

Ali and Nino by Kurban Said in Terms of Imagology

Abstract: Kurban Said in his novel *Ali and Nino* tells the reader about different cities by using a wonderful descriptive technique, which quite clearly demonstrates how the author perceives his own, his native city, people and culture and on the other hand, a foreign, others' city and city life. Whereas the author passionately describes his city, trying to demonstrate all the best features, which even bear some ideological undertones, when it comes to a "foreign", "others' " city, the description becomes a little exaggerated and stereotypical. In this case, all the elements characteristic of imagology emerge: stereotypes, prejudices, myths, images and archetypes about "alien", "foreign", "others'" city which finally leads to the concept of binary opposition of "one's own-others' ", or "self-other" dichotomy, which we agree to be the basis of Imagology. The book opens up ample opportunities to discuss imagological problems on the background of comprehensive and impressive descriptions of various cities, people, customs and culture.

Key words: imagology, stereotypes, native, foreign, a city.

Imagology as a discipline has recently taken its place in Human Sciences. The word stems from the Latin term *Imago* which means an image, a pattern, a reflection. Image studies or imagology had its origins as a sub-discipline of Comparative literary Studies in the French tradition. Imagology deals with the ways in which perceived national/ethnic/cultural character and identity - both one's own and that of others - are expressed in broad range of discourse. The emphasis is upon perception, not the real truth or accuracy of an image. An imagologist seeks to understand the structure and nature of images and to present their conventional nature. In doing so s/he addresses the intersection between verbal (aesthetical/rhetorical) and historical (ideological/socio-cultural) aspects of the discourse. Any comparative image study should serve to promote consent and better understanding between nations by diverting attention to socio-cultural diversities and resemblances between them and the way they think about themselves and each other. Comparatists have come to see this "self-other" dichotomy or "one's own-others'" binary opposition, as central in understanding national perception and representation.

The paper aims to explore the cities - Baku and Tbilisi - presented in *Ali and Nino* by Kurban Said in imagological terms. The study is based on the concept of binary opposition of "one's own-others'", or "self-other", which we agree to be the basis of Imagology.

Kurban Said gives the detailed description of several cities to the reader, one of which, Baku is his native city. He uses the following methods to describe a city and a city-life: the description of external and internal aspects of a city including its buildings, streets, the nature and sceneries; the people's attitude to the existing political situation and their mentality in general; the traditions of receiving and entertaining guests; eating and drinking habits and customs. So, we would like to present first the cities of Baku and Tbilisi from the author's point of view and perception, and, then discuss them in terms of imagology.

There is put a critical question to the people living in Baku in the first chapter of the novel: "West or East?" Although this is the question which a teacher asks the third-graders, in fact, this is one of the most central themes of the novel. The pupils make a unanimous and firm decision – they choose East as here (in Baku M.M.) they feel great. Indeed, the book is saturated with patriotic motifs and the personages fight with passionate devotion against the enemy as for them Baku equals to the world. The author does his best to use all the best epithets to describe his beloved city- an ancient city with ancient traditions - to the reader: "Our city keeps many secrets. Every corner of it is full of miracles. And I love these miracles, and the darkness whispering at night, and the silent meditation in the dusty yard of the mosque" [25 M.M.]. Or: "in front, there is a vast grey Caspian Sea in the far distance and in the back there is a boundless desert: the cliffs, the sand... the most beautiful landscape of the world" [14 M.M.]. Ali Khan Shirvanshir, the leading character of the novel, is deeply in love with this city along with other people living in Baku including Nino Kipiani, a Georgian Princess, who dreams to go back to Baku while her stay in Tehran. Moreover, she calls Baku her home. The personages of Ali and Nino neither want to change anything here (in Baku M.M.) or abandon it for any reasons. Due to the tense political situation Ali Khan Shirvanshir and his wife have to flee to Tehran, where they severely suffer from missing their home-town. This tormenting feeling pushes Ali Khan to participate in the self-flagellation Muharram procession to beseech God for peace and freedom of his native-town.

Kurban Said skillfully communicates through Ali Khan Shirvanshir, the main hero of the book, to tell the reader about the eating and drinking customs and rituals of Baku, which is the inseparable part of the city. The author uses a wonderful descriptive technique: there is a Karabakh carpet laid in the roofing protected against the wind. Ali Khan, his father and his uncle are sitting on it, and there is a rich assortment of the Asian dishes laid in front of them: "a honey cake, sugared fruits, the pieces of mutton on the spit, the hen with rice and raisins"[19 M.M.]. Ali Khan admires how his father and uncle eat: "they even did not use their left hand... they ate with just three fingers so that neither their palms got dirty nor any grains of the pilau fell down... After eating we washed our hands. My uncle prayed for a while. The servants took the dishes back, brought black tea in small cups and as they would say in old times "Good eating is followed by good talk" [19-20 M.M.]. The uncle talks most part due to the rules and customs of theirs. He mainly remembers old times, criticizes Europeans' immoral behavior and Christians, talks about war and other controversial issues. So, the author describes in details eating and drinking rituals characteristic of Baku as well as the traditions of

receiving a guest, which are rather moderate and quiet, keeping some rules of etiquette, which they carefully follow.

Hence, this is Kurban Said's Baku, which bears some ideological characteristics as well. The author's perception of his city is both quiet and lively, traditional and modern, very patriotic, individualistic, beautiful, especially at night, when the city of Baku becomes even more beautiful at the moonlight with breathtaking sceneries and views.

Now we would like to present the foreign city or others' city, culture and people from the author's point of view and perception. This is the city of Tbilisi. In this case, all the elements characteristic of imagology emerge: stereotypes, prejudices, myths, images and archetypes about "alien", "foreign", "others' ". Whereas the author passionately describes "his own" city and demonstrates all the best features, which sometimes bear some ideological undertones, when it comes to a "foreign", "others' " city, the description becomes a little stereotypical and exaggerated. Before Ali Khan Shirvanshir visits Tbilisi, he talks only about the beauty of the Georgian women with great admiration. But as soon as he arrives in a foreign city, Ali Khan compares the strong connection of Georgian relatives, uniting many surnames, with a dense forest, where it is very hard to pave the way. In this case, we think the author's perception and judgment of Georgian people's attitude to their relatives who, despite being numerous, still manage to keep close and friendly relationships with one another, is correct.

The author's perception of eating and drinking habits and traditions of a foreign city is very interesting and absolutely different from that of his city: in the Didube garden, in the suburbs of Tbilisi, a big feast is prepared by Nino Kipiani's relatives to welcome Ali Khan Shirvanshir, an honored guest. The hosts play on the old Georgian musical instruments, sing the traditional Georgian songs and perform various Georgian dances. The feast lasts the whole night. The relatives of Nino start singing their hymn very loudly at dawn, which is followed by old Georgian dances with swords. Ali Khan Shirvanshir is rather surprised by Georgian customs of welcoming their guests as he was of a different opinion of Georgians' hospitality and the city life, which he finds rather tumultuous and exhausting, so different from that of quiet receptions in his own city.

Here, we would like to make a small correction: we think the way Kurban Said perceives and presents Georgian Eating and drinking ritual and the tradition of a guest reception is a bit exaggerated and stereotypical which leads straight to a literary imagology. In Georgia, Georgian *supra* (feast) and toast-making has a long-standing tradition and order, and bears some artistic and religious motifs. *Tamada* (Head of supra) must be endowed with good rhetoric skills and eloquence. The first toast is made in order to praise God. When a tamada is proposing a toast, the members of supra should neither talk nor eat but listen carefully to him as a tamada will discuss at length the theme of a toast or even tell some interesting story. Other traditional toasts might be the toasts to a motherland, family, the dead, children, women, various saints, ancestors, friendship

etc. So, a traditional Georgian supra (feast) is not as tumultuous and chaotic as the main hero perceives it but, in fact, it has its own order and traditions which are carefully kept.

We would also like to highlight one more passage in the novel. While staying in Tbilisi, Nino Kipiani's behavior becomes quite strange according to the story: she dances, drinks and almost never goes to sleep throughout a week. We consider this passage is also a bit exaggerated as, traditionally, such kind of uncontrollable feasting and behavior was not typical of Georgian Princesses.

Why were these stereotypes and prejudices created? How it all started? It is not very difficult to find the answer to these questions: Georgia has always been called the country of wine as winemaking has a long-standing tradition there. Accordingly, Georgian wine is the main element of Georgian supra (feast), where a number of toasts are proposed, which naturally is followed by drinking much wine as every toast equals to blessing and "This wine is pure; for God is in it" [116 M.M.] as it is said by an old woman in the novel. It is feasible that those factors produced the not quite accurate associations of Georgian eating and drinking customs and rituals later turning into archetypes.

So, Kurban Said develops a rather interesting approach to perceiving and describing different nations, cultures, traditions and cities, one of which is his native, his own city and the other is a foreign, others' city. We consider the book gives a wonderful opportunity to discuss a number of questions in terms of imagology.

References:

Дима 1977: Дима А. Образ иностранца в различных национальных литературах // Дима А. Принципы сравнительного литературоведения. М., 1977.

Ali and Nino by Kurban Said (translated into Georgian by Maia Mirianashvili). Tbilisi: Diogene Press 2008.

Imagology: The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters. A critical survey. (Studia Imagologica), edited by Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, 2007.