

The Allegory of the Man who Fell Into a Well in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* and its Artistic Function

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Abstract

The Knight in the Panther's Skin offers an allegory of the man who fell in a well. The story is real and is used for developing a communication between characters; it also has a function of identifying the psychological condition. The allegory by its meaning is very important and has a function and a mission of foretelling the future. With the allegory of the man who fell in a well we met Avtandil, Tariel and Asmat (the main characters of the poem). This allegory is a prediction of Tariel's being taken away from the cave or being woken up from the "cave consciousness". This article offers an analysis regarding Avtandil, tariel and Asmat as a paradigm images of the man who fell in a well.

Keywords: *allegory, man who fell in a well, cave consciousness.*

The research on the allegorical nature of Shota Rustveli's poem *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* started as early as in the time of Vakhtang VI when the king did a lot of research on Rustaveli's work. Georgian writers of earlier times mentioned the allegory of the poem. David Guramishvili pointed to the meaning of the allegory in his poetry:

When the wise rhetor Shota planted the tree of parables

He made its roots deep and applied branches bearing fruit

They gave double fruit to whoever shook it

I have never heard a verse as eloquent as by the ones of Rustveli [Guramishvili 1955:22].

The quotation from Guramishvili indicates the symbolic allegoric and parable like nature of the poem which is expressed through his phrase: "He made it deep rooted". Several episodes in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* must be explained as a symbol, allegory and enigma. In this article we will discuss the allegory of the man who fell in a well but let's go back to the text first:

THE knight replied: "This only resembles one thing: Two men were journeying somewhere along some road; the one who was behind saw the one in front fall into a well. He came up, called down, weeps and cries 'Woe!'

"THUS he spoke: 'Comrade, stay there, wait for me, I go to bring ropes, I want to pull thee out.' The man who was beneath laughed, he marvelled greatly, he shouted up:

*'Unless I wait, whither can I flee from thee, whither can I go?'*¹ (256-257).

Before discussing the episode I think it is necessary to identify the story told by the two rhymes above, what does this: Is this a tale or an allegory? I think, it is useless to try to give a traditional explanation for those terms. It will only be sufficient to mention the explanation given by Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani from his dictionary of the Georgian language: "Tale in Armenian means Allegory, the same meaning it has in our language" (Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani, 1966:58). "Allegory (+13:24 Mathew ZA) (+Tale B) is a word giving an example, or indication, or a marker" (Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani 1966, 320). Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani gave the same meaning to both allegory and tale. He said that they are short stories and "verbal examples". The same dictionary explains the meaning of the example as: "what you would like to make whether it is a church, or house, or tent, images or flowers, shown for making things similar to them" (Sulkan Saba Orbeliani 1966, 424). So the "verbal example" must be defined in terms of an artistic value of the text or allegory. So the story of the man who fell in a well in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* is allegory since the "verbal example" is clear and it definitely has the function of allegory. The allegory of the man who fell in a well has the key meaning for identification of the artistic function of Avtandil's coming to the cave, the dwelling of Tariel and Asmat in the cave, communication between them.

Those two above mentioned verses have important meaning for studying the psychological conditions of the characters because they show us the individual thoughts of Avtandil, his wisdom and unique skills. He never acts directly, he prefers to be careful and to use direct actions even if it involves hurting the others around him; he, as a mentally strong person is perfectly aware of the difficult situation throughout his search of the unknown knight. he was taken by impatience and desired to learn about the knight as soon as possible. He did not expect such a sharp reaction from the woman. Asmat's refusal of talking about Tariel reveals her psychological condition, for the last seven years she had withdrawn from society, there was no one who could reach the cave and she did not know of anyone who could rescue Tariel from his

¹ Rustveli:1966

suffering. She did not expect anyone to be so kind to understand Tariel's difficult inner suffering, rise above himself and support him. She would not be surprised if the interested person e.g. Avtandil, failing to reach his goal may even kill her. She thinks somehow that death will free her from her suffering. This is confirmed in the conversation of Asmat and Avtandil.

The dialogue between Asmat and Avtandil in the cave portrays their psychological profiles. Avtandil tries to get information about Tariel as he tried during the last three years of looking for him, but after the unexpected reaction of Asmat he becomes anxious and takes extreme measures: He captures the woman and threatens to kill her if she does not tell him about the "bright faced" knight. Avtandil realized soon that the erroneousness of the method, released the woman and started crying; It. It is not usual for Avtandil to act in this manner, his credo is: "do the things you hardly wish to do, do not follow your own desires" and from other side Asmat does not let him even look at her and refuses to talk to him despite his plea. Shota Rustveli employed a rare metaphor to show Avtandil supplication: "Like a partridge under an eagle, so the lady was trembling", this metaphor shows the psychological portrait of both characters very well. Asmat as a lady trying to defeat herself from Avtandil because she finds the aim of Avtandil unacceptable. She is trying to keep a secret and Avtandil asks to tell it. Asmat is presented as a partridge and Avtandil as an eagle. This contradistinction does not solve the problem. Those two birds have opposite characters, one is wild and the other is weak and powerless in front of the strong one. Avtandil is trying to persuade Asmat using this method but he fails to do so. His aim is to get information about Tariel, or at least to find out who he is. This episode gains a special meaning after this allegory. The dialogue between Asmat and Avtandil is a preparation for a meeting of Avtandil and Tariel.

Before the meeting of Avtandil and Tariel in the cave there is another meeting between Asmat and Avtandil where the allegory of the man who fell in a well comes up in their conversation. This man who fell in a well is imprisoned and needs freedom. This allegory is connected with Asmat and Avtandili: man who fell in a well stands for Avtandil and the man outside the well is Asmat, and it is the main rationale of the allegory, yet it is not the full explanation of the allegory because with this allegory Avtandil shows us the situation he is in; he has no other way except the one possibly offered by Asmat. After meeting of Tariel and Avtandil the allegory gets a deeper meaning and several functions. It has the mission to identify the future attitudes of Tariel and Avtandili: 1. It shows that Asmat who lives in the cave with Tariel ought to rescue Avtandili, she must arrange a friendly meeting between Tariel and Avtandili; 2. After the meeting of the two heroes Tariel living in the cave is expected to help Avtandil by telling him his story in order to appear truthful in front of his beloved Tinatin; 3. After telling his story to

Avtandil it seems that Avtandil must also help Tariel and only after this will Tariel be able to win the throne of India and inhabit it.

Living in a cave has an important meaning for Tariel because in order to leave the cave one has to first get help in overcoming "cave consciousness". This has to be solved at the first meeting of Tariel and Avtandil. Avtandil, the knight raised in wisdom pronounced a parable in his dialogue with Asmat, that played a crucial in defining his future relationship with Tariel and has a rather prophetic character.

Let's remember what the first meetings of Asmat and Avtandil and later Avtandil and tariel were preceded by in the cave. After finding the place where Tariel lives the aim of Avtandil is to find him safe, he had two different occasions when he witnessed the meeting of Tariel with human beings: 1. First when Tariel appeared unexpectedly in the happy and relaxed Arabia after the ceremony of the coronation of the daughter of the king, everyone is happy in the country and old king worries only because he has no male heir; he considers Avtandil as like him but not his equal. Yet, during hunting he finds out that Avtandil is not out of his league and the king is happy about it. After the hunting trip they met a weeping knight dressed in a panther's skin. The king desired to know him, so he sent his one servant first and twelve later to bring the unknown knight to him but he was unable to bring the knight by his will, they tried to capture the knight but when he noticed them he killed them all. 2. On the second occasion Avtandil met three brothers who told him about having seen a man dressed in panther's skin and how he fought them away smashing a head of one of their brothers. All these episodes present the knight's isolation and alienation from people and his peculiar attitude to humankind.

Of course it is true that Avtandil is trying to be gentle because this unknown knight never let anyone near him. So the lady in the cave who knows him is a real chance for him to get to know this mysterious knight. Yet, Asmat refused and the only word said by Avtandil: "Beloved" managed to soften her heart and she promised to help Avtandil to meet Tariel, while exactly at that time Avtandil tells the allegory of the man fell in a well.

The aim of the allegory and its function are already clear. It precedes the meeting of Tariel and Avtandil. According to this allegory Avtandil has two meanings: as a communicator with Asmat and as a communicator with Tariel. Avtandil is the one who is the well and later we find that the Tariel is the person who was in the well, needs help. In truth, even Asmat is the one who is in the well; Rescuing Tariel and letting him go out from the cave means to rescue Asmat to let her be free from the cave where she is staying because of Tariel. This allegory lets Asmat think that Avtandil is a wise person, she knows his value: "you seem to be the one needs praised by sapient". It seems like the artistic side of the allegory ends here. The allegory helped Avtandil and all ended well. But just at that time we recognize the most important meaning of the

allegory, which starts later: this is the foretelling function and mission. Tariel and the man who fell in a well must be placed into a paradigm structure because he needs help as does the man who fell in a well and also Avtandil who went to look for him.

All of this means that compositional point of view of the poem and this allegory are the main artistic components of them poem. The meaning and function of the allegory manifest the future prediction that Avtandil and Tariel must help each other and become true friends. In any case both characters present a paradigm of the man fallen in the well and the man who was outside the well trying to rescue him. This paradigm has two sides: 1. Tariel must rescue Avtandil and 2. Avtandil must help him.

According to mythological religious literature cave has a symbolic meaning and function. In *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* it has multilateral function: Biblical, Mythological, Philosophical, Historical, Literary and Hagiographical, so it expresses a love-hate model since it has negative and positive sides. According some of ancient myths, the first man who was from underworld settled in the cave and it means: life-death-life and the cave emerges as just a pre-Christian symbol and the model of church. The well was the source of life which purified the human soul. According to the Bible the well is the source of life and another image of the cave. We have thoroughly examined the notions of the cave and well in other researches.² The consciousness of the man who fell in a well indicates two different types of human consciousness: 1) Cave consciousness or slavish consciousness and 2) free consciousness. So the main point of human life is to achieve the heavenly wisdom by overcoming the “cave consciousness” and to reach the greater idea of the sun. The paradigm of Avtandil and Tariel paradigm reminds us of Biblical Joseph who was dropped in a well. It was the beginning of his future; he was bought by the Egyptian merchants and was taken to Egypt. The well was a guarantee for Joseph to be rescued (Genesis 37,14-28; Kiknadze 2004:91). Also the history from the Bible about Daniel how he was dropped in the lion's den and his life was saved. In hagiography of the well has a symbolic meaning: St Shio of Mghvime, lived in a cave in order to reach spiritual maturity and purification St Evagrius lived in the well for the same reason. The well also has a mythological meaning in fairy tales.

The allegory from *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* is a hypodigm for the characters of “Davitiani”, for David Guramishvili who was kept by the Leks and was dropped in a hole and was later rescued by the Mother of God. R. Gabashvili drew a parallel between the allegory about a man who fell into a well from *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* and Sancho Pansa in *Don Quichotte* who fell in a hole and Don Quichotte went to fetch a rope (Gabashvili 1944,

² See Sulava:2004, pp. 216-232, and Sulava:2009.

185-186). Being fallen into a well or in a hole is a way to spiritual purification. In ancient mythology and literature human struggle on the way to sanctity (κάθαρσις) has two stages: 1. Martyrdom (πάθος) and 2. Catharsis (κάθαρσις). No spiritual development can be imagined without one of them for the way to spiritual purification necessarily lies through martyrdom. This principle in Christianity derives from the Gospel. The first aim for human beings is to escape from the well, from the cave. The long and hard process of escaping from the hole, well or the cave in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* comes not only from Christianity but from Antiquity. The poem for this reason adopts the function of a renaissance story. Well, cave is the place where the process of human spiritual purification has to start and human beings should be able to acquire the heaven in life. The aim is to rebuild the bridge between the heaven and earth, which was demolished earlier.

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