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PARALLELISM OF SCENES IN HOMER'S EPIC AND SHOTA RUSTAVELI'S *THE MAN IN THE PANTHER'S SKIN*

Homer's poems have more than once become the subject of comparison with the so-called national epics of Europe or different peoples of the world¹. Hence, a comparison of Homer's poems and *The Man in The Panther's Skin*, Shota Rustaveli's unsurpassed work of the 16 centuries-old Georgian literature should not, I believe, be considered unexpected, even bearing in mind that the latter was written *ca* 20 centuries after the creation of Homer's epic. Research, carried out along these lines, may be equally beneficial both for Homerology and for Rustaveli Studies. The validity of posing the question from this angle is strengthened by my awareness of the possible inclusion of the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea littoral, including Greece and Georgia, as forming a single cultural area, covering the period from Classical times to the late Middle Ages. In this case Homer should be considered the initial stage of a centuries-old cultural tradition broken due to well-known historical cataclysms in the cited area, with Shota Rustaveli as one of the most important completing stages.

Research into the formation of the poems remains to the present day one of the main lines of modern Homerology. In particular, scholars give different answers to the question: "Oral or written Homer?"² In the opinion of the majority of Homerologists, in order to give a comprehensive and final answer to this question the difference between works created orally and in written form must be shown as clearly as possible.³ Thus, I believe, a comparison of Homer's poems with Rustaveli's *The Man in The Panther's Skin*, the latter doubtless having been created in written form, may be useful in shedding light on many important issues connected with the creation of Homer's epic. As to the Rustvelological problems, the relation of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* to the European Renaissance remains one of the major directions, and various questions arising when the poem is studied in the above-stated aspect, the main being: "To what extent is Rustaveli's poem medieval and has it weighty elements characteristic of the European Renaissance?"⁴ As the recall of the Classical period – its "rediscovery" – is considered a factor that paved the way for and determined the European Renaissance, a comparison of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* with Homer's epic and bringing to light similarities in them will, I think, be useful for the study of the Renaissance elements in Rustaveli's poem.

Along with differences, Homerological and Rustvelological problems have many common aspects as well. Here I wish to focus only on one aspect, viz. compositional parallelism. However, I should like to stress from the start that compositional parallelism in an epic work – be it a heroic epic or chivalrous or love romance – may manifest itself from diverse angles. Thus, e.g. in relation to Homer's epic it may be connected with the so-called principle of the unity of action, or with parallelism between

¹ *Homer and the Nibelungenlied* by Fenik B. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1986) is one of the latest such works known to me.

² For the conceptions of the so-called oral or written Homer and the scholarly works of Homerologists supporting them, see, respectively Miller D.C. (*Improvisation, Typology, Culture, and "The New Orthodoxy"*. How "Oral" is Homer? Lanham – New London, 1982) and Gordeziani, R. *Kriterien der Schriftlichkeit und Mündlichkeit in homerischen Epos*, Frankfurt am Main, Bern, New York, 1986.

³ Cf. Fenik B., *Homer and Writing*, Wujbb N.F., Band 2, 1976, pp 37-47; Finnegan R., *Oral Poetry, Its Nature, Significance and Social context*, Cambridge, 1977; Zumthor P., *Introduction à la Poésie Orale*, Paris, 1983.

⁴ See: Gogiberidze M., *Rustaveli and Homer*, Tbilisi., 1937 (This work has not been published. Its manuscript was lost following the tragic death of its author, hence its content is unfortunately unknown to the present day); Nutsubidze Sh., *Rustaveli and the Eastern Renaissance*, Tbilisi, 1947 (In Russian); Baramidze A., *Shota Rustaveli and His Poem*, Tbilisi, 1975 (In Georgian); Khintibidze E., *Weltanschauung Problems of The Man in the Panther's Skin*, Tbilisi, 1975 (In Georgian); Khintibidze E., *Medieval and Renaissance Trends in Rustaveli's Vepkhistkaosani*, Tbilisi, 1993 (In Georgian).

poems and myths⁵, as well as with innovative elaboration of the so-called traditional motifs or themes by means of parallelism⁶, and, in a novel, parallel plot lines, etc. Naturally enough, even a superficial discussion of such important problems is unfeasible in a single paper. Hence, I shall limit myself to one specific – even though highly important aspect – that of compositional parallelism of scenes.

When speaking about the parallelism of scenes in an epic work, epic repetition should be clearly distinguished from it. Although both are closely linked to the subject of the literary work – its plot – the similarity ends there. In particular, repetition – both literal and condensed – is not indispensable for the development of the plot line either with Homer or Rustaveli; it is functionless from the compositional point of view; hence some repetitions are considered by some researchers to have been later interpolations in the texts of the poems. Parallelism of scenes, however, which is largely functional from the compositional point of view, is not repetition but likeness – partial at that – between two sections or scenes of the text, at a large or small distance from each other.

In 1988, in my Candidate's Thesis "Principles of structural symmetry in the composition of the songs of the *Iliad*", I suggested that the *Iliad*, in its extant form, must be the result of a gradual written expansion – carried out by Homer himself – of the original, orally created short version or "preliminary plan" or outline.⁷ However, I stressed then that the poem must have expanded not through the addition (interpolation) of new plot episodes, but in the course of expansion of existing scenes. I was led to this conclusion by a study of the compositional organization of the text of song XXIV of the *Iliad*; a single network of the structural symmetry of the poem came to light – the constituent elements or the scenes of song XXIV proved to be of polyfunctional nature.⁸ Thus, in my view – similarly to other supporters of the "written Homer conception" – the parallelism in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is an obvious indication of the completing, so-called written stages in the process of the creation of these poems.⁹ But, in the view of the supporters of the theory of "oral poetry", or the followers of Milman Parry, along with improvisation, oral poetry is characterized also by repetition, stemming from the oral poet's desire to further elaborate or embellish this or that section or scene of a text composed during the improvisation. This, in the view of the followers of Parry, the parallelism of scenes – so organic to Homer's epic – is nothing other than the so-called ornamentation, characteristic of the process of oral improvisation, or duplication of a passage already created and super- or exaggerated ornamentation, which violates the compositional harmony of an oral song.¹⁰

My study of the text of Rustaveli's poem has shown numerous cases of parallelism of scenes, of which 15 are examples of distance parallelism¹¹ and up to 50 of the so-called contact parallelism.¹² The time limit precludes quoting the above-noted scenes, to say nothing of their discussion in detail. I should like to observe only that distance parallelism of scenes is due to Rustaveli depicting Avtandil and Tariel in the same life situations in which they always act differently from each other. Thus, the parallelism of scenes is obviously functional. Moreover, scrutiny of the text has shown that not only parallel images of Avtandil and Tariel are created on the basis of distance parallelism of scenes in the *Man in the Panther's Skin*, but the so-called subject parallelism as well. In particular it is not only Avtandil's adventure that is parallel to Tariel's adventure, but the developments in the Kingdom of Arabia and in the Kingdom of India are on the whole parallel with respect to each other – unlike the developments in the other kingdom in the poem. Even more unexpected to me were the scenes of contact parallelism, or so-called doublets in Parry's terminology, in a work created in written form, such as e.g. the scene of the first meeting and acquaintance of Avtandil and Pridon: Pridon is greatly delighted at the news brought to him by his slave saying that Tariel's sworn brother or Avtandil had arrived: "They praised each other, not dispraised" (965). The scene of the meeting of Avtandil and Pridon would seem to have ended, but in the next two lines Rustaveli conveys this scene again – in more detail, this

⁵ Gordeziani R.V. Problems of the Homeric Epic, Tbilisi, 1978 (In Russian).

⁶ See Khintibidze Z., The motif of the burial of a hero killed in the war (Patrocles, Hector) in the *Iliad*, Proc. TSU, 323, 1997, pp. 50-55, Tbilisi. (In Georgian).

⁷ Cf. Mandler G.M. and Johnson N.S. Remembrance of things passed: story, structure and recall; Cog. Psy: 9, 1977.

⁸ See: Khintibidze Z., How could the *Iliad* have been created? Does Homer himself afford an opportunity of solving the problem in the form of Demodocus? *Matsne*, N4, pp.31-63, Tbilisi, 1992.(In Georgian).

⁹ Cf. Gordeziani R., Kriterien der Schriftlichkeit und Mündlichkeit in homerischen Epos, Frankfurt am Main, Bern, New York, 1986.

¹⁰ Cf. Miller D. G. Improvisation, Typology, Culture, ...

¹¹ See: Khintibidze Z., Towards the individualization of the ideal character in *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, *Matsne* 4, pp.53-54, Tbilisi, 1987. (In Georgian).

¹² Cf. Baramidze A., Shota Rustaveli, pp. 220-294.

time: “Hastily Pridon came from the ridge; he descended to meet (Avtandil)” (966)... “They embraced; they were not shy for being strangers. The knight seems peerless to Pridon, and Pridon pleases the knight (967)”. An analysis of each such scene demonstrates that by means of contact parallelism of scenes Rustaveli manages to devote more time to a detailed rendering of events which he believes are of special significance from the subject of the poem, and to logical argumentation of especially significant views expressed by the character in dialogues or monologues.

In summing up the foregoing, I believe, the following conclusion can be made: 1. For well-known reasons, the parallelism of scenes evidenced in Homer’s epic is characterized by symmetricalness, while in Rustaveli’s *The Man in the Panther’s Skin* parallelism of scenes is asymmetric. Notwithstanding this difference, in both cases we have distant as well as contact parallelism. That in Homer’s epic their number is much larger than in Rustaveli’s poem is easily explained when it is borne in mind that Homer’s parallelism must be a literary norm characteristic of the geometric period. As to the parallelism of scenes identified in Rustaveli’s poem, irrespective of the explanation we find for its existence in *The Man in the Panther’s Skin*, the very fact of its existence in an epic work created in written form points once again to the validity of the conclusions of those Homerologists in whose view the capacity of creating a literary work by means of ornamentation and duplication is not the prerogative of an oral poet alone.

2. The existence of parallelism of scenes in *The Man in the Panther’s Skin* in the above-discussed form shows that, although the system built on its basis is still in the process of making in the poem, this system has fully established contours at both macro- and micro-structural level. That is why, a close study of the subject of Rustaveli’s poem leads me to the belief that this poem must be a transitional stage from Chretien de Trois’ so-called single-subject (or a single subject-line) romance to the period of the late Renaissance and post-Renaissance two- or many-subject European romance. In other words, unlike the Classical Greek epic and the medieval European court romance,¹³ in Rustaveli’s poem, along with secondary characters and events related to them, it is not the main character that is depicted and hence not only one main plot story is connected with this main character, but two main characters, hence two main plot stories. But these two parallel stories are not yet subject lines totally independent of each other, being under one common subject line. Nevertheless, in his poem, Rustaveli made a fairly successful attempt at changing the so-called paratactic subject - its qualitative change, by means of parallelism of scenes. (In my opinion, such change is characteristic not only of oral poetry but in general, of heroic epic). From this point of view, *The Man in The Panther’s Skin* should be considered a precursor of the European so-called multi-plane (or possessing several subject lines) romances of the late Renaissance and subsequent period. Hence, the classification of *The Man in The Panther’s Skin* as a literary work transitional between the mediaeval and renaissance types will be proved to be correct.

3. From the viewpoint of parallelism of scenes, *The Man in The Panther’s Skin* evinces a clear relationship with Homer’s epic. I believe, future research will shed light on the type of this relationship, i.e. the so-called typological or a closer, organic relationship. A definitive answer to this question will probably be feasible when we form a clear idea about the situation in post-Homeric and pre-Rustavelian epic works, viz. in Classical Greek, Byzantine and Medieval Georgian epic. Meanwhile, two points may be said to emerge clearly: a) *The Man in The Panther’s Skin* is originally linked with Classical Greek philosophy, while Rustaveli’s contemporary Georgian literature was familiar with Homer’s name and, probably with his poems too; b) the cases of scenic parallelism, recorded in Rustaveli’s poem, resemble very much the scenic parallelism of Homer’s epic - a complex system known under the name of structural symmetry: however, it would be unjustified to ignore the clear difference between them.

¹³ Cf. Meletinski, E. *The Medieval Romance*, Moscow. 1978. (In Russian).