

An Artistic Image of Rustaveli in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*

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Abstract: Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* one of the main plot sources of which is based upon the love story of Nestan and Tariel, represents transformation of artistic images from Rustaveli's MPS. In particular, a famous metaphor from Rustaveli's epic "a pen steeped in gall" was adopted as an artistic image by Shakespeare: the fellow in love, banished abroad, implores the only heir to the throne to send him a letter "though ink be made of gall".

Keywords: *Rustaveli, Shakespeare, "Cymbeline", "The Man in a Panther-Skin".*

The fact that the love story of Nestan and Tariel from *The Man in a Panther-Skin* (MPS) became a plot source for the dramatists of The Royal National Theatre in the first decade of the 17th century, not only has been confirmed by some allusions to Georgia and MPS in certain English plays but, also, by ample and precise plot similarities. In particular, the plays *A King and No King* and *Philaster* by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher are based on the adventure of

Nestan and Tariel, transferred in a different setting with different characters; the topic, idea and a composition in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* also reveal a direct reference to the same plot source. It should be noted that the late plays of the Great Bard (*Pericles*, *Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*) evince the reminiscences with the plot details of MPS.

Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* reveals obvious parallels with legal terminology, rare types of miracles, and most importantly, specific artistic images from MPS.

"The Letter of Nestan-Darejan written to her Beloved", sent from Kajeti fortress, is considered to be the best sub-chapter from MPS. The words full of despair starting the letter are as follows: "See, O my beloved, here the work of my hand. My form serves for a pen, a pen steeped in gall" [5, p. 155].

Words written to her beloved one with a *pen steeped in gall* are the rarest artistic images of their kind not only in the MPS but, also, in Georgian literature in general.

These artistic images, accompanied by the same specific details encountered in MPS, are also utilized in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*. (The play must have been written no later than 1610). The protagonist character of the play, during the farewell, asks his beloved one – the only heir to the throne – to send him letters, even if written with *ink made of gall* and promises that he will absorb them with his own eyes. The passage reads: "And with mine eyes I'll drink the words you send, though ink be made of gall" (*Cymbeline*, I.1. 100-1) [4, p. 8-9].

The English word for *gall* is mainly defined as bile (liquid or gall bladder), sometimes denoting bitterness. Two types of gall are distinguished: animal gall and that of a plant (the liquid stored in the degraded projection of a crust). Sometimes *gall* may denote the liquid made from oak crust, used as ink in typography.

It should be noted that the artistic image *ink made of gall* has not been observed by me so far in the early plays or sonnets by Shakespeare. This is not a conclusion based solely on my quest. My claim has also been strengthened by the fact that commentators of *Cymbeline* do not provide any reference concerning the corresponding, equivalent passage of this specific paragraph within Shakespeare's heritage. The significance of the issue is based on the fact that the editors of the plays define and analyze *gall*, given in the passage, from different angles. Howard Furnes's famous edition (1913) defines, based on old commentators, that Shakespeare, in this case, does not distinguish (but, in fact, equals) between the animal gall and that of the plant, adding that the latter is the more bitter than the former [3, p. 21]. John Pitcher's publication (2005) defines Shakespeare's *ink of gall* as *bitter ink* [4, p. 167]. According to the explanation provided by Roger Warren's edition (1998) [1, p. 92], *gall* is bitter liquid obtained from the oak tree. He also adds that this phrase is quite common and he makes a reference to the phrase from a text dating back to 1611: "Ink was made of bitter oak gall". It should be noted that the date indicated follows the period Shakespeare used this artistic image.

The word *gall*, mostly in sense of bitterness, is employed by Shakespeare on frequent occasions. However, *gall related with ink* is for the first time encountered chronologically in Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night* (3.2): "Let there be gall enough in the ink".

Twelfth Night is considered to be written no later than 1600-1601, the period, I assume the love story of Nestan and Taniel from MPS must have already penetrated the circle of English dramaturgy. At the end of the 16th century, an English delegation of travelers, led by a famous diplomat Anthony Sherley, sojourns Shah Abbas's court for a long time. At the Shah's court, Anthony Sherley, who had close business and relative ties with the English earls being in touch with the

circles of English Royal Theatre, is largely supported by a man of Georgian extraction, the Shah's principal adviser, a great admirer of literature and a bibliophilic himself - Alahverdi Khan Undiladze. In my opinion, the relationship mentioned above led to the penetration of the plot of MPS in the circle of English dramatists.

It has been confirmed that Shakespeare is aware of Sherley's adventures through the correspondence sent to England by the participants of the expedition and refers to them in the early 17th century. In the final suicide episode from *Othello*, the Venetian Moor recalls a Turk beating a Venetian man in Aleppo and berating his own country (Venice). One of Sherley's companions, George Manwaring mentions this fact in his accounts, which must have been circulating in the form of manuscripts in London society at the beginning of the 17th century [2]. The most important is that Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is the very play mentioning the pension set by a Shah (II, 5). This is the fact giving a reference to the salary set up by Shah Abbas for Sherley who was appointed by Shah as his ambassador in Europe.

Thus, we should assume that the story of the adventure of Tariel and Nestan, serving as the plot source for the plays *A King and No King* and *Philaster* by Beaumont and Fletcher as well as *Cymbeline* by Shakespeare, written at the early 17th century, must have been known to the English dramatists, Shakespeare in particular, at the beginning of the century.

Therefore, I would like to emphasize the importance of the fact that Rustaveli's artistic image – expression of sorrow and mourning of a woman for her beloved one, exiled overseas, depicted by the letter *written in ink made of gal*, was transposed with precise semantic nuances by Shakespeare in his *Cymbeline*.

Presumably, *Cymbeline* reveals the creative perception of the image system of the love story of Nestan and Tariel

from MPS rather than its plot line solely. All this has been confirmed not only through the reference to rare terminology of Jurisprudence and the types of miracles from MPS, but also, through the transformation/transposition of specific artistic images from MPS into *Cymbeline*.

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