

FOLKLORIC STYLIZATION IN THE FICTION OF
RUBEN HOVSEPIAN

In his book "Literature and Folklore" B.U. Dalgat regards literature and folklore as self-contained systems and categorizes two types of relationship between them, namely functional and correlative. The literary critic assumes that in the first case the mythical-folkloric texture has a conceptual implication and adds to the aesthetic integrity of the narrative. The correlative type of interpolation of folkloric elements implies stylistic and artistic functions and on the whole "deepens the perception of reality" giving a larger dimension to the plot.

If we apply these criteria to the analysis of Ruben Hovsepian's fiction we will see that the relationship between literary texts and folkloric elements basically has a correlative character. It comes like an "open text" and doesn't structurally organize the plot and the fictive concept. It is especially characteristic of the story "The Archeologists" in which folk legends and tales are auxiliary elements that extend the artistic outlook and deepen the psychological aspects of events.

The legend about brave Machtum Kuli (how he courageously saved the manuscripts from the enemy) and the legend about the Great Shahir looking for an oasis in the desert are straightforwardly relevant to the emotional state of the characters and help them overcome anxiety and frustration which were triggered by the failure to find water in the sands of Turkmenia. On the other hand these two legends give some poetical touch to the narrative.

In the poetics of the story "The Armenian Neighborhood" the plot and folkloric elements are interwoven more organically and the latter is more integral. The tale, the legend, the spell, the dream – all these are linked to the aesthetic structure of the story. The Armenian neighbourhood is not merely a geographic substance and an ethnic unity, it is an individualized entity that shapes the moral-psychological complexes of the characters. It has its unique life, primeval mores and legends that permeate everyday rituals. The stream of folkloric imagery is conditioned by the legacy of the past and the ethnic values of the Armenian neighbourhood. When a historical event becomes a legend, it is no longer etymologized. It might be most unbelievable, but you should believe it. "Don't touch legends, this imperative whisper resides in us as an instinct."

The allegorical forms of the dream and tale are the integral part of the poetics of the writer's fiction. On the one hand it is a sequel of earlier events in the subconsciousness of characters, on the other hand it functions as a premonition.

In the article "Myth in the 20-th Century" A. Doroshevich marks that modern writers highlight events through the dream which itself has a mythical element. The reality in a dream is as trustworthy for a sleeping person as the fantastic reality for the primeval thinking, which didn't differentiate the real and the ideal. In this respect the myth and the dream are alike and the latter has the same symbolic meaning as the myth-metaphor. From this perspective the dream becomes a mythological motif and expresses a peculiar perception of being. The subconscious complexes in the dream bring out authentic archetypes, which are timeless primeval patterns.

The allegory of the dream is a special stylistic device in the fiction of R. Hovsepien. In the story "The Armenian Neighbourhood" Mariam sees a dream in which she is doomed to redeem her fault in the hell. It is the retribution for the guilt of maltreating her dog. On the whole the dream reflects the primordial mythological conception of guilt. Mariam's dream is the instinctive reflex of her sufferings enclosed in her subconsciousness, whereas her son's dream is the continuation of reality. This reality is mythicized in his dream, since what has been deduced by imagination, has become quite tangible in the dream. They were digging a well in the yard in the hope of finding treasures. Seized by this illusion he saw a dream in which the stars fell into the well, transforming into treasures. It's easy to notice the symbolic connection of the dream with the plot which uncovers the inner anguish and secret wishes of the heroes.

In the story "Scream" the writer once again employs the allegorical imagery of the dream. This time it becomes a dominant of the dramatic - psychological state of the characters. In the fantastic images of his dream and impulses dying Gevorg sees archaic mythological scenes. In his death vision he found himself on a path by a spring, with his wounds bleeding. A great many wound licking dogs (aralez) appear from the heavens and lick his wounds with their long hot red tongues and relieve his pain and alleviate his sufferings, etc. The dream is a hint on the Armenian legend of Ara the Handsome. The mythical parallel deepens the emotional aspect of the narrative and is a kind of psychological commentary on the events.

In his mental anguish another character, Sahak, too, found himself in a similar dream vision which uncovers his inner tension and subjective emotional experiences. The appearance of either nuns or saints was like a half-dream and half-reality. A cricket was incessantly squeaking in the complete whiteness. That unbearable squeak echoed in the ruins of a medieval castle. Sahak solves his mental crisis with the symbolics of the Christian legend. The myth of Christ's crucifixion has a deep connotation and the human life, too, is inconceivable without it. "Life is a crucifixion. Perhaps it's impossible not to be crucified."

In the aforementioned stories the dreams aren't fabricated artificially. They harmoniously interweave with the texture.

In another story the old tale is a loop that solves the psychological knot of the plot. On the subtextual level it basically justifies the choice of the only woman in a desert aul.

Seven male beings are fighting to possess her. The woman's choice falls on the youngest of them, who identifies himself with a fish in an old legend and accounts his fishy existence for the need to find the lost grinder (erkank).

The legend about the lost grinder and the salt lake tells the following story. Once upon a time there were two brothers. One of them was a kind and humble fisherman, whereas the other brother was rich, wicked and envious. From the King of reptiles the fisherman had obtained a magic grinder which granted the good things of life. The kind fisherman ground flour and gold for his fellow villagers. The rich brother resented his brother's kindness and once at night he stole the grinder, took a boat and escaped. He had taken everything with him but salt. And he started to operate the grinder to get salt. But he didn't know how to stop it. Soon the boat sank with the grinder under the weight of the salt. "And the sea gradually became salty. And the sea became smaller and smaller. And all the fishes died. Only one species survived. Perhaps in order to find the grinder." The legend is in correlative connection with the text.

The spectrum of legendry has a wider subtextual integrity in the novel "Worm-Red" (vordan karmir). The fictive reality is introduced as a legend, which creates a deeper time and broader spatial dimension in the narrative.

"From afar that bygone day occurs to me in the form of the carpet hung on our wall. My grandfather Levon had saved it from the flood. Like my grandpa, who was amazed each time he found a new ornament on the carpet, I, too, have been wondering many years, recollecting the details of that bygone day.... Daring to describe that day, with torn bounds and embracing many other past days, I'm not certain at all that I have discovered all the hidden ornaments, because that carpet-day was inexhaustible and unlimited. At least for me it's a legend – a legend that has grown up with me, matured with me, every other instance of which is more marvelous and wiser than the previous one."

The prefatory paragraph suggests that in retrospect, the artistic reality of the novel arises as a legend and saga – saga of the Simonian family.

In the novel a teacher from Mush is contemplating about the fate of the Armenian people and tries to guess the beginning of "our tragedy, pain and fall." It naturally goes back to historical events which also arise as a legend. It started with the imprudence of King Tiran, who following the advice of plotters, appointed Assyrian Daniel as patriarch to the Armenian Cathedral. This is how the Assyrian responded to it: "How can I be primate for a nation that doesn't follow the Lord, or how can I be primate of a nation who is forsaken by the Lord? How can I raise my hands to God and pray for those whose hands are covered with the blood of saints?" To King Tiran's order "Smother him with a rope," the Assyrian responded: "God will deprive you of your kingdom and

priesthood for all your lies and vileness. You will be scattered and separated and your borders like those of Israel will go to pieces, you will be abandoned, nobody will spare you and you will be sheep without a shepherd."

"This is the beginning, thereafter we have been drawing water in a sieve," said the teacher from Mush. From the writer's perspective this legend becomes a clue to our national fate.

On the other hand Armenia is a blessed mythical land and one should penetrate and discover its mysteries. "There is nothing meaningless and useless here. If this stone uselessly lies here it's because we don't know its unrevealed secrets. Or we knew it at one time and then forgot." In a clay jug hidden in the wall of a well Grandfather Levon discovers the mystery of the red worms(vordan karmir). The red worms symbolize renovation and reincarnation both on the national and personal levels and occur as a legend from the depth of the past and from the perspective of the present.

The writer often employs mythical references and prefigurative characters. In the novel the protagonist is first paralleled to Noah and then to Job. Calling himself Noah because of frequent floods in Tiflis, later Levon Simonyan identifies himself with Job in terms of his personal losses and misfortunes. He moves from one Biblical prefiguration to another. Now he is archetypally Job, that's why he so desperately clings to the idea of finding the red worms, considering the earthenware pot full of worms the beginning of good days and the resurrection of something very precious.

The myth of flood is also employed in the story "Noah" where Sargis is modeled on the Biblical character of the same name. The writer stylizes the hero's life into a myth pattern. In the novel God warns Sargis of the inevitable nuclear catastrophe; that the mankind will be annihilated and advised him to dig a deep hole and hide there with his family taking seven years' supply of food and water.

Thus in Ruben Hovsepian's aesthetic system there are both stylistic interpolations of folkloric elements and more organic archetypal allusions that view the past and contemporaneity in a common model giving more in-depth and philosophical estimation of events. The tale, the legend and the dream are "open texts" where folkloric analogies condense the idea underlying literary episodes.

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