through a text rather humble in volume and artistic merit, like that in the dramatic sketch "Song of Songs", Anton Strashimirov draws on the poetic inspiration of Solomon's text in the Bible and uses idiosyncratically his own poetic arsenal. He organized his work in a genre that was not so popular, that of dramatic poems. He seeks footing in the message, the universal meaning and the poetic nature of the Word. In the same period (after 1908 – the period of his individualism) his literary positions were subject to abrupt fluctuations and changes; he raises neo-romanticism as a reaction against the devitalized realism and proclaims the age-old life problems against the "provincial" constraint of social and patriotic topics in literature.

What aids him in this process are the motifs, images, stylistic, lexical, genre-specific constructs, borrowed from the Old Testament.

### **LITERATURE**

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