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One Occurrence of the Symbolic Reception of "The Man in the Panther's Skin"¹

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Abstract: As a result of the reconstruction of Valerian Gaprindashvili's theoretical views and the analysis of poetic works, it was outlined that V. Gaprindashvili intends to create a myth on Rustaveli. He discusses Rustaveli's literary work as the work with the aspects characteristic of modernism. He understands "The man in the panther skin" according to two origins of the creativity given by Nietzsche and attributes the poem to a series of Apollonian works. Via allusion of chivalry novels the poet links Avtandili to the heroes of courtesy novels. Reception of Avtandili's image is also original – Avtandili perceived as the knight self-sacrificed to a friend, is conceived as an enamored character in "Rain performance".

Keywords: *"The Man in the Panther's Skin"; Valerian Gaprindashvili; Apollonian and Dionysian; Reception.*

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Many factors influence the perception and interpretation of a literary text. The values, aesthetic principles, ideals or aspirations of a particular epoch condition a different understanding of the literary work. It is noteworthy to explore a text that has participated in the literary process for centuries. The best example of such a literary work in the history of Georgian culture, of course, is Rustaveli's "The Man in the Panther's Skin".

What purpose can this type of study have? Such a study will reveal the degree of influence of analytical literary work on creative writing, and shed light on the role of analytical work in the creativity of individual authors. In addition, in the history of literature, in general, such studies are also noteworthy as they allow exploring the ways the environment influences the interpretation of a text and the causes of the different reading of a literary work in different epochs. Such observation, in fact, implies the observation of the ideological worldview, aesthetic and ethical values of different epochs, which allows me to follow the history of Georgian thought.

I find the first interpretations of Rustaveli's poem in the sequels of "The Man in the Panther's Skin". As it is indicated in the Rustavelological studies, *"the sequeler is not a falsifier and does not try to pass off his work as belonging to Rustaveli, he keeps his own world"* [6, p. 77]. For example, an interpolator may find the idea of a centralized monarchy alien to him although it was completely natural for Rustaveli due to the political context (E. Khintibidze). Therefore, the interpolator understands the text of the poem in accordance with the aesthetics of his contemporary epoch. Thus, the sequels of Rustaveli's poem can be considered as the first reception of "The Man in the Panther's Skin". In this regard, "The Man in the Panther's Skin" has not been deprived of attention in later periods either. In the so-called Renaissance epoch, there are many receptions of Rustaveli's poem – be it King Archil's theoretical views on overcoming Persianophilic tendencies or Vakhtang VI's Christian exegesis of the poem which was an attempt to protect "The Man in the Panther's Skin" from certain clericalists.

The analysis of all epochs or the more or less original reception of Rustaveli's poem by any important author requires lengthy research. I'd like to focus the reader's attention on the era of modernism, which is extremely complex and characterized by spiritual pursuits and worldview changes, which,

of course, were reflected even in the reception of classical texts by modernist authors.

The attitude of modernist poets towards Rustaveli's poem is completely different from their predecessors. The poets of the movement of "Blue Horns" show a critical attitude towards the past and sharply oppose the creativity of the previous generation. It is not uncommon for them to express a negative attitude towards both Georgian and foreign classics. All these are evidenced not only in their poetic heritage but also in their literary manifestos and letters. Against this background, the interest they showed concerning "The Man in the Panther's Skin" is especially noteworthy.

The epic by Rustaveli has become the impetus for the "Blue Horns" poets to write many verses. There are also many reflections on "The Man in the Panther's Skin" in their literary letters. Valerian Gaprindashvili, a "Blue Horn" poet and theoretician of symbolism, states in his essay "David Guramishvili": *"Modern poetry returns to the past"* [2, p. 16]. In the past, he implies Rustaveli who is not easy to approach: *"Rustaveli is a closed palace for us, this palace is guarded by incomprehensible words like lions"* [2, p. 10]. The reception of "The Man in the Panther's Skin" holds a large place in the works of the "Blue Horns" poets. By analyzing Valerian Gaprindashvili's concept, I'll try to approach the problem and discuss some aspects of the modernist reception of "The Man in the Panther's Skin" using the example of one verse.

Before discussing the issue, it should be mentioned that in addition to being a symbolist poet, V. Gaprindashvili is a theoretician of symbolism, and, grounding on the standpoints expressed in his literary letters or declarations, I can reconstruct the poet's aesthetic views and poetic concept, which, in turn, are noteworthy regarding the study of his poetic texts, since the theoretician Gaprindashvili's views are reflected via poetic hints in the poet V. Gaprindashvili's verses. Thus, the purpose of my study is to attempt such a complex analysis.

V. Gaprindashvili's goal is to "return the past", and this important mission, in his opinion, should be fulfilled by literature. *"The renaissance of Rustaveli and old poets in Georgian poetry begins"* which can be considered one of the most important phenomena on the way back to the past. In my opinion, for V. Gaprindashvili to "return the past" means the return of Rustaveli. This implies approaching the text, assigning Rustaveli's creative work to the symbolic

mythology, like the European modernists and symbolic characters, the full participation of the world of "The Man in the Panther's Skin" – characters, toponyms or other realia of Rustaveli's poem – in the common modernist mythopoetic world. That is why V. Gaprindashvili tries to implement the thesis in his own poetry formulated in a literary letter a "Declaration (New Mythology)" dated 1922 – *"Georgian poetry must create the myth of Rustaveli"* [3, p. 12]. According to Maia Jaliashvili: *"Rustaveli took the first place in the New mythology created by the Blue Horn movement"* [7, p. 347].

The poem "Rain Performance", dated 1918, begins with the lyric hero's admiration for the "rain cloth". Despite the bad weather, the poet's imagined picture gives rise to a positive expectation – *"as if the beautiful and snow-winged young girl, // waits for her Avtandil with a smile in this bad weather"* but this beautiful picture will not long infatuate the lyrical hero bored with other dreams. The change of mood is followed by a dream of "old poets", towards whom the heaven is ruthless:

*"Verlaine goes forward as King Lear
And is followed by the doomed
Rimbaud, Rollinat, Corbière, our Paolo,
And their hearts do not burn with fire."*

[5, p. 72]

Unlike Avtandil, who is depicted in the exposition of the poem, *"they have no charming ladies accompanying them"* – this phrase is repeated with minor changes in the text and, in fact, serves as a refrain, encouraging a reader to pay more attention to the named verse line. Indeed, the variation of the above lines *"they do not have tournament ladies with them"* helps me to clarify the aesthetic position of the lyrical hero and, in my opinion, through this repetition, Avtandil's artistic image depicted in the first strophe. I believe that the "tournament ladies" is an allusion to chivalrous novels. The protagonist of a typical courtly novel is a knight enamoured of a queen or noblewoman. This lady often attends a tournament of knights, and the knight dedicates the success in the competition to her.

What can be meant in the analytical verse, on the one hand, the allusion to a novel of courtly love and, on the other hand, the depiction of the hero of the

medieval chivalrous novel² – Avtandil – and what relation do the named artistic characters have with the modernist authors mentioned in the verse?

In an essay “Two Elements”, dated 1922, V. Gaprindashvili brings the following analogy: “There are happy and cursed poets in poetry, just as there are two elements in nature, two origins – Apollonian and Dionysian” [4, p. 1]. In my opinion, the contrast of the Nietzschean dichotomy is presented in the “Rain Performance”: on the one hand, the world of medieval literature, which denotes the Apollonian origin in the named text, and, on the other hand, the procession of the cursed poets manifesting the Dionysian origin. My opinion is supported by the following lines from “Two Elements”: “The surface of the cosmos is clear and beautiful. There are poets like Pushkin, and Rustaveli; they show this surface to us, blind us with rays and make us tremble with happiness. This is the Apollonian form of poetry” [4, p. 1]. On the contrary, the cursed poets, “doomed knights”, as V. Gaprindashvili refers to them in the same essay, are poets named in the analytical verse – Verlaine, Rimbaud, Rollinat, Corbière. I consider it noteworthy that they are mentioned as knights in the theoretical paper since this fact underlines the correctness of linking the artistic image I have explained – “tournament ladies” – with medieval chivalrous novels. It is not generally uncommon for modernists to depict the worshipping characters as knights, e.g. V. Gaprindashvili mentions Baudelaire and Lautréamont as knights in “Fragments”. The “overcast sky” mentioned in the “Rain performance”, which, in my opinion, is a symbolic marker, opposes the bright and beautiful surface of the cosmos, and Rustaveli is the very creator who, according to V. Gaprindashvili, shows the bright surface of the cosmos.

In addition, I believe that the character, who is portrayed as Avtandil and who is “*waited for in the rain*,” is somehow associated with the knight of a medieval novel in the lyrical protagonist's consciousness, and the cursed poets who “*have no tournament ladies next to them*” form an opposition to him.” My conclusion is based, on the one hand, on the allusion discussed above and, on the other hand, on the view expressed by V. Gaprindashvili, as a theoretician of symbolism, on Rustaveli. This kind of understanding of Avtandil's image is also a

² Rustaveli's poem is not a typical example of a medieval chivalrous novel. In this regard, see M. Elbakidze, To define the genre of “The Man in the Panther's Skin”, *Sjani*, VIII, 2007.

novelty when writing a verse. In general, Avtandil's link with the Western chivalrous novel is found late not only in the creative work but also in Rustvelology studies³. Of course, the shown link is expressed through hints, as is characteristic of artistic creation in general, and symbolic poetics, in particular.

In the verse, there is a reception of Avtandil's image, different from the traditional one. My attention was focused on the fact that in the given text, Avtandil is the image of an enamoured man which is different from the traditional understanding of his image. Although being enamoured, Avtandil appears from the very beginning of "The Man in the Panther's Skin" (*"The beauty of T'hinat'hin and of the host of her eyelashes was slaying him"* (translation by M.Wardrop), he is still perceived by the reader as a selfless knight ready to sacrifice himself for a friend. The typical lovelorn character in Rustaveli's poem is Tariel. This is logical, because Avtandil's love is not in danger and thus this aspect of his artistic image is somehow overshadowed in the reader's perception of him. In my opinion, Aka Morchiladze's phrase from "The King and I" is a good example to illustrate the traditional reception of the heroes of "The Man in the Panther's Skin": *"here is nothing left of the Man in the Panther's Skin about this fictional country... Avtandils were killed in this country, the boys who went to help a friend, Tariels, the truly enamoured boys, were killed in this country,"* [1, B5]. Obviously, the contemporary writer turns the view of Georgian readers to the characters of "The Man in the Panther's Skin" into a metaphor. A reception of Avtandil's image different from the traditional one is not accidental in V. Gaprindashvili's verse, that can be seen from the fact that in the text dated 1919, "Rain profile", Avtandil appears again:

*"And if I become Avtandil,
I'll take possession of his obedient hands."*

[5, p. 80]

Avtandil is an image of love here as well. It is noteworthy that in the title of this verse, rain is depicted and the mood is related to the text discussed above. In particular, the author pictures the unhappy reality and desired

³ See. E. Khintibidze, "Avtandili and Lancelot": *The Wordview of Rustaveli's Vepkhistqaosani ("The Man in the Panther's Skin")*, Tbilisi, 2009, p. 582-613.

perspective through contrast, and in this controversy, Avtandil is associated with light, beauty and harmony.

To summarize, as a result of the reconstruction of Valerian Gaprindashvili's theoretical views and the analysis of poetic works, it was outlined that V. Gaprindashvili intended to create a myth on Rustaveli. He discussed Rustaveli's literary work as work with the aspects characteristic of modernism. He understands "The Man in the Panther's Skin" according to two origins of creativity given by Nietzsche and attributes the poem to a series of Apollonian works. Via allusion to chivalrous novels, the poet links Avtandil to the heroes of courtly novels (at least, the mood and context of the verse are freely relevant to such an interpretation). The reception of Avtandil's image is also original – Avtandil perceived as the knight self-sacrificed to a friend, is conceived as an enamoured character in "Rain Performance".

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