

The Plays of Shakespeare's Late Period and *The Man in a Panther-Skin*

Elguja Khintibidze

*Professor of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.
Head of the Institute of the History of Georgian Literature.*

Abstract: The last plays by Shakespeare reveal reminiscences from the love story of Nestan and Tariel from the MPS being the direct literary source of Shakespeare's 3 plays by his contemporaries: *Cymbeline*, *Philaster*, *A king and No King*.

Key words: *"The Man in the Panther-Skin"*, *"Cymbeline"*, *"Pericles"*, *"The Winter's Tale"*, *"The Tempest"*.

As a result of four hundred years of research into Shakespeare's legacy, three distinct periods have been identified in the Bard's opus. The first period, approximately up to 1601 is characterised by the revival of ideals and a surge of optimism. In addition to this, the characters are strong, fun-loving, and cheerful. The second period lasts up to 1608, and reveals the clash between unfairness emerging in real life on the one hand and the glorious ideals of fairness and kindness on the other. This period is also characterised by sorrowful dispositions and an acute feeling of human helplessness. The third period begins in approximately 1608, and is characterised by the creation of a dream world, as well as by the development and transformation of realistic drama into an unreal fantasy world culminating in a happy ending.

I believe that all three periods of Shakespeare's works make up a single cycle constructed against the background of his previously expressed optimism: hope and love are opposed by disillusionment, ruthlessness and unfairness experienced in real life. In later works, unreal escape from this reality of wickedness and evil is

accompanied by the introduction of dreamlike happiness, justice, and harmony.

The third period of Shakespeare's works gives rise to a number of questions, such as what triggers this sudden longing from a dreamlike towards a Utopia like state of mind, perhaps the progression of the author's life from adolescence to maturity or social and political changes in the country? Is it new literary styles and demands of theatre-goers or all of these together? These questions are actual even in the latest Shakespeare studies. These issues are still important for the latest Shakespearean literary criticism¹.

One further important question is the literary or world-view foundation which the playwright relies on, and which inspires him to enter the dreamlike world. This question is also preconditioned by the fact that Shakespeare's dramaturgy was always closely connected to plot sources. One significant characteristic of Shakespeare's plays is transformation, rethinking, and novel construction of certain episodes, topics and stories. English literary scholars are of the opinion that the author of *Cymbeline* was inspired by an as yet unidentified plot story. It has also been noted that this problematic play by Shakespeare is characterised by certain similarities with Beaumont and Fletcher's dramaturgy of the same period. The plot source of these authors is also unknown (or was until quite recently). Moreover, critics have noted that *Cymbeline* is connected to other plays of the same period (*Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*) as regards not only the ideal and creative world, but also the topic and plot nuances.

It is considered that *Pericles* starts this new trend in Shakespeare's works by showing considerable divergence from the literary and ideal style of the playwright's prior works: controversial and tragic characters are replaced by simple ones; problems arise regarding the progress of events, and not from the complexity of the characters' psyche; plots are constructed in a style similar to that of the early Renaissance; longing for reconciliation, forgiveness and harmony are clearly felt and noticed. What is more, there is an apparent turning back from the style of comedy, tragicomedy or romantic drama to the ideals and

¹ Kate Aughterson: "The plays of Shakespeare's late career... have been the focus of fierce critical and theatrical debate. Are they the acme of a brilliant career, or the signs of a playwright who has lost his ways and his audience? Are they about the Jacobean political world or Shakespeare's own aesthetic biography?" [1, p. 1]

knightly comportment of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. In *Pericles*, these knightly ideals are shaped against the background of pastoral life: a change of this type is also visible in *Philaster and A King and No King* by Beaumont and Fletcher. The dominance of a knightly soul is distinctly visible in the cave in *Cymbeline* [6, p. 4].

Similar to the case of *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare studies also refer to the main plot sources on which Shakespeare relied while working on other plays of the same period. It is claimed, for instance, that *Pericles* is based on Gower's *The Tale of Apollonius of Tyre* [5]; the main story underlying *The Winter's Tale* is considered to be *Pandosto* by Robert Greene; and whilst *The Tempest* lacks a direct plot source, it is frequently linked to a New World shipwreck in 1609 [14, p. 138]².

In spite of the fact that the plays of the last period of Shakespeare's literary works, as English literary critics have pointed out, possess different plot sources, Shakespearean studies consistently claim that they are still linked to certain plot motifs as well as scholars a common ideal link. As early as the XIX Century, Shakespeare scholars had clearly demonstrated that the four plays belonging to the last period of the Bard's creative activity (*Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*) showed a philosophical calmness and harmony of the other world (Edward Dowden) [4, p. 6]. At the turn of the XIX and XX Centuries, Shakespeare scholars added *Pilaster* by Beaumont and Fletcher to these four plays on the basis of ideal and plot similarities [13; 21]. In addition, the novelty of the literary style of these plays not only in Shakespearean dramaturgy, but also in the common space of the drama of the first decade of the XVII Century, was particularly pointed out. It was also noted that, despite earlier existing dramas connected with love, the emergence of a sentimental lover ready to sacrifice anything to save their love, was still a novelty. Never had such incredible, sentimental, and heroic adventures by a female protagonist been attested before. By introducing this novelty, Shakespeare not only differed from the older style of his own works, but also from that of most of his contemporaries. Similar differences emerged in *Philaster* by Beaumont and Fletcher [21, p. 106-108]. Shakespeare's late period plays reveal plot and ideal similarities as well. It has been

² Other presumed sources for *The Tempest* are as follows: a) *The Fair Side* - a German play by Jakob Ayer; b) *Winter Nights* by Antonio de Esclava; c) *Virginian expedition of Sir George Somers* (see: <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/sources/tempestsources.html>).

pointed out that *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* contain a similar atmosphere at court: romantic motives, jealousy, and envy (Martin Butler) [4, p. 4].

Cymbeline depicts a completely new world with unbelievable characters [18, p. LXIII]. These unreal, incredible characters and plots, regarded as “more improbable than a fairy tale” by English literary critics [3, p. 25-26; 2, p. 6], are typical of the last period of Shakespeare, which is generally marked by a dreamlike, fantasy-driven search for human happiness: reconciliation, forgiveness, and fairness. What is more, Shakespeare was supposed to have been looking for a plot through which he could express the theme of “forgiveness and reconciliation” [15, p. 258]. It has also been claimed that “one external circumstance” Shakespeare was looking for “may very well have reminded him of a yet untried way of handling dramatic material, and have led him to *Pericles* and then, via *Love and Fortune*, to *Cymbeline* without further prompting” [16, p. XXXVIII].

In order to facilitate the search for the “one external circumstance” I would like to attract the attention of the English literary critique to the fact of employment of Nestan and Tariel's love story by Beaumont and Fletcher as well as by Shakespeare, discussed and verified in my recent works [8, 9, 10]. *The Man in a Panther-Skin* presents the love story of the protagonists against the backdrop of the royal court. In addition, MPS is a sentimental, heroic epic whose dramatic situations depicting tragic events finally end in dreamlike happiness of incredibly harmonious proportions. Owing to this, I find it important to discuss the ideal, topic and plot characteristics of Shakespeare's plays of the last period and their relationship with MPS, the Georgian chivalrous epic from the Late Middle Ages.

Shakespeare studies focus on one innovative, compositional peculiarity emerging in the late period plays - combining two story lines, two plots in one play by interweaving one into the other, not presented in either any earlier plays by Shakespeare or in any other work of the English dramaturgy of the time, in general (*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*)³. As discussed above, this trait can be considered to be a principal compositional peculiarity of Rustaveli's epic.

³ F.D.Hoeniger: “*Pericles*, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* are characterized by a peculiar kind of double plot which is found nowhere else in Shakespeare, and hardly anywhere else in Elizabethan drama. Two actions are intertwined, the protagonists of which are a king or a duke and his daughter...” [7, p. LXXII]

Let us consider the Bard's compositions from his last period. The fact is that all four plays share the main principle of compositional pattern (expressed in a more or less precise way): intrigue at court → banishment (vanishing, disappearance) of the protagonists from the country → adventures beyond the court, in the so-called "other space" → happy return to the court (or marriage with the prospect of return). This is the compositional model of *Cymbeline*. This same model is clearly visible in *The Winter's Tale*: the conflict at the court of Sicilia; disappearance of the new-born heiress, Perdita; adventures beyond the country in the "other space" - Bohemia; the happy end: return to the court, reconciliation, and marriage. A similar compositional pattern is obvious in *Pericles*: the drama at the Royal court; disappearance of Pericles; tragic adventures beyond the kingdom; the happy end: the wedding of Pericles' heiress, Marina. The same pattern is also present in *The Tempest*: the conflict at the court of Prospero, Duke of Milan; banishment of Prospero and his daughter, Miranda, from the country; their adventures in the "other space"; the happy end: reconciliation, and the marriage of the heiress. Rustaveli draws a precise analogue of these compositional patterns in Nestan's and Taniel's romance: the conflict at the Indian Royal court (the king's only daughter, Nestan, and his commander-in-chief, Taniel, are in love with each other. However, the king and queen invite a prince from a neighbouring country as their daughter's husband-to-be. Nestan and Taniel decide to kill the prospective groom and Taniel does so). Both Nestan and Taniel disappear from the country (after Nestan's disappearance, Taniel leaves in search of her); Nestan's and Taniel's trying adventures beyond the kingdom, in the "other space"; the happy end: the discovery and liberation of Nestan; the return of the couple to their homeland, followed by their marriage.

Similarity in compositional pattern in the four plays by Shakespeare is quite obvious at an initial stage as well (the conflict at the royal court). The disappearance of the protagonists from the court is neither unintentional nor accidental. They either vanish from the country, or are forced to leave it by themselves. Posthumus is banished, whereas Imogen is forced to leave the country (in *Cymbeline*); Prospero and Miranda are banished from the country (*The Tempest*). The only heiress to the throne of Sicilia, the newly born Perdita is banished from the country (*The Winter's Tale*); Pericles is forced to leave his country, Tyre (*Pericles*). The fact

that the banished protagonist is always wrongly blamed also deserves attention. Interestingly, heiresses are more frequently seen to be forced to take the blame: Imogen is accused of being self-willed by her father, and of being unfaithful by her husband. Perdita, a sole heiress to the throne of Sicilia, is considered by her father to have been born through adultery. In MPS, Nestan, the heiress, is accused of plotting against the invited husband-to-be, as well as of carnal love with her lover as a result of (this, tragic events ensure at court). In the end, Nestan is severely punished and vanishes from the country.

Literary collision distinct at the very first stage of the plot development mostly reveals similar features, refer to one and the same issue, which, in certain cases, is decoded only in the final part of the story. Such collision is usually connected with the heiress princess. Both *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* follow the same pattern. Intrigue at the royal court leaves the King of Sicilia, Leontes without an heir (*The Winter's Tale*). Simultaneously with the events at the palace, the playwright draws attention to the romance of the princess Perdita, believed to have been removed when young. The most important element of the happy end here is the heiress princess's return to the kingdom and her marriage. One of the most important parts of the happy finale in *Pericles* is the discovery and marriage of the heiress, Marina. Additionally, in the same play, the discovery of King of Pantapolis's daughter Thaisa, considered to be dead, is one of the main parts of the happy ending. In *The Tempest*, Duke Prospero is banished from his kingdom together with his only daughter, Miranda, and her marriage also constitutes one of the important parts of the happy end. Such literary collisions (the conflict at court connected with the princess, and the happy ending with her marriage) come from Rustaveli's MPS. The primary topic of the literary collision regarding Nestan's and Tariel's romance is the search for Nestan's future husband, which ends in the wedding of the lovers (Nestan and Tariel) in the final of the poem.

This model of starting and finishing parts of the story from MPS is precisely transposed in both plays by Beaumont and Fletcher – *Philaster and A King and No King*. This happens in one and the same cultural environment, and at a time simultaneous with the creation of Shakespeare's last plays. Two candidates for the throne are clearly seen in *Philaster*, as well as in MPS: the only daughter of the king and the prince from the joined kingdom. The happy ending of their love is

their marriage. The topic of *A King and No King*, as well as of MPS, is the sentimental love between the king's only daughter and the young man adopted by the king as a prospective successor to the throne. It is worth noting that such a narrative pattern (the search by the groom-to-be of royal background for the king's only daughter) also comes from MPS and this pattern is created by Rustaveli on the example of the historical realias of the XII century Georgian Royal court.

The happy love of the heiress in MPS, the plays by Shakespeare discussed above, and both plays by Beaumont and Fletcher (*Philaster* and *A King and No King*) also shares one common feature: the daughters marry princes or rulers of a country – Nestan marries Tariel, the heir of the joined kingdom (MPS); Arethusa marries Philaster, prince of the joined kingdom in Calabria (*Philaster*); Panthea gets married to Arbases, adopted by the King of Iberia (*A King and No King*); Perdita weds Florizel, Prince Bohemia (*The Winter's Tale*); Thaisa gets married to Pericles, Prince of Tyre; Marina to Lysimachus, Governor of Mytilene (*Pericles*); and Miranda to Ferdinand, Prince of Naples (*The Tempest*). The only exception is *Cymbeline*. Imogen marries Posthumus, raised (but not adopted) by the king. However, it should also be remembered that at the end of the play, it turns out that Imogen does not have the status of heiress to the throne.

Intrigues at the Royal court are followed by the vanishing of the protagonist in MPS on the one hand and in the four plays by Shakespeare on the other. In the case of Nestan and Tariel the act of banishing is expressed through throwing Nestan into the sea. The plot develops in the same way in Shakespeare's plays: Prospero and Miranda are also thrown into the sea (*The Tempest*); Leontes arranges for his newly born daughter to be thrown into the sea (*The Winter's Tale*); Pericles, banned from his kingdom, travels by sea and throws his dead wife Thaisa into the sea as well (*Pericles*). Although Imogen from *Cymbeline* is not thrown into the sea, she wanders in woods of Wales and scholars draw parallels between her roaming and Pericles' voyage by sea. The reason for Imogen's wander is the search for her lost lover. A similar search for the lover and wandering around serves as a basis for Nestan and Tariel's romance. Nestan also roams in the open sea.

There is one more specific detail to be mentioned regarding Nestan's vanishing in the sea. The furious nurse puts her into a huge trunk and throws her in the

sea to die: "...two slaves... appeared, with a great chest. Inside this they put the sun – fair lady" [19, p. 70].

This specific feature emerges in *The Tempest* as well. Prospero and his daughter are taken into the open sea and left in "A rotten carcass of a butt, not rigged, nor tackle, sail, nor mast", (*The Tempest*, I.2) [20, p. 656]. This detail cannot be accidental. Shakespeare employs it in *Pericles* as well: Pericles puts the body of his newly dead wife into a coffin made from a valuable tree and throws it into the sea (*Pericles*, II. 1).

The shift of the action from the palace to beyond the country, to the "other space", is considered to be the most significant trait of the compositional modeling of *Cymbeline*. As I have already pointed out, it is absolutely clear that by this *Cymbeline* also resembles MPS. Moreover, the action beyond the palace in both of the plays, in MPS as well as in *Cymbeline* develops in the cave. The cave is a very popular topos for the action to develop in Biblical stories, folklore and even in literature. Hermits enter the caves in order to delve into the depths of their personality and leave the caves in a somewhat transformed state. Shakespeare's characters also enter the cave. Macbeth visits the grotto to speak to the witches and contemplate his fate. Bomelio, the wizard from *The Rare Triumphes of Love and Fortune* lives in a cave. Prospero (*The Tempest*) also lives in a cell. Against this background the cave of *Cymbeline* acquires a special meaning. It presents a different atmosphere: residents of the cave are banished and kidnapped from the palace and live on hunted game. What is more, it is in the cave where the story about what has happened in the Palace is retold. In this respect this play is similar to MPS. Taniel lives in a cave together with his maid and they also live on hunted animals. What is more significant is that in both *Cymbeline* and MPS the story of the Palace is retold in the cave. This is also typical of Shakespeare plays of the last period. Prospero living in a cell retells his daughter, Miranda, a story of the Palace (*The Tempest*); Thaisa retells Pericles about her adventure in her secluded place, the Temple of Diana. Other significant, similar nuances are also visible regarding the caves of *Cymbeline* and MPS. The characters leaving the caves get involved in military operations and return triumphant to the Royal court. It should be noted that the topos of the cave becomes even more active in the plays by Shakespeare of the last period and reveals these specific features. The same trait is visible in *The Tempest* and *Pericles*: the characters come out of

Prospero's cell and the temple of Diana to return to their countries, full of happiness.

There is one more plot nuance which the plays of the last period share: 'enlivening' of the character who was considered dead. In *Cymbeline* Posthumus believes Imogen to be dead whereas Imogen thinks *vice versa*. Pericles from *Pericles* presumes that both his wife and daughter are dead. In *The Winter's Tale* Leontes arranges for his newly-born daughter to be thrown into the sea; in *The Tempest* Alonso, king of Naples considers his son Ferdinand to be dead in the tempest. In the finale of the plays all of these characters are actually alive. This detail is not uncommon to Nestan and Tariel's adventure: Tariel considers Nestan to be dead and he has a good reason for this: after a long search Nestan, who has been thrown in the sea, is nowhere to be found. The work finishes by Nestan's appearance and the couple's happiness.

As we can see, all the plot and compositional parallels shared by all four plays belonging to the last period of Shakespeare's works, are also visible in MPS. This is particularly important due to the fact that the above discussed features shared by the plays of the last period do not prevail in tragedies and comedies belonging to the earlier period of Shakespeare's works. The fact that the above mentioned circumstances cannot be accidental may be proved by the following fact. One of the first plays of the last period in Shakespeare's creative works is *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. As it was mentioned above, it is noticed in Shakespearean literature that *Pericles* reveals some unknown source (or circumstances), which is later developed in *Cymbeline*. *Pericles* was not included in the so-called first folio but was first published in the third folio in 1664. The scholars consider that its first scenes were either written or restored by someone else. It is clear from the above examples that there are a number of plot details in *Pericles* with parallels in other plays of the last period as well as in MPS (the woman is put in the coffin or a box and thrown in the sea; the people who are thought dead appear alive; princesses marry princes; a happy end is also shared: victorious and happy people leave the temple and return to their palace). All the above mentioned parallels to MPS in the plot of *Pericles* are revealed in the part of the play, which is usually considered to be by Shakespeare. None of the parallels is found in the first scenes of the plot dedicated to King Antiochus and his daughter's immoral love (*Pericles, I, 1*).

One more parallel of great importance must be paid attention to. In *Cymbeline* the author pays particular attention to the exchange of memorable gifts which does not appear in other, earlier plays by Shakespeare. Jewellery given as a gift plays an important role in the development of the plot as with the help of it identity is verified. This particular detail of the plot is shown in *Pericles* as well. Thaisa recognises her father's ring on Pericles' finger and in this way proves her identity to her husband (*Pericles*, V, 2) "Now I know you better. – When we with tears parted Pentapolis, The King my father gave you such a ring" [17, p. 612]. *Cymbeline's* reference to the love story of *MPS* regarding this plot detail has been thoroughly studied by myself [12, p. 35-71].

Finally, I would like to make several comments regarding common features of Shakespeare's literary style expressed in his late plays. As was mentioned above, fantasising is a common feature and it is also noted that not only certain episodes but also the characters' behaviour is unbelievable, unrealistic and is characterised by the idealisation. Extremely attractive women from these plays are dreamlike characters fantasised and made up by Shakespeare. Parallels to this literary style shine though *The Man in the Panther Skin* as well. Rustaveli introduces a realistic vision "tinted" with romanticism into the medieval symbolic world view. This realistic, worldly and humane is emphasised by the hyperbolic expression of the idealistic. In the medieval transcendental thinking the shift of the accent towards the realistic world, emphasis on the human being creates a fantasised, ideal artistic world. This is the common style shared by a great number of literary works of the Pre-Renaissance period and the main literary parameter of this literature is fantasising. Rustaveli also creates a dreamlike world. He dreams about a divine harmony in this reality which means the victory of 'kind' over 'evil'; happiness won by love, friendship and courageous behaviour [11, p. 761-786]. Literary creativity of the characters in Shakespeare's plays of the last period reveals obvious parallels with the dreamlike literary world of the author of this Medieval Georgian romance.

Thus, ideal-thematic as well as literary-imagery shared details which bind the plays of the last period of Shakespeare's works together reveals common features with Nestan and Tariel's romance in *MPS*. I suggest that *Philaster and A King and No King* by Beaumont and Fletcher rely on *MPS* as their source. The same material is used as a source for the topic, idea and plot composition in *Cymbeline* by Shakespeare.

The romance of the protagonists of *The Man in a Panther-Skin*, a Medieval Georgian chivalrous poem must have been perfectly available to certain circles of

dramatists in England at the beginning of the XVII century. The main plotline of the two plays by Beaumont and Fletcher is to transfer the plot of this literary source to other setting with other characters. The same source provides composition as well as the main idea and the topic for Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*. In addition, in other plays of the same period by Shakespeare, reminiscences about compositional and plot details of the Georgian romance are also obviously observed.

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