

Love of *The Man in the Panther Skin* – a New Philosophical Concept

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“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God”(1 John, 4.7)

“Rustaveli has a message, almost a gospel”(C.M. Bowra)

The present paper is dedicated to the concept of love of *The Man in the Panther Skin* proving to be a new theosophical-philosophical one in Christian civilization and concerns a significant change at the transition stage from the Medieval into the Renaissance mentality.

Love is the impulsive force of the ideology and the worldview of the MPS, and it is obvious as they are qualitatively similar to the late medieval European Christian intellectual process; as in the center of Christian ethics there is an idea of love and the definition of God leads to love: “God is love”(1 John, 4, 16).

Love of the MPS is a Renaissant concept based on the medieval model. The latter definition corresponds to my standpoint with regard to the position of Rustaveli Weltanschauung in the European-Christian intellectual process. The world perception of the MPS is a harmony between the Middle Ages and Renaissance[7]. It means that in Rustaveli's worldview traditional Medieval ideals and the basic postulates of Christianity – belief in eternity of gracious Creator, immortality of the soul and the hope of union with the infinite Creator after the death – are harmoniously blended with convincing in the beauty of human, sensual life, the value of everyday reality and declare trust in human consciousness.

Love in the MPS always was a matter of various and versatile debates while being traditionally interpreted on the basis of medieval Christian dogmas. Moderate opponency of traditional clerical or public opinion on Rustaveli's poem (according to the poem, the essence is believed to be the earthly life and not the spiritual one; the poem won't prove useful for the day when we pass away – a Pseudo-Rustaveli's stanza) was brought to the boiling point in the 18th century by Kartli archbishop: Rustaveli taught Georgians to corrupt sanctities and depraved Christianity[2, p. 80]. A learned King Vakhtang VI attempted to change the Orthodox-dogmatic attitude to the poem, interpreted the love of the MPS as a Divine one and stated that though his interpretation might not be true, it is better to be interpreted this way[3]. King Vakhtang's opinion was shared neither by the old Georgian clerics (Timothe Gabashvili: Previously, his evil verse was rendered as a Divine one by the ignorant) nor by the secular circles (M. Brossett, D. Chubinashvili, I. Palavandishvili, the second printed edition of the MPS, Saint-Petersburg, 1841).

Rustaveli himself did not imply the possibility of allegorical reconsideration of the poem's love as a Divine one. On the contrary, Rustaveli emphatically declares that he speaks about the love that differs but imitates the Divine love: “Sages cannot comprehend that one love; The tongue will tire, the ears of the listeners will become wearied; I must tell of lower

frenzies, which befall human beings; they imitate it...”(stanzas 28)¹. At the same time, Rustaveli flatly states that the poem’s love differs from wantonness – “They imitate it when they wanton not...”(st. 28). Therefore the poet dedicates several stanzas to strongly discriminating love from wantonness. Rustaveli realizes that his contemporary public opinion won’t understand that the earthly love is in the center of ethical world outlook of the poem’s characters. (It should be noted that this is not taken into account by some researchers and the editors of the MPS who do not attribute these stanzas to Rustaveli. Dante and Petrarca focused their special attention on discriminating between true earthly love from wantonness).

But we should not regard love of the MPS the way it was regarded by the 20th century popular Rustaveli studies: Rustaveli’s love differs from Divine love and is a true earthly one. The poet gains a deeper insight into this concept.

In this regard special attention should be paid to Morris Bowra’s – an English literary historian, one of the best researchers of the MPS – viewpoint. The scholar states that Rustaveli’s poem’s structure is based on the concept of love. He writes that it does not mean that love in the MPS more often moves to the forefront than in the pre-Rustaveli world literary monuments (The Song of the Nibelungs, Nizami poems, King Arthur novels). As distinct from the above works, love in Rustaveli’s poem represents the whole system of life[11, p. 53]. In another place the author ascertains his opinion: Rustaveli considers his doctrine more consistently than the authors of French and Persian tales of chivalry. According to M. Bowra Platonic love tune is as clearly defined in Rustaveli’s poem as in Provençal poets’ works: Provence poets as well as Dante describe the same problems but Rustaveli more vividly presents them as his philosophy is very closely related to action[11, p. 58]. M. Bowra compares Rustaveli’s world of ideas with the development of chivalry romance in the Renaissance Italian literature; in particular, with Boiardo and Ariosto. But along with similarities the author notes many differences: Italian Romance as well as Alisher Navoi in the East are more attracted to unreality, extravaganza, miraculous actions against the laws of nature – they are “far removed from the solidity and seriousness of Rustaveli”[11, p. 56]. M. Bowra emphasizes that Rustaveli has much to say. “The difference between him and most other writers of romance is that, while they are concerned mainly to amuse and entertain, Rustaveli had a message, almost a Gospel”[11, p. 67]. Yes, Rustaveli has a great message, but what does he say in particular?

First and foremost attention should be drawn to the prologue of the poem where Rustaveli considers the essence of love and notes that the subject matter of the poem is love being the first and the greatest among the Divine ideas: “I speak of love which is first and foremost among heavenly ideas” (see Marjory Wardrop’s translation: “I speak of the highest love – divine in this kind” – st. 27). The latter is the basic thesis of Christian theology converted into the philosophical-logical terminology: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God ...

¹ See: *The Man in the Panther Skin* translated by Marjory Wardrop[17].

This is the first and great commandment”(Matt. 22, 37. 38). The poet continues and states that we can speak only on the earthly shape of love because the other form(“Love God of yours”) is unsearchable and incognizable for a human being(st. 28)[see: 8, pp. 395-409].

Here Rustaveli pursues Apostles’ theosophy: “No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us”(I John 4, 12).

Thus, the above is the theoretical justification on the basis of which Rustaveli introduces real, earthly love to his poem. Therefore, Rustaveli’s love described in his poem is human, earthly love, the essence of which is similar to Divine love and is not its allegoric depiction.

Mutual love was a new commandment that was given by Jesus to his disciples: “A new commandment I give unto you. That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”(John, 13, 34-5). Love of the neighbor is the particular characteristics of the Christian religion and distinguishes it from other religions. The Savior clearly declares: “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you”(John, 15, 12). Jesus also asserts that there is not any other greater type of love than the love of the friend: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”(John, 15,13)[see: 6, pp. 24-26].

Rustaveli’s present theoretical reasoning is closely related to the essence of the poem, the love of the characters of the MPS has the same definition that is conceptually provided for in the Prologue – the latter can be proved not only by the fact that for the poem’s characters mutual love is the main principle, essence and content of life but also by the fact that while describing characters’ earthly, human love Rustaveli applies the categories of Divine love: to prove his friendly love to Tariel and substantiate the necessity to assist him, Avtandil highlights (to Rostevan) Apostles’ apology of love: “Thou hast read how the apostles write of love... if thou conceive not this how can I convince ignorant men?”(772). In another passage, where the defeated pirates swear friendship to Avtandil, Rustaveli writes: “Truly saith the Apostle: “Fear makes love”(st. 1023).

Love of the MPS is more than love between a man and a woman – the latter fact is evidenced also by Rustaveli selecting both the above type of love and the friendly love as the subject-matter of artistic representation. More than that, according to the poem, love among friends does not qualitatively (and by its psychological essence) differ from the love between a man and a woman.

In his Testament Avtandil substantiates the necessity to assist Tariel with the following words addressed to King Rostevan: “I cannot remain sundered from him, the kindler of my fires”(769). The “Kindler fire” is a traditional imagery and means a lady-love. Avtandil frequently uses this formula representing the highest emotion of human relations while talking about his friendship with Tariel:

“The fire of yon knight burns me, the flame that consumes him afflicts men”(st. 715).

Another example:

“The fire of that knight burns me, I am consumed with hot fire”(981).

Thus, Rustaveli's love is alike that highest emotion, it is a great psychological feeling that attracts a pious person to God, but the latter cannot be described, or perceived or expressed as God is "unknowable and unspeakable". That is why Rustaveli describes only those aspects of love that exist among people, that represent an earthly reality of the human world. It is apparent that Rustaveli's concept is based on Apostles' theosophy: "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us"(I John, 4, 12).

The highest Commandment of the Medieval Christian faith – "Love the Lord your God" – is considered and represented by Rustaveli as an earthly, human aspect but his earthly love is not the "love of a neighbour" of the Testament any more. It (Rustaveli's love) proceeds from it (from the concept of love of a neighbor), is based on it but is a true, real manifestation of human spiritual aspiration towards one another – showing up in friendship among the friends and love between a man and a woman. Therefore, Rustaveli brings human love to the level of Divine one. This concept is based on the medieval concept of love of a Renaissance character and corresponds to the epoch of introduction of the Renaissance into the medieval world perception. At the same time, this concept is an apparent performance of Rustaveli's world outlook that I consider to be a harmony between the medieval and a Renaissance views which, for its part, corresponds to the Late or High Middle Ages' epoch in the European civilization. This is the European-Christian civilization of 11th-14th centuries that has been differently manifested in high intellectual circles of various countries.

This is not an epoch – as sometimes it is considered - when the Middle Ages weakened and Renaissance gained ground. This epoch is a new stage of the Middle Ages and simultaneously, it differs from the typical Middle Ages as well as it differs from the Renaissance. As it is evident from the analysis of the world perception of the MPS the public world perception of this epoch fully retains the best ideals of the Middle Ages and complements them with new, perfect ideals of the next era. An epoch with such world perceptions is considered to have been the most peaceful and happy period in the process of European civilization; as a man with such world perception believed in the immortality of the soul, hoped for the grace of Good Lord and internal freedom for biological and aesthetic enjoyment. It is almost impossible to fully cognize the world outlook of a man of that epoch (it is said that in order to more or less completely perceive the past ages one should live in that century). We can judge only on the basis of those data that have been accumulated in that century's historical literature or belles-lettres.

This new world perception of the Late Middle Ages attempts to non-hazardously set foot in the orthodoxy of the Middle Ages. This new world perception, the empathy towards the interests of the real world and trust and compassion are introduced to the traditional orthodoxy in such a manner that they do not even try to question the latter and strive to retain it. (At least it is how it is perceived from the MPS). Such focus shift was mainly revealed in the realization of the highest Commandment of the Christian faith: that is the Divine love. The literature showing new world perception has already hymned the earthly love. The same is done by Rustaveli. This re-thinking proved to be a complicated and

longstanding process. Introduction of the concept of the earthly love into the Medieval Christian lyrics is related to the Troubadour's poetry (XI-XII c.). In this poetry new world perception seems not to be distinguished. On the one hand, this might be explained by the Sufistic implied sense of the Arabic lyrics (one of the sources of Troubadour lyrics) and its gradual withdrawal. And on the other hand, it can be explained by the Christian exegetic tradition – by the symbolic-allegorical re-thinking. One way or another, in European literature Troubadour lyrics lay the foundation for subliming the human love to the Divine one – in the Renaissance era this was called the Platonic love. According to C.S. Lewis, a well-known researcher into the allegory of love, Platonic love traces back not to the Plato philosophy but to the poetry of Troubadours of the 11th century [16, p. 15]. This innovation of Troubadours will be theoretically rethought in the 13th century – the so called poetry of “a sweet new style” (*dolce stil nuovo*) and then will develop in Dante Alighieri's poetry: the earthly love is a roadway to reach the Divine: a woman is a medium between a man and God. Dante will introduce a new shade to the thesis of rethinking of the earthly love and considering it a Divine one; this shade of meaning is considered the most important word in the process of understanding the concept of love in a Renaissance way: sublime love for Beatrice is similar to the Divine love; human love is the first stage of the Divine love; it is a part of the Divine love [12, pp.30,37; 14, p.63]. Finally, as far back as in the 14th century Francesco Petrarca established the Renaissance thesis: human love in its sublime, true manifestation is the Divine love. This thesis is the most essential postulate of the human emotion, hence considering its (human) nature to be the Divine one.

This most significant thesis on new world perception created by the late Middle Ages, its principal acceptance and its theoretical and artistic solution proves to be the main novelty of Rustaveli's world outlook – in the Christian thinking process that began in the Middle Ages and continued to the Renaissance [15, pp. 143-46].

Simultaneously, Rustaveli's concept of subliming the earthly love to the state of the Divine love differs from establishing the similar concept in the European reality and sources. It is believed that Dante dates from the 13th century Scholastic and Christian (monkhood) tradition of brotherhood. Rustaveli, as I substantiated, proceeds from the theosophical interpretation of the New Testament. In addition, the essence of re-considering the earthly love is different in Dante's and Rustaveli's works. If in Dante's poem, as it is believed, the earthly love is only the first stage of the Divine one (Dante believes that he will see Beatrice in the next world not as a earthly woman but as a spiritual, Divine one sublimed to the Highest. Some researchers believe that Beatrice from the Divine Comedy is a symbolic-allegoric image of Christ [12]); from Rustaveli's point of view Tariel will meet Nestan in the next world with earthly, human emotion and love [see: 8, pp. 604-614.]. “How shall the lover not see his love, how forsake her! Gladly I go to her; then will she wend to me. I shall meet her, she shall meet me; She shall weep for me and make me weep” (st. 863).

Rustaveli's concept of love needs interpretation from another standpoint as well. In Rustaveli studies the concept of love of the MPS is sometimes considered to be the courtly love being popular in the European literature of the Late Middle Ages. The viewpoint is

widely spread among the contemporary foreign researchers[10, pp. 239-48; 13]. The incident of relations between Avtandil and Patman is considered the most ambiguous among the proponents of the above viewpoint and foreign scholars in general. Sometimes it is considered to be degradation or a failure of a character of the highly developed stage of the courtly literature[10, pp. 243-4].

From my point of view, in this incident Avtandil's behavior cannot be considered degrading. The thing is that Avtandil is not a typical character of a courtly novel. It is true that amour between the characters in love in the MPS at the initial stage is similar to European tales of chivalry, in particular, to the courtly novel (the amour between the knight and his queen, demonstration of love by a woman, tasking the knight...); besides the fact that the model of amour of the characters of the MPS does not fit the triangle of the European courtly love, Rustaveli's character in love drastically differs from the adventurous peripeteia of Chretien de Troyes's knights in love[8, pp. 582-604]. Avtandil's behavior and striving do not meet either the courtly standards of love or the code of knights. I mean homicide of sleeping Chashnagir and the Khvarazmian groom without the combat. It is a very urgent argument and the author himself emphasizes it:

“This is a marvel to me, how he could thus steel his blood!”(st. 1095).

Tariel: “I killed that youth without shedding of blood,
though his blood cried out as it flowed”(st. 541)².

The characters of the MPS act not pursuant to the code of knights but according to dictates of reason.

Avtandil's breaking the established norms of love is of a paramount importance. In the incident of sexual relationship with Patman he is not curbed by the loyalty to the love of Tinatin. Initially we shall define that Avtandil is not unfaithful to Tinatin's love. According to *the* MPS, if an affair with another woman can be justified by the specific situation than it is not considered a breach of faith (Tariel intends to have a love affair with Asmat but does not think that he is unfaithful to his great love). Generally, the same approach is applied in the Oriental epic poetry (*Visramiani*). The love affair with another woman is not always considered as betrayal of the beloved in European love code (Andreas Capellanus)[9]. This model of Rustavelian love was based on the epic tradition as well. Odysseus shares a bed with Circe but returns as a faithful husband to Penelope. The most essential thing is Rustaveli's substantiation of the fact that Avtandil is faithful to his great love. It is immediately identified when Patman proposed her love to Avtandil:

“said he:“ What hath the raven to do with the rose, or what have in common? . . .

What says she? What nonsense she talks! What a letter she has written!”(st.1068)

Avtandil does it against his will. Rustaveli clearly says: “That night Patman enjoyed lying with Avtandil”(St. 1230) and not Avtandil. Avtandil did not open his heart to Patman's love: “the knight unwillingly embraces her”. He thinks that the situation is embarrassing and

² The last passage from M.Wardrop's translation is not accurate. It should be as follows: *Though I should shed the blood.*

thinks only of Tinatin: “Remembrance of Tinatin slays him, he quakes with secret fear”. He is very well aware of his unworthy acts and laughs over them:

“He says: Behold me, O lovers, me who have a rose for mine own! Away from her, I, the nightingall, like a carrion-crow, sit on the dungheap!”(st. 1231).

While interpreting this event we should not be restricted with only the plot of this writing. Avtandil’s behavior cannot be explained only by the fact that he needed Patman as a person providing information about Tinatin. In this passage Rustaveli makes Avtandil act: Rustaveli introduced him to Patman’s company and made him act that way. How can we explain Avtandil’s, a literary character’s, behavior? Is it his personality decline?

From my viewpoint Avtandil’s behavior in Gulansharo is the further development of his personality. Avtandil exalted over his personal will and desires. He did not intend to do it but it was the requirement of his highest human duty. Avtandil’s actions in this passage are in harmony with his credo: the only request he has to God concerns the perfection of his personality: “give me to endure longings, O ruler of heart-utterances”(st. 790). His behavior is in harmony with his basic way of proceeding that he unambiguously defines to Tariel (during their second meeting): “do that thou desirest not, follow not the will of desires“ (st. 860). The latter circumstance clearly shows that in the romantic situation with Patman Avtandil does it against his will but his behavior is not a senseless degradation either. Avtandil does not want to do it; but it is an obligation of his supreme human ideal. After getting acquainted with Tariel, Avtandil – from the love to his beloved – exalted to the service to his comrade without denying his beloved’s love; in the passage with Patman he exalted to the beautiful ideal – to the love of the neighbor, to the compassion of the neighbor without discarding the love of a friend and the beloved. The way – from the love to a beloved to the service of a friend and to the compassion of a human being, a neighbor – is the way of exaltation. According to Plato’s philosophy, the same is the way of human perfection: from the beautiful body – to beautiful deeds and then – to beautiful ideas(*Symposium*, XXIX)[5, p. 306].

This issue needs to be specified: what is the role of Avtandil’s character, his compassion to Patman, in the process of European civilization? Avtandil’s behavior adds a Renaissant shade to his literary character.

In Avtandil’s literary character an interest towards a human being dominates the norms (rules) of love (both courtly as well as free human feeling). In particular, in the MPS a desire of love is subordinated to or predetermined by high human ideal and its requirements.

Human empathy, the skill to share your neighbor’s lot as a moral perfection can be deciphered in one of the epithets applied by Rustaveli to characterize Avtandil. Avtandil agreed with Patman who asked him to kill Chashnagir; to describe the character Rustaveli used the epithet that is applied only once in the MPS – “*bunebaziar*” – “Compassionate of heart”[see: 18, p. 152]: “when Avtandil, the proud, gifted with bold resolve, heard this, he arose and took a mace – how fair, how bold is he“(st. 1087).

Comments on the terms used in the MPS clearly show that it refers to human greatness and benevolence[5, pp. 162-167]. It might also mean that a human being may be

compassionate to the neighbor. Anyway, St. Basil the Great while explaining the theological topic of love to a neighbor, clearly notes that nothing is more intrinsic to a human nature than the gift of understanding each other (communion). The Georgian translation of this thought from *Asketikon* by St. Basil the Great is as follows: the nature of human beings is similar[1].

Human compassion is the basic feature of Avtandil as a literary character – it means that the author considers humanistic values of a paramount significance for him; hence, it corresponds to the initial stage of Renaissance. Care of human beings, sharing their problems, empathy to them are values higher than knightly moral standards and even the requirements of love – the supreme personal feeling. Avtandil’s behavior in Patman’s passage is caused by a moral obligation and requirement of compassion to a human being and not by the knightly ethics or the amorous obligations and norms. Avtandil’s actions imply Renaissance ideals. At the same time, this Renaissance ideal retains its medieval nature and development. Human compassion demonstrated in the relations between Avtandil and Patman is based on the Christian thesis of love for a neighbor – “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”(Matt. 22, 39); it is a Renaissance interpretation of this thesis. Avtandil recognizes a trustworthy and loyal neighbor in Patman. “I know thee to be a good friend, faithful, trusty”(st. 1241) – he addresses her after revealing his true name and tries to express his gratitude to the faithful friend for the provided services by demonstrating compassion to her. He realized this obligation even at the beginning of their relations with Patman: “perchance she will be of some use to me; I shall know how to pay my debt to her”(st. 1070). As we prove hereby the concept of love in the MPS stems from the Christian concept of love for the neighbour. In the MPS Rustaveli interprets this concept his own way. Rustaveli changes the concept of love for the *neighbour* with the love for the *mokvare* (lover, friend and...)³. Rustaveli’s *mokvare* and that of the New Testament’s do not amount to the same thing. Rustaveli’s *mokvare* is implied in Christian *neighbour* but means the person who is loved (a friend, a beloved) and that neighbour who deserves compassion for his/her benevolence and faithfulness. According to the New Testament compassion (benevolence, mercy) is the basic form of demonstration of love among the neighbours, “be ye of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous”(1 Peter, 3, 8). The love for the neighbour means sharing other’s joy and sorrow: “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep”(Romans, 12, 15). The love for the neighbour means that one should be weak with the weak and agitated with the offended: “Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I born not?”(2 Corinthians, 11. 29). Thus, pursuant to these teachings Avtandil shares Patman’s joy and weakness. That is why Avtandil “agitates” for the “offended” Patman. More than that, the idea of Christian neighbour, as a teaching, does not exclude expressing compassion with love for the offended neighbor. Paul the Apostle says: “Charity... Doth not behave itself unseemly”(1 Corinthians, 13, 5). St. John Chrysostom

³ Rustaveli’s *mokvare* is a lover, a friend and a loyal, trustworthy person as well.

explains the Apostle's words as follows: none shameful deed is dishonorable if committed for the sake of love for the neighbour[4, p. 299].

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