

# **ANTHOLOGY OF GEORGIAN POETRY**

Translated by

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**VAZHA PSHAVELA**

(1861 — 1915)

In Georgian poetry, the outstanding and exceedingly original Georgian poet Vazha Pshavela, is called "The Mountain Eagle". He was born in Pshavi a mountain region, into a peasant family, in which the traditions of Pshav poetry were reverently conserved. In 1882 Vazha Pshavela graduated from the teachers' Seminary in Gori. A year later he entered Petersburg University, where he studied law. However, through a lack of means, the poet soon left the university and returned to his native country, where he made teaching his chief pursuit, at the same time assiduously pursuing his own studies. He made a deep study of the classics of world literature and became familiar with philosophic and social doctrines. Despite the fact that the poet was greatly interested in the cultural and intellectual movement of his time, he voluntarily left Tbilisi, Georgia's cultural centre, and returned forever to his native hills, to his village of Pshavi, to the life of a peasant. The poet often wrote his poems by the light of the fire on his hearth, in his primitive hut.

Vazha Pshavela, together with the well-known Georgian novelist Alexander Qazbegi, were the first to introduce a fresh theme into Georgian literature — the mountains of Georgia. The poetic world of Vazha Pshavela is one of exceeding breadth, originality and variety. The life of the Georgian hillmen (Pshav-Khevsurs), their legendary exploits in battles for the defence of their native land, as well as their great mythology, are depicted in his works. The poet's world outlook finds expression not only in Vazha Pshavela's lyrical pieces, but also in his most interesting poems, "The Snake-Eater", "The Guest and the Host", "Bakhtrioni" and others.

Vazha Pshavela is known as an outstanding master of poetry.

### **A FEAST**

Pour me the wine of liquid flame,  
And steep my soul in rubied flow;  
Perhaps twill banish cares away,  
And tinge with rose this world of woe  
Perchance 'twill drown the pangs of life  
In Bacchus' horn of nectared fire,  
And Fancy find for me a maid  
Upon whose bosom I'll expire.  
On whirlwind's wing my steed and I  
Will cleave the waves of oceans wide.  
We'll fly the haunts of mortal man  
Where every joy of mine has died.  
For death on high is sweeter far  
Than life upon the earth below  
Which is an urn of buried hopes,  
Floating on a sea of woe.

### **THE SHEPHERD-MAID**

On quiet sleep you lie, fair maid,  
With curly locks that lure the eye.  
What visions, thoughts invade your dreams  
As you rest here beneath the sky?  
With beating heart and hurrying feet  
You pass this forest every day.  
Woe if you meet the tiger fierce,  
The wolf or bear upon your way!

\* \* \*

A light worn garment hid her form.  
Her feet in slippers soft were clad.  
The beauty of her arms on which  
Her head reposed nigh made me mad.  
A sheep-skin sack hung on her back,  
A shepherd's rod beside her lay.  
She slumbered on and sleep brought her  
A short respite from toils of day.  
Oblivious of any fear,  
No troubled dreams disturbed her sleep,  
Yet, for that angel of the woods  
I feared, and prayed to God to keep  
Her safe from every future pain.  
Though I, by fate, am doomed to wander  
With dire misfortune all my life,

God, may Thy blessings fall upon her,  
For if those eyes are closed by death,  
And no more will they brightly glow,  
What other fires can warm my heart  
Or on it equal joys bestow?  
O mounts! O trees! O flowing streams!  
On ye I call in humble prayer,  
This lass, the angel of my dreams,  
From pain and sorrow shield fore'er!

### **A SOLITARY WORD**

I breathed a word that grief had wrought.  
It winged its flight into the air,  
Then pierced the haunts and souls of men,  
And left its tears and laughter there.  
It was a word flung from a heart  
That knew but misery and tears, —  
A word that knew its lowly birth  
In throes of agony and fears.  
Though nursed by suffering and trial,  
It spread and flourished in its flight,  
And wondering I beheld it glow,  
Adorned in sparkling jewels bright.  
And soon upon a throne of gold  
It ruled in radiance and might, —  
The hope and faith of sunless hearts,  
The darkened bosom's torch of light.  
I marvelled at that vision fair,  
The offspring of my passion's fires;  
Resistless was its beauty as  
It filled men's souls with strange desires.  
I wondered much, and smiled to see  
How over souls of men it reigned,  
How it had sprung from misery  
That birth with tears of blood had stained —  
A solitary word of woe,  
Abused, objected and profaned.

### **A SONG**

Beyond the river dark thou art.  
Between us rushing waters flow.  
There is no bridge, no boat have we,  
Nor wings to cross the river, so,  
I gaze upon thy smiling face

And long to press my lips to thine,  
Though well I know I ne'er will hold  
Thee in my arms, O dearest mine!  
No hope relieves our hopelessness,  
Nor lights the brooding darkening sky.  
Delusion makes us bitter smile  
Through tears that blind the aching eye.  
Over the rushing waters wild  
My voice takes wing and towards thee flies,  
But mingling with the deafening roar  
In raging depths it swoons and dies.  
It's heart-corroding to behold  
The years pass like the stream in sighs...

### **THE EAGLE**

In haughty pride, though wounded sore,  
An eagle fought the raven-crow.  
The bird in desperation strove  
To rise but fell in frenzied woe.  
His right wing swept the blood-stained ground;  
His bosom shone in crimson glow.  
"Alas! you smite, O ravens wild,  
When I am wounded, fallen low.  
Were I not struck, your feathers black  
Would surely deck the plains below!"

### **DESPAIR**

Beneath the shade of a beech tree high  
In solitude a violet grew.  
It wished to woo the sunbeams gold  
And lure them to its realm of blue.  
The flower in breathless eagerness  
Waits for the sun-rays from on high  
And gazes on the sunny world  
With wistful sighs and tearful eye.  
The violet longs to curtsy low  
And dance amidst the sunbeams bright,  
To have its pretty head adorned  
With rays of shimmering golden light.  
The lovely flower droops and weeps;  
It heaves a piteous, hopeless sigh,  
For to this realm of shadows soft  
No rays of sunlight ever fly.  
The violet's heart in sorrow breaks

As on the ground it withering lies.  
Near by, its dying eyes behold  
Sun-lighted flowers dance 'neath the skies.

### A SONG

Once there bloomed upon a meadow  
Roses, violets, flow'rs of grace.  
The gods from urns poured nectared beauty  
On the meadow's up-turned face.  
Hanging vines and branches wove  
Canopies of gold and shade  
Through which the sky serenely peeped  
And gentle breezes humming strayed.  
The bulbul sang of only love;  
Nature listened in delight —  
I felt joy rise in my breast;  
Thrilled at the beauty of the sight.  
Captivated by the place  
The morrow found me there again...  
But alas! the scene was changed  
And horror petrified my brain.  
The violets and roses were  
Lovely; though the bulbul's song  
Was as musical and sweet,  
Yet my heart in pain was wrung!  
Stunned, I saw a sight that made me  
Wish my seeing eyes were blind...  
Stagnant vapours and black snakes  
About the flower stems were twined.

### ELEGY

O heart, in dreams I behold thee,  
In toils of despair and of pain.  
Thy throbbings are wrung by emotions  
That torture the heart and the brain.  
The sun and the moon shine no longer,  
The world lies in darkling and gloom,  
And my life nursed by grief and by sorrow  
Is shrouded in darkness and doom.  
Thus tortured with madness of dreaming,  
I curse all my past and my life;  
And the heart embittered and weary  
Wants but to be freed from the strife.  
'Tis torture to live in a land where

The faith of one's sires is profaned,  
Where honour and justice have fallen,  
Where freedom in darkness is chained.  
O where are the deeds of true valour  
Our past and our heritage claim?  
Thou phantom of glory rise from thy  
Grave where is buried thy fame.  
O breathe in me, Georgia, the epic  
And life-giving fires of thy might!  
Infuse in me strength for the struggle;  
In pride let my falchion gleam bright.  
May the bosom that nursed me to manhood  
Curse and blast me fore'er if I fall.  
O my heart, that is aching, have courage,  
Fight on, though in agony's thrall!

### **THE SWORD'S COMPLAINT**

Rust adorns thee, sword, and mould'ring  
Is thy scabbard once so fine.  
Where's thy master's arm of iron,  
Where's that flashing gleam of thine?  
"On the fatal plain of Shamkor,  
He fell dead, with many a wound,  
And his blood flowed like a torrent,  
Dyeing red the battle ground.  
Though he fell beneath the struggle  
With the deadly enemy,  
Valiant were his deeds and dauntless.  
Matchless was his bravery  
Foremost was he in the battle,  
Smiting, hewing down the foe.  
Georgia and a soldier's honour  
Made him bear the crushing blow.  
A coward's hand has hung me useless  
Here to rust in endless night.  
Georgia has become a market  
Cursed and doomed by venal blight!  
I, who proudly fought for freedom,  
Now am pawned or sold for gold,  
A bartered thing to crown the downfall  
Of my country's pride of old.  
Many years have passed since  
Georgia's Son did whet me till I flashed,  
Rendered sharp my blade so deadly,  
And with me to battle dashed.

Nor have I heard sounds of trumpets,  
Nor the shouts of victory...  
I have passed an age thus hanging  
Here in rust and slavery."

### **LETTER OF A PSHAV SOLDIER TO HIS MOTHER**

Thy dreams, dear mother, will become  
A garden full of happiness.  
O weep not so, nor drown thy heart  
In languor of grief's heaviness.  
Our wounds are healed, and once again,  
We're ready for a dubious fight.  
The morn we'll greet with battle cries,  
With deeds of wonder and of might.  
Tamari's sons will flood the skies  
With radiance of vict'ry's light,  
And with our lives we'll guard and keep  
The torch of honour ever bright.  
For glory born of fallen pride  
We ne'er will barter Georgia's right!  
We'll fell the enemy or die,  
And ne'er like cowards shirk a fight.  
Though now we're far from Georgia, yet,  
Our hearts for her with longing sigh.  
One thing sends fires through our veins,  
As wondering we see on high,  
Above a red-fanged field of war,  
Upon a flying steed — a knight!  
He holds a flaming sword that like  
A star of hope shines in the night!  
His glowing eyes flash sombre light.  
And there midst man-wrought hell and woe  
That knight protects our souls from blight!  
When all is still and not a sound  
Is heard of cannon's deafening roar,  
When battle's surging din is hushed,  
And thoughts invade my mind once more,  
I seem to see thee, mother, combing  
Wool in the quiet of the night.  
Thy head is bent and tears like torrents  
Fall on the carded wool so white.  
A homespun 'chokha' wilt thou sew  
For me, made holy by thy tear;  
No sword can tear it, nor can fire  
Burn through the cloth, O mother dear.

And through the long and dreary night  
Sleep toucheth not thy tearful eyes.  
God grant to happy smiles and song  
Be changed thy mournful dirge and sighs.  
Farewell! the battle-trumpet rings,  
And bids us rush where soldiers' cries  
Resound; where blades like lightning blaze  
And cannon's volley rends the skies.  
But woe! if glory's thrill is o'er  
And all our hopes turn to despair!  
Woe if the spark of valour's flame  
To ashes cold be quenched fore'er!  
Perchance the raven black will croak  
A dirge of doom o'er Georgia fair!  
Farewell! the battle-trumpet rings  
And bids us rush where soldiers' cries  
Resound, where blades like lightning blaze  
And cannon's volley rends the skies.  
Farewell! and weep not, for thy son  
Will fell the foe or bravely die!