

The Book by an American Scholar
on *The Man in the Panther Skin*

Gvantsa Tcholikauri

Master's student at Tbilisi State University

Elguja Khintibidze

Professor at Tbilisi State University, Academician of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences

Abstract: Based on the latest research by an American scholar, Diana Farrell, this article discusses several issues relating to the manifestation of the concept of love in *The Man in the Panther Skin* in contrast with the concepts of love as expressed in Oriental epic and Western courtly love.

Key words: *Diana Farrell, The Man in the Panther Skin, Andreas Capellanus*

In the autumn of 2012 the University of Pittsburgh published a monograph by an American researcher Dianne Ecklund Farrell "Courtly Love in the Caucasus: Rustaveli's Georgian Epic, *The Knight in the Panther Skin*". This fact is important not only because it gives Medieval Georgian literature an international dimension, but mostly because it includes the issues of Rustvelian studies in the area of Western research. It is also worth mentioning that about a decade ago an American researcher G. Koolemans Beynen, who is now a well-known Rustvelologist, became interested in the same theme [1].

Based on various research opportunities and reliable sources, the author makes an attempt to revive the circumstances in which Western courtly love was conceived and the role that the Arabian literature or Neo-Platonic philosophy played in its formation and dissemination. In addition to this, the American researcher also states and explains the similarities between the concept of love expressed in *The Man in the Panther Skin* and also in Western courtly love.

While characterising Western courtly love, Diana Farrell relies mostly on the love lyrics of the early troubadours, “The Art of Courtly Love” by Andreas Capellanus, the Arthurian romances of Chretien de Troyes and the prologue of Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan*.

The author of the book has noticed the fact that Rustaveli employed the writing style of the Persian Epic. Therefore, she considers *The Man in the Panther Skin* in relation to Persian epic work. While doing so, she relies on *Shah-Nama* by Firdausi, *Visramiani* by Gurgani, *Layla and Majnun* by Nizami and a Georgian epic by Mose Khoneli *Amirandarejaniani*.

Diana Farrell notes that the work is dedicated to “fin’amor”. Consequently, we will start reviewing it with this definition of the concept.

A. J. Denomy, the researcher of the love lyrics of the troubadours, states that from the earlier troubadours, there existed a constant understanding of pure love (Fin’amors) [3, pp.142-149]. Andreas Cappelanus argues that a strong desire creates the essence of true love. After being satisfied, the desire decreases or disappears altogether. After this, pure love is replaced by “mixed love” (amor mixtus) [2, p.21]. If the main reason for the affair is sexual and the lovers are dishonest as well as insincere, we deal with “false love” (amars) [3, p. 143]. The troubadours did not exclude the possibility of adultery either [3, p.154].

Diana Farrell mentions that Rustaveli’s concept of pure love accords well with the twelfth-century French conception of fin’amors: 1) it is an ennobling passion; 2) it is linked to divine love; 3) it involves the nearly religious veneration of the beloved lady; 4) it requires humility before and deference to the lady as morally superior; 5) it requires service to the lady like that of a vassal to his lord; 6) it proves the lover’s worth; 7) it requires fidelity, discretion and patience; 8) it prolongs love’s desire by deferring fulfilment.

The American scholar discusses “The Art of Courtly Love” by Andreas Cappelanus in great detail and states that, hidden behind the ironic mask, Cappelanus expresses a number of controversial

ideas about love. Consequently, it is hard for the reader to select which idea the author finds true. Diana Farrell mentions that according to Cappellanus, a woman is not faithful in love and never responds to the love of a man by the same emotion [2, p. 52].

We would like to add that in this respect the similarity to the Rustvelian theory of love is apparent. Rustaveli also mentions that there exists a type of heartless love, which he refers to as "adultery", and advises a knight to avoid it.

"Keep clear of Woman, if you have the strength and self-mastery! She will play with you, she will charm you, she will build trust up between you and her - and then suddenly she will betray you and do you what harm she can... Never should a secret be told to a woman in confidence!" [8, p. 130]

Diana Farrell makes a contrastive analysis of, on the one hand, *The Man in the Panther Skin* (she refers to the text from Katharine Vivian's translation [7]) and *Visramiani* (she attests this work by the translation made in the Rustaveli epoch [5]). On the other hand, she compares and contrasts *The Knight in the Panther Skin* and *Layla and Majnun*. Farrell sees a principal difference between the concepts of love as expressed by Rustaveli and Gurgani in that the loving couple in *Visramiani* indulge in love before marriage whilst lovers from *The Man in the Panther Skin* reveal exemplary willpower and abstain from sexual love. Moreover, despite being married to Nestan, Tariel declares that he will not fulfil his conjugal duties unless he marries Avtandil to Tinatin.

Although we consider the conclusion of the American author principally correct, we believe that attention should also be paid to the fact that the true love in *The Man in the Panther Skin* does not exclude the desire for a sexual relationship. Before parting with Nestan after counselling with her, Tariel says:

"Then I rose to depart, but the princess besought me to stay with her. I longed to take her in my arms, but did not have the daring" [8, p. 66].

The fact is that the last meeting between Tinatin and Avtandil, before the latter leaves to help Tariel, evokes a variety of opinions from contemporary scholars. Taking into consideration the

multilayered nature of this passage, it is not excluded that Rustaveli here refers to the final relationship of lovers. The realisation of the fact that the lovers may face the final separation not excludes the expression of sacrifice in this form.

While analysing epics by Rustaveli, Gurgani and Nizami from the point of faithfulness to the lover, Farrell states that for *Layla and Majnun* faithfulness is of major importance and does not allow "exceptions" which we come across in the other two works [4, p. 21]. Under "exceptions" the American author considers, on the one hand, the marriage of Ramin and Gul, and on the other, the relationship between Patman and Avtandil.

There exists a different interpretation of the episode depicting the relationship between Avtandil and Patman in Rustavelian studies, which questions this fact as unfaithful [6]. In this episode the emotional state Avtandil is in reveals that he has to do what he is inwardly opposed to and which tortures him. However, the behaviour comes in accord with Avtandil's world view.

"You should rather do the contrary, and not obey the prompting of your desires". [7, p. 129]

Having compared the ways the concept of love is expressed in *The Man in the Panther Skin* and Persian epics, Diana Farrell comes to the conclusion that *The Man in the Panther Skin* differs from both *Visramiani* and *Layla and Majnun* in essential ways, and in these ways it is more closely akin to Western courtly love [4, p.21].

The American researcher singles out two leading elements in the formation of courtly love: the social-political reality in the times of William IX, Duke of Aquitaine and Robert of Arbrissel, in which the function of the ruler is given to the woman, who needs a good military person to defend the territories. This ideology brings about recognition of the woman's moral advantage over the man, service and deference of the man and the ennobling effect of the service on him.

While discussing the impact of the Arabic world on the birth of courtly love, Farrell puts forward several possible links between medieval Europe and the Muslim world: Mozarabs (Spanish Christians who had become arabized in culture), Norman Sicily and

marriages between the noble families from North Spain and the South of France [4, pp. 28-30]. Farrell also points out that contemplation only on the basis of suppositions, and thus no factual evidence, does not allow us to state whether the troubadour lyrics experienced the influence of Arabic literature, especially that of Arabic treatises on love.

Because of the scarcity of factual material the American researcher does not discuss the role of Neo-Platonism in relation to Western courtly love.

The author examines *The Man in the Panther Skin* in relation to the philosophical school of Neo-Platonism and considers that the Sun, as an image of the God as it appears to Rustaveli, is an obvious Platonist sign. Here Farrell refers to *The Republic* by Plato. She also argues that the Sun as a god is employed in the Persian epic *Shah-Nama* whose main hero Rustam is mentioned by Rustaveli once. The author states that the above mentioned image in *The Man in the Panther Skin* differs from the Persian epic, which points to Neo-Platonism.

Diana Farrell pays attention to the letter from Nestan, written to Tariel from the kaj's castle, which, according to the scholar, is written in a Neo-Platonic style. Besides the Neo-Platonic elements, Farrell finds here the characteristic features of courtly love, specifically, the urge expressed by Nestan encouraging Tariel to leave for India.

The author notes that the doctrine of Neo-Platonists regarding evil is expressed in the words of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite:

“Denys the Wise has revealed this arcane truth to us: “God sends good, and good only; evil is not his creation: he gives the bad but a moment, the good he wills to endure. He sustains his own excellence in its utter perfection” [8, p. 179].

At the same time, Diana Farrell notes that Rustaveli does not mention the founder of the Neo-Platonic school, Plotin [4, pp. 51-52].

The connection between Rustaveli's worldview and Neo-Platonism discussed by the American writer is based on Shalva

Nutsubidze's position regarding Rustaveli, as mentioned by Farrell herself [4, p. 47].

It is noteworthy to claim that in modern Rustvelian studies the theory according to which Rustaveli's world view is fully based on Neo-Platonism has not gained many followers. However, Neo-Platonism is considered to be one of the philosophical sources for Rustaveli, albeit in its Christian interpretation, through Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. It is also stated that, along with Christian theology, Rustaveli relied on Plato's and Aristotle's theories directly as well as through sources from late middle ages [10].

While summing up her work, Diana Farrell concludes that there is no visible direct influence of the troubadours and minnesängers of South-Western Europe on Rustaveli's philosophy. However, Neo-Platonism, which was the leading theory in Rustaveli's worldview, may have served as a common ground for all of them.

The researcher mentions that the models of the courtly love embodied both in Rustaveli's and William IX's works were created in similar social and political environments. Specifically, in Georgia as well as in the South of France there was a feudal society ruled by the woman.

As argued by the American author, the concept of love in *The Man in the Panther Skin* denotes more than the concept of courtly love. Rustaveli sees the lover in the image of the panther, which at the same time, is a symbolic embodiment of Tariel and Nestan's ardent love. Diana Farrell believes this to be a linking trait between the Georgian epic and Persian literature. The author concludes that *The Man in the Panther Skin* is a humanistic epic in which Western and Eastern literary elements co-exist.

The book by Diana Farrell is highly important as it carries the issues regarding Rustvelian studies into the international orbit. The author relies on the scientific literature of the second half of XX century dedicated to Rustavelian studies and, against this background, draws interesting conclusions regarding the connection of the epic by Rustaveli both to Oriental epic and Western courtly love. Her theory which states that the concept of love expressed in

the Georgian epic is closer to the Western courtly love than to the Oriental epic, is also of high importance.

The book "Courtly Love in the Caucasus: Rustaveli's Georgian Epic, *The Knight in the Panther Skin*" is an important acquisition for Rustvelian studies.

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