

Shota Rustaveli and Nizami Ganjavi. Cultural Intersections

The Man in the Panther's Skin by Rustaveli is a work of the late Middle Ages, which organically unites the cultural traditions of the Christian West and Muslim East. However, *unification* does not imply an artificial reconciliation of these different traditions or their rough imitation. This word implies the unification of all streams and trends in one entity and organic reconciliation of various elements taken from the cultural environment of the Middle Ages, which enriches Georgian literature and turns it into an organic part of the world literary process.

The opening point of the plot is the Arabian royal court, whose harmony is broken by the appearance and sudden disappearance of strange knight. At the request of his beloved lady, Tinatin, (who is at the same time the Queen of Arabia) Arabian military commander Avtandil sets out in quest of the stranger knight and, after three years of roaming traces his abode in a thick forest, in the cave of giants (devils). He learns from the stranger knight's story that he, commander-in-chief of India, Tariel, had lost his love, had looked for her on sea and land and upon losing all hope of finding her, left the human abode and, desperate and enraged, set up his abode among wild beasts. Avtandil promises him help, and renews a long quest of Tariel's love Nestan-Darejan. In the Kingdom of Seas, he heard the sequel of the story of Nestan-Darejan from Patman, the wife of the chief merchant, and learned that she was kept in the inaccessible Kajeti fortress. Avtandil immediately went back to his sworn brother to communicate the good news. The "secret" – "evil" – was defeated by "good" and "light", as the secret became known. It was not difficult for "three heroes" – Tariel, Avtandil and Pridon - to defeat thousands of fighters, even if they were invincible and free Nestan-Darejan.

Even the adapted theme of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* makes it clear that the plot of the romance unfolds through an Oriental-type framework adapted to Georgian conditions. Loss/quest/find is the main motive of the work (the so-called quest for adventures, which is called *ghariboba* in Georgian), which ends in the formation of a perfect personality of a hero and the victory of good over evil.

One of the significant parts of the compositional structure of the romance is the Prologue, which in epic works of medieval literature was attributed great significance. In Prologues the authors used to open to their readers a plot of their works, they established their own world outlook and aesthetic views, opinions. Prologue of "Vepkhistkaosani" is construed in full conformity with this tradition. And the fact seems most interesting that in the 9th stanza of the Prologue, telling about creation of the poem, Shota Rustaveli declares that he "found this beautiful tale from Persia", "translated into Georgian" and "have set it in a setting of Georgian verses". This assertion couldn't be left without attention of commentators and researchers of the romance. ⁷ Back in the beginning of the XVII century the king of Kartli Vakhtang the VI (1675-1737), who knew perfectly the Persian language and literature who, was the first publisher of the romance, in his "Comments" confirmed that in Persian literature even traces of such history couldn't be found. The expression "Persian tale" turned out to be a poetic symbol, which was rather significant for interpretation of deep meanings of the poem. Poly semantics, foreign tales, allusions, metamorphism are organically inherent to the language of Rustaveli and determination of the meaning of სპარსული [sparsuli] ("Persian") formed the base for serious scientific polemics and in the process of this polemics many opinions were expressed. Irrespective of difference in expressed interpretations it can't be doubted that trying to give artistic reliability, credibility to described events, the poet uses definition "Persian" as a notion, referring to the whole cultural area of the East, which is proved by the geography of artistic space of the poem.

Artistic approach of "alienation of the plot" is not a rarity in the history of the world literature. It is noteworthy that Georgia's political, religious, and ideological confrontation with various Muslim countries, more specifically, with Persia, has never developed into cultural antagonism. Hardly anywhere else were Ferdowsi and his successors adored as much as in Georgia. In the Late Middle Ages and for

quite some time in the following period, Georgians regarded Persians as masters of artistic word. Those, who used Persian terms, allusions, and artistic images borrowed from the poems of Persian poets, would definitely become successful. So in Rustaveli's poem conditionality of the "Persian history" is created by the use of various artistic approaches:

- 1) heroes of the poem, conditionally "Muslims"; more than conditionally following Muslim traditions;
- 2) action takes place in conditional Arabia – არაბეთი [Arabeti] – Arab region, in no less conditional ინდოეთი [Indoeti] – India - country of Indians, as well as in the imaginary Gulansharo, Mulgazanzari and Kadjeti; absolutely real Khataeti /China (ruled by a "khan", and in other place we find "king"), Khvarazm /Khorezm, Balakhshan/Badaghshan (country in the lower Pamir at the border of Afghanistan), Egypt (strophe 1019.1), Bagdad (Bagdad merchants – strophe 1019.1) and others; at this moment it is considered that all these countries belong to the Muslim world.
- 3) realities of oriental culture are mentioned (eg. Mosque, Mullah, Quran etc).

All together, the above listed create oriental coloring of artistic space of the romance which is necessary for the poet.

"Alongside with the western, European orientation the Georgian culture didn't break links with oriental cultures and this was conditioned not only by geographical, political and economic factors, but also by tendencies of spiritual development" (Tvaradze 1985:17).

With this in view, as I. Ratiani states:

"In Georgian literature Shota Rustaveli's "Vepkhistkaosani" – is a meeting of western and eastern cultures" (Ratiani 2015: 41), which clearly illustrates inter-textual roll-calls fixed in the text of the poem. Sending the reader to the summits of oriental poetry, they contribute to the fusion of the Rustaveli's poem with meta-text of poetic culture of the East.

Inclusion of cultural realities in the narration is of no less significance. First of all, these are concepts of Love მიჯნურობა [*mijnuroba*].

In particular, substantiating the notion of მიჯნურობა [*Mijnuroba*] in the Prologue, Rustaveli directs his readers to Arabic culture – stanza 22.1: "In Arabic a lover is called a 'madman'; because of futile burning he loses his reason" (p. 17). So, it's quite expected that the individual details of Rustaveli's conception of love bear a clear imprint of oriental culture (the most obvious example of this is the reference to the main characters as *mijnur*). In general, the malady of love was known in all times and in all countries, but Arabic medicine paid particular attention to it. Arab doctors regarded the malady of love as a disease caused by love that ended in madness or even death.

Presenting the suffering from love as an incurable malady obtained a special literary and aesthetic meaning in the poetry of the Bedouin tribes of Central Arabia in the 7th and 8th centuries, which praised the immaculate, Platonic love between two tragic lovers separated by fortune. Some researchers said the kind of love described in Udhur poetry was a Bedouin version of the fin'Amor (sacred love) of French Troubadours (Filshtinsky 1977: 159). In this respect the most distinguished was the **Udhrah** tribe, which was a nomadic tribe travelling from Medina towards the North around the Wadi al-Qura area. The poets of this tribe wrote verses on a fatal and almost mystic love that could bring only ordeal, with death being the only possible way out of it. Correspondingly, Udhur poetry was full of fatalism, endless melancholy, and impending doom. They tried to free themselves of the captivity of sexual desires, give their feelings the force of divine inspiration, and set them forth as an ideal. As it was Allah who gave the poet this fatal feeling, it was impossible to get rid of it. The following words of a Bedouin poet are well known: "*I belong to the tribe, whose men die as soon as they fall in love*". It is clear that the poet implies the Udhur tribe. The poets and men of the tribe believed that love was not only an all-encompassing feeling, but life itself. According to the *Udhur* poets, the souls of lovers are going to meet in the eternal kingdom, where they will find eternal happiness. Therefore, the *Udhur* lyrics were permeated with fatalism, endless grief, hopelessness and at the same time with an infinite loyalty to the loved one. Every poet had only one object of affection, an ideal woman, whose idealization drove these poets to such a condition that the physical woman was relegated to the background, and love attained a rather abstract character, it can even

be said that it became a form of religious devotion: “this love was so pure that the *Udhr* love secured its place in Arabic literature as synonymous with Platonic love. It was precisely this tradition that laid the foundation of that literary concept according to which the *Udhr ghazal* was molded, and the poets who followed this tradition were referred to as *Udhr* lovers regardless of their tribal belonging. This term became somewhat generalized and instead of signifying the ethnic origin, it pointed to the specific literary concept that this poets followed”.

What is the essence of this poetry? – First of all, *death for love’s sake*, which is merged with motifs such as *concealing one’s love*, representing it as a *malady*, which cannot be cured by medication and which takes away mind and strength from human beings and renders them powerless. Love visits the poet unexpectedly, puts him through terrible torment and even drives him, occasionally, into madness. Poets compare the feeling of love with hot firebrands, with flaming fire, heated iron, a trap, into which the helpless prey finally falls. A lover sheds his tears over the separation from the loved one, he kisses the earth that were touched by her feet, walks in places where she enjoyed walking, and loses consciousness.

From the 8th century on, we encounter *Udhr* love stories in every famous philological edition of collected works or anthologies; we find them in either fully or fragmented forms, in different versions, relying on different oral or written sources, and they are increasingly enriched by new poetic or prosaic versions. The most noteworthy among these works is *The Book of Songs* by the famous literary scholar, writer, historian, musicologist and poet of the Abbasid Caliphate, Abu al-Faraj Ali ibn Al-Husayn Al-Khatib Al-I fah n . The author seems to have employed dozens of the written sources of his predecessor as well as the oral stories of his contemporaries. The existence of such stories filled the gap of epos in Arab literature. All these traditions were included within the frameworks of certain schemes:

1. The poet, at an early age, falls in love with the beautiful young woman from his own tribe; the love arise at first sight and stays with him until death;
2. The enamoured poet dedicates his poems to the object of his affection; in these poems only one woman’s name is mentioned. The *Udhr* poets became famous for dedicating their poems to a single woman;
3. Their love is pure and sublime. Therefore, the lover has to “faint from afar”; this is of necessity takes the form of a constant longing, wedded to the “obliviousness” of the loved one, thus placing fortune between the lovers; their separation is a fatal yet inevitable necessity;
4. The lover has to hide his own “suffering”. He has to suffer all his life and endure the pains brought about by love;
5. The parents and family of the loved one turn down the lover’s proposal giving him various reasons when he is asking her hand in marriage;
6. A benefactor will emerge, who wishes well to the poet, usually, he is a nobleman or someone occupying a special status in upper class society; he either himself or via another influential person tries to interfere and help the lover marry his loved one, yet all his attempts are in vain;
7. The relatives of the woman, annoyed by the persistence of the poet, complain to the local governor or even to the Caliph;
8. In order to protect the woman’s dignity, she is given in marriage to somebody else. Fortune and circumstance separate the lovers forever;
9. The poet loses his mind out of his boundless love, he heads off far away from home, flees people, takes refuge in desolate places and constantly remembers his loved one. The malady of love leads him to the verge of death.
10. Both the poet-lover and his loved one die of sorrow for one another .¹

¹ If you read the poem By Nizami “Laila and Majnun” you probably saw the same plot lines which we see in this scheme.

Many scholars tried to see the above listed motifs in Rustaveli's *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*. A professor of Baghdad University, Jaleel Kamal Al Adh-Din identifies directly Rustavelian love with that of the *Udhr* in his article "Arabs in the ancient Georgian literary legacy". In his opinion the suffering of the characters in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* is similar to the suffering of an Arab who is maddened by love. Even their attitudes to this feeling is similar to that of an Arab. The Arabic background of the whole story further secures his opinion. Yet, it should be mentioned that the comparative analysis between the normative schemes of the Arabic accounts of the *Udhr* poet-lovers and the plot of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* shows that despite some similarities typologically these are two different schemes and, even though the similarity is evident on the level of particular components, and certain episode lines also coincide with each other, but if the composition of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* is based upon the motif of "loss-search-finding", the skeleton of the composition in the other is "falling in love – fatal and eternal separation – dying of love". Therefore, the similarity between them, as tangible and particular it may be, still remains superficial.

The main motifs of the *Udhr* lyrics acquired greater meaning and depth in Sufi poetry. The follower of Sufism could not experience divine love until he was tempted by God through carnal love. Therefore, the Sufis in their sermons used the examples of those *Udhr* lovers who loved their chosen ones selflessly. Among the *Udhr* poets the Sufis still accorded a special honour to Majnun, who was named as the ideal lover, and his madness was considered as the symbol of his blessed divine vision.

Arabic sources described the person of Majnun differently. Some Arab theoreticians believed he was a historical person, a poet, whose poems have reached us in our time. According to the traditional reports, the real name of Majnun was Qays ibn Al-Mulawwah and the story of his tragic love was passed on from generation to generation. According to *The Book of Songs* by Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani, the story of Majnun can be attributed to the end of the 8th C. and his poems to the fine examples of *Udhr* poetry. Although the adventure of *Layla and Majnun* enjoyed an enormous popularity among people, within the Arabic literary tradition it developed in a somewhat fragmented manner. These romantic adventures were first collected, put in a literary form and presented as a complete piece of work by Nizami Ganjavi – the greatest poet of the East. The suffering of a *mijnur* (the man in love) is expressed by the secondary motifs, such as: *to be maddened by love; shedding tears of blood; burning and flaming with an inextinguishable flame of love; to be wounded in the heart; dreaming of death; ranging*.

The poem shows, in sequence, how Majnun's love gradually turns into all-encompassing passion from which he cannot free himself; only death can be its finale. The basic steps in the development of love, which are based on the theoretical and philosophical thought and the ethical belief of that time, are presented distinctly and tangibly. The love of Qays grows from the soil of daily life, gradually the flame of love arises, intensifies, later their love passes beyond earthly understanding, and manifests itself beyond the real. According to Eastern mysticism, an insane person is closer to truth and closer to God than a wise man who is concerned with the troubles of this world. Truth (God) cannot be conceived through one's mind. It requires a great feeling, which will embed into one's "I" and conquer it completely. Therefore, this is the stage of love, when this all-encompassing feeling that took over a person has to defeat the cold mind. "Layla – the beloved is the manifestation of God. Here, Majnun sees God in Layla's image and expresses his love for God through her. The character of Layla and the love for her are a metaphor here, and function as a bridge to reach both truth and God".

If we imagine these steps (stages) of the development of love in relation to the state of the lover, it will become obvious that falling in love causes contamination by the malady of love, the expressions of which are found in the following symptoms: fainting, loss of consciousness, moaning, sighing, melancholy, paleness, trembling, fear, and the like. Tariel, the main character of "The Knight in the Panther's Skin", while telling the story of his falling in love, says: "I saw the maiden (Nestan) and a lance pierced my mind and heart". It is obvious, that the occasional fainting of Tariel when he was recounting his adventure or when he saw Nestan for the first time, were nothing but a representation of a normal condition of a roaming knight. Tariel, faints and doctors are summoned to cure him, the latter are unable to conceal their surprise at the unusual state of the sick man. "What manner of sickness is this?" they ask and conclude: "Nothing medicable afflicts him; some melancholy has laid hold of him" (Rustaveli, 1966, p. 114). It is clear that the doctors draw the conclusion from their observations of Tariel's condition: "Sometimes I leaped up like a madman, I uttered idle words" (Rustaveli, 1966, p. 114). This reflects

spiritual problems of the sick man rather than physical weakness and is expressed in appropriate motifs in the *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* as in oriental and occidental love poetry: a) Being in the state of madness, exasperation, and craziness; b) Shedding tears of blood; c) Burning in an unabated fire; d) Having a heart wounded with a lance; e) Longing for death.

Getting sick with love is followed by amorous torments, madness and roaming the wilderness. The ordeal is so all-encompassing and unbearable that people in love are unable to remain locked within the prescribed boundaries, so they go beyond the limits of the locale and soar closer to the highest point of madness. A person who is the prisoner of his own feelings and is roaming in the wilderness, cuts off his ties with the world. His worldly existence is limited to his physical presence alone. He is ready to make spiritual contact with the heavenly realm. The clear example of this is Majnun, who after his separation with Layla flees into the wilderness, weeps, cries, avoids people and communicates only with animals. His madness reaches its climax when he asks an elderly beggar to carry him from door to door with a rope tied around his neck. Reaching the Layla's doorstep, he bangs his head on it, covers the gate with kisses, sings the heart-breaking song of love, then he breaks his chains, flees back to the wilderness and finds shelter in the desert once again.

This episode symbolizes the fact that the link between Majnun and human society is already broken and his adventure will no longer reach a happy ending. From now love is supposed not to simply make him mad, but also eliminate and destroy his personal identity. Love is going to burn him into ashes. At this stage of the development of love the individual differences between the lovers should be abolished, they need to become a unified individual and become the general "I". This is well documented in the episode when Majnun sees a paper hanging on the wall, where the names of he and Layla are written, and tears off that piece of the paper where Layla's name is written. When Majnun is asked about the reason for such an act, his answer is: "One name is enough for both...One can see the shell, but not the kernel...The name is only the outer shell and I am this shell, I am the veil". Therefore, Majnun's love reaches this level of perfection. His soul merges with Layla's soul and thus they unite. Here Nizami comes very close to the Sufi ideal of "merging". From now on Majnun is no longer Qays, he is only a "shell", in which lives his ideal – and she is even more dazzling and beautiful than the Layla who exists in everyday reality.

At the end of the poem Majnun goes to Layla's grave, falls down on it and gives up his soul while whispering the name of his beloved. The tragic death of the main characters is the final stage of the development of love in Eastern literature – lovers leave this world, their souls are certainly going to meet in the kingdom of absolute beauty.

Like Majnun, Tariel "roams the wilderness" after he loses Nestan, but this state is not yet the madness that would motivate the knight to turn his back against human society and race among the wild beasts. Despite the misfortune that befell him, he is still able to suppress the painful emotions that torment him, mobilise his forces, and bear the difficulties of his life without batting an eyelid. Only after he loses hope he leaves the "community of men", starts wandering in the fields, and clad in the panther's skin, finds shelter in a remote cave. From now on, Tariel is driven by only one desire – to leave this world as soon as possible, so that he could unite with his separated beloved at least in the other world – with the woman, who was the meaning of his life and who, he thinks, is now dead. The difference between Tariel's and Majnun's madness and quest for death is that it is enough for Tariel to see Nestan's letter wrapped up in her veil, to believe that his lover is alive; the lost hope revives in the person, who "loses consciousness" from unexpected joy and receives the impetus to live and act. From that moment, Tariel relies again on his courage and power in reaching his goal. Together with his sworn brothers, Tariel heads to the fortress of Kajeti in order to regain Nestan and, together with her, the love and spiritual peace he lost. The knight, who returns victorious from Kajeti becomes invincible again. After he unites with the woman he loves, his madness disappears and the motif of roaming the wilderness is no longer necessary.

As the "plague" of love brings ordeal and passion, man has either to tolerate it or fight against it. It is here that the will and spiritual firmness of a person becomes visible. So the ordeal in Rustaveli's Romance also has its dialectic: It will not always be there, but will be replaced by joy. Ordeal cannot exist forever. It must be overcome by joy. It is for this purpose that man must be courageous and "firm in trouble". Thus, the philosophy of ordeal is optimistic in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*. Man must resist ordeal and combat it, which is the path upon which a personality can attain perfection.

In *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, the pains, ordeals, torments, fires, burnings, and faintings of love are a result of unattained love. There is no one in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, who would voluntarily want to be in trouble because of love or to be tormented and tortured. On the contrary, the will of every hero becomes visible in their struggle for obtaining love and, if love is a malady, every hero tries to recover from it and escape the malady.

Thus, we can see that enduring pain in amorous relations is equally regarded as obligatory in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* and in oriental poetry. However, in oriental poetry, pain is mostly regarded as a poetic decoration and it is defeated and replaced by joy in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*. Love is victorious. Rustaveli closely links amorous torments and joys of love. They are not separated. On the contrary, they are strongly bounded together. The poet concentrates not on the strength of pain and death but on overcoming painful emotions and the ability to cope with them, which leads to the perfection of the lover and the perception of high ideals in this world.