

An Epic Hero in the Role of a Lyric Character

The ravishment caused by the sudden discovery of Nikoloz Baratashvili's poetry and research into his works carried out with this sentiment were initially spontaneous. As a result, one of his most important poetic texts (*Merani*) remained in the shadow of prominent poets (Mickiewicz, Byron, Lermontov, Poe) for a long time.

Nevertheless, the time of fundamental research gradually started in Baratashvili studies too. Two main lines became outlined in his works as a result of scientific research and this lyric poem (and all of his works) was comprehended precisely within these frames. The first line implied the poet's creative closeness to European or rather German Romanticism (F. Schlegel, F. Schleiermacher, Novalis) and the second implied his organic ties with national Georgian literature, where Baratashvili was immediately recognised as a direct heir of the classical literary line. It is noteworthy that many interesting works have been created in both directions over the past decades, which forms a reliable foundation for future researchers of Baratashvili's works.

At the same time, it should be noted that the essential differences between the two directions do not at all make researchers face any problem, because Romanticism, as a philosophic and aesthetic movement, is a universal phenomenon due to its scope, so "certain readiness to accept the ideas, themes, and sentiments of Romanticism was already present in the fold of national spirituality" (Doiashvili 2017:125).

Therefore, it is natural that works of the Romanticist poet (predominantly *Merani*) aroused the interest in and desire of connecting it to the first-rate poem of Georgian literature (*The Knight in the Panther Skin* by Shota Rustaveli), because as Guram Asatiani noted, "*Merani* is as high a peak in Georgian poetry as *The Knight in the Panther Skin* by Rustaveli. Classical epic way of thinking was perfectly embodied in Rustaveli's poem and *Merani* is a most excellent example of lyric expression characteristic of Romanticist poetry" (Asatiani 1988:123).

Pavle Ingorkva's contribution to our literary criticism is particularly noteworthy in this regard. He managed to find such parallels between the two works that made it possible to share his assumptions that were quite bold.

Initially, he paid attention to certain artistic and lexical coincidences between *Merani* and *The Knight in the Panther Skin*. However, his main assumption was based on similarities between Baratashvili's lyric hero and one of the main characters in Rustaveli's poem - Avtandil.

"In foreign lands thou lay me low, not where my fathers sleep;
"Nor shed thou tears nor grieve, my love, nor o'er my body weep." (Baratashvili 1954:45)

The researcher compared these well-known lines from *Merani* to the passage from Avtandil's *Testament*, which makes the connection between these two artistic texts obvious:

"If Destiny destroys me as, in the end, it destroys us all,

"A wanderer who died wandering, abandoned by great and small,
"With no parents, guardians, trusted friends, enshrouded me in the hall." (Rustaveli 1970:146)

"Pointing to the connection between *Merani* and *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, I am far from asserting that *The Knight in the Panther Skin* presents some prototype of *Merani*. Rustaveli and Baratashvili are two different poetic worlds. However, in spite of this, there are some coincidences in *Merani* that are reminiscent of Rustaveli. Moreover, these coincidences are sometimes very important in terms of philosophy. There are also partial coincidences in the poetic inventory" (Ingorokva 1969:133).

As I said above, most Georgian researchers immediately shared this opinion of Pavle Ingorokva about the internal closeness of the lyric hero of *Merani* to one of the heroes of *The Knight in the Panther Skin* - Avtandil. This time, I will focus only on the fragment of the research, where the researcher quotes another passage to compare these two artistic texts, believing that the main poetic image of this work by Baratashvili is precisely reminiscent of the poem by Rustaveli:

"Suddenly he appeared, morose and gloomy of visage, a knight.
"He sat on his horse, his black stallion, the way a demi-god might." (Rustaveli 1970:39)
"His horse seemed to fly. His pursuers pursued till their senses reeled." (Rustaveli 1970:21)

Interestingly, these lines are about the main hero of *The Knight in the Panther Skin* - Tariel. In other words, this means that the researcher initially viewed a connection of Baratashvili's lyric hero (also) with Tariel. However, he never continued his research in this direction, as his attention bent to Avtandil. As regards the question whether the lyric hero of Baratashvili's *Merani* could show closeness to both main characters of *The Knight in the Panther Skin* (Tariel and Avtandil) at the same time, has remained unanswered.

In order to be able to raise this issue again today, we should first and foremost prove that the unification of these two characters in one artistic image has a logical foundation in Rustaveli's poem proper. (Such an approach can become a novelty in researches in Rustaveli's poem.) It is only after this that the attempt to connect such a "perfect" character to Baratashvili's romantic hero can be justified.

For this purpose, on the one hand, we should have clear understanding of the situation Tariel found himself in. Searching for Nestan (unending life), he lost faith and turned into a person defeated in his struggle with his fate (let us recall Nestan's complaint: "Fate has brought down on us, mine own, everything that has laid us low" - Rustaveli 1970:232). On the other hand, there is Avtandil, who is sacrificing himself to his friend without fearing even death.

We should also recall that Avtandil reprimands Tariel, who is in desolation, first and foremost for forgetting his friend (Asmat):

"Better to lose the armlet than her to whom you are connected." (Rustaveli 1970:162)

This reprimand of Avtandil is just. However, readers remember that Tariel did not lack this skill either. This became clear, when he helped Pridon in war and after he released Nestan from captivity and started taking care of Avtandil's future.

"I desire to serve him in return, but his need is opaque.
"Go and ask what he wants; he'll tell you if you an inquiry make.

"As he has quenched my furnace, now in his service, I will partake." (Rustaveli 1970:264)

We can draw the conclusion here that after Tariel "found" himself, he incorporated Avtandil's function (joined his lost half) and achieved human perfection.

Let us go back to *Merani* by Baratashvili, in which the unbridled race from the vanity of this world is motivated by finding a place in eternity. After crossing the border of the fate, a person reaches freedom precisely in the sense that freedom is also volition within the frames of a higher substance, which is the aim of the rider's aspiration. It is noteworthy here that such an aspiration (that is characteristic of only Tariel's inquiring mind) can be felt everywhere in Baratashvili's works. This becomes particularly obvious in his poem *Twilight over Mtatsminda*.

"Beyond your realm my soul takes wing to seek repose
From dreary haunts where every cherished hope expires..." (Baratashvili 1954:13)

It becomes quite clear here that the circle of providence is beyond the circle of fate. It is the heavens with eternal life - freedom - there. It can be said that oriental contemplation seen in *Twilight over Mtatsminda* is replaced by active motion in *Merani* under the influence of Western philosophy.

Merani can conditionally be divided in several parts. The first five lines are extremely purposeful and disregardful. There are no traces of mind here. The aim that implies crossing the circle of providence is so great that the rider does not care if he dies on his path and is buried far away from his homeland without being mourned by his beloved. (It is also important here that he admits that he bears only remains of love.) However, it is the mention of his beloved that arouses pessimistic sentiments in the hero. "The sixth strophe seems to comprise renewed understanding of his death without his beloved and the initial sentiment re-emerges due to inertia, but the boldness seen in the rider's actions at the beginning of the poem seems to disappear."

After this, the rider seems to accept fate: "By fate repulsed, oh bury me in a dark and lonely grave" (Baratashvili 1954:45). And this sentiment makes him similar to Tariel in despair: "Come, friend, and bury me. Cast clods upon me with a grave man's art!" (Rustaveli 1970:160). However, the possibility that he may make the difficult war easier for others at the expense of his own life remains. The possibility of sacrificing his life for his relatives and friends also remains, which is characteristic of only Avtandil.

As regards the eighth strophe - "The yearnings of my restless soul will not in vain have glowed" (Baratashvili 1954:46) - shows hope that emerges thanks to the discovery of a different new function of a human.

"Nikoloz Baratashvili's works are the whole life of one person (lyric hero) built on the biography of the poet starting with his birth ("new-born") and ending with his death ("Merani"). At the same time, this person-universe has enough room for the past life of humankind. His joy is the joy of a carefree infant burbling in the language of heaven and his fall is the fall of Adam burdened with the inherited sin, a permanent search, defiance of the destiny, and selfless running - Tariel's search, defiance, and roaming of the wilderness, because he (lyric hero) is also a man of longing and obeys his desires like the hero of *The Knight in the Panther Skin*. The destiny and world betrayed him like they did to Tariel, so both took a dislike to this world" (Arganashvili 2006:120).

In *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, Avtandil comes to rescue Tariel. He saves the latter from the desperate situation close to death. Baratashvili's lyric hero (author) correctly assesses his spiritual state, feeling his invisible connection with his direct predecessor and searching for a friend (Avtandil), who is to create

conditions necessary for a balance. "I need a man to take me out of these rocks and chasms to stand in the open country. Oh, what a free breath I will take then and what a royal look I will take at my arena" (Baratashvili 1954:99).

It is interesting that the lyric hero of *Merani* (the same as Tariel), who suffers a defeat in his struggle against the destiny, finds the "man" precisely in himself. He finds the force to believe that he is also a son of this world and he thinks he is obliged to have understanding of his parent, because a person, who lives in this world, but takes no care of it, is good for nothing.

The difference between epic and Romantic poetries in general, which is due to differences between literary trends pertaining to various eras, draws works by Rustaveli and Baratashvili even closer, because the path of Tariel's life and search stretches from sea to sea and his Merani (Pegasus) is exhausted covering this boundless space, while the arena of Baratashvili's lyric hero stretches only over the nonexistent distance between heart and mind. It is its running to "nowhere" that causes the desperate mood of the rider obsessed by the desire to cross the boundaries of providence.

We should also bear in mind that "it is Rustaveli's varied world that is so deserted and desolate in Baratashvili's works (*Twilight over Mtatsminda*). It is the thriving, majestic, generous, and modest king, who strives with lust for that earth wherein he is doomed to mingle with its dust (*Meditations by the River Mtkvari*). This is why his homeland is so deserted and it is probably only the desire to imitate his ancestors that gives the homeless wanderer the force (*I have Found a Real Church*) to condemn like the Saviour did the evil spirit that charms his mind (*The Evil Spirit*).

We can say in conclusion that our literature (Baratashvili is an example) managed to revive epic heroes in a lyric text. A medieval knight entered our life, acquiring the features of a romantic character. Such a complicated genesis of a literary hero is possible only in classical texts of global level. Only a rich tradition can maintain the ceaselessness of the main line of literary heritage and the uninterrupted nature of links between times.

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