

კვლევები: ქართული ლიტერატურა  
STUDIES: GEORGIAN LITERATURE

## **Analysis of Two Lines from *The Man in the Panther's Skin* by Shota Rustveli against the Background of Its English Translated Versions**

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**Abstract:** Studying the text of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* by Shota Rustveli means the interpretation of its content as adequately as possible. Alongside with the scholarly analysis to understand the essence of the text, its translated version represents the fact of interpretation that requires critical analysis. Translations of "*The Man in the Panther's Skin*" are mainly based on those academic findings and data that Rustvelology had achieved and obtained by the time of their renderings in English.

According to the first Rustvelologist – Vakhtang VI, there had been many attempts of either "translating" or clarifying the poem, i. e. providing its ethical and philosophic interpretation. Respectively, before reviewing the poem concerning renderings, it is of high significance to determine the issues that Rustvelologists attempted to define and clarify through the researches conducted during centuries. The definition of adequacy of a rendering of the poem is possible, based on determining the significance or clarification of the Georgian text only.

The present article provides an analysis of a reflection of Neo-Platonism in the poem, based on one stanza. The teaching of Neo-Platonism about world unity meant the identity of God and the human being and acknowledgement of the absence of Evil as the substance, representing the main idea of the text to be analyzed.

The lines containing the above - referenced content are given under the Stanza #1492 (according to the edition by A. Baramidze, K. Keke- lidze and A. Shanidze, Tb., 1957) as compared with all its translated English versions.

„ამ საქმესა დაფარულსა ბრძენი დივნოს გააცხადებს:  
ღმერთი კარგსა მოავლინებს და ბოროტსა არ დაბადებს...“

English translations of the poem were made by M. Wardrop (1912), V. Urushadze (1968), R. Stevenson (1977), K. Vivian (1977) and L. Coffin (2015). K. Vivian offered the shortened rendering of the poem, under which the Stanza #1492 is omitted.

Reviewing of the stanza to be analyzed in the context of its English renderings aims at determining how the philosophic idea of Neo-Platonism was reflected in the translation. This is of high significance for defining the adequacy of renderings of the specific extract from the text.

**Key words:** *Divnos (Dionysius the Areopagite), Neo-Platonism, The Man in the Panther's Skin, English translations of Rustvelis' Poem.*

The essential pre-condition for the comprehensive study of the text of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* by Shota Rustveli is an adequate interpretation of the text based on scientific research. Along with the scientific exploration of the essence of a text, the rendering in another language remains the way of interpretation.

With consideration of that attitude, we will attempt to represent the analysis of two following lines of one stanza (#1498) from the poem by Shota Rustveli against the background of its English translated versions:

„ამ საქმესა დაფარულსა ბრძენი დივნოს გააცხადებს:  
ღმერთი კარგსა მოავლინებს და ბოროტსა არ დაბადებს,  
ავსა წამ-ერთ შუამოკლებს, კარგსა ხან-გრძლად  
გააკვლადებს.“

თავსა მისსა უკეთესსა უზადო-ჰყოფს, არ აზადებს“

[6, p. 310]

The selection of these lines in this article was determined by the following factors: this stanza contains the main idea of Neo-Platonism as the leading philosophical doctrine of the poem. It is worth mentioning that the author of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* was aware of not only the Neo-Platonic tradition, but also of the Bible and Koran, Eastern Church, and Sufism. This can be proved by reflecting Sufism themes in the poem (mystic love towards God was idealized in Arabic Sufism that must have contributed to the creation of Rustveli's Love Theory [8, p. 402]).

Neo-Platonism in Georgian thinking was represented by scholarly works of Pseudo-Dionysius who was the first to elaborate the Neo-Platonism teaching developed later under philosophy of Ioane Petritsi. According to the outstanding Georgian philosopher and translator, Shalva Nutsubidze, Georgian thinker of the V century – Petre Iberi, an author of Areopagite books, was also Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite [11, pp. 6-7].

The poem by Rustaveli represents the apotheosis of this world's love and the basic form of representation of kindness is actually the love of this world elevated up to the divine level, at which the object of love is a human being. The thesis on deification of a human being, i.e. theory on so-called "Theosis" is represented in the works by Petre Iberi – Pseudo-Dionysius, who provides the basis for the possibility of God to be humanized and the human being to be deified [11, pp. 86-87]. "The Direct Road to Good" by Petre Iberi was one of the achievements of Ancient philosophy, and the idea of "good" was the essence of the unity of existence, the key to which was identified by Neo-Platonists and was reflected by Rustveli in the stanza we are interested in: "*God sends good, He creates no evil*", i.e. God creates only good and that is in compliance with the Bible.

The teaching of Neo-Platonism on the world unity meant equalising God with a human being and rejecting existence of evil, since the latter does not exist separately, as the substance, and the scarcity of good is the main idea of the text to be analyzed. The worldview of the author of *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, in general,

justifies deep conceptualization of Ancient philosophers (Plato, Aristotle) as well as of Neo-Platonism (Pseudo Dionysius the Areopagite) theosophy [9, p. 55].

This article aims at studying the above -reviewed two lines from one stanza by Rustveli and comparing them to the English translations of the poem by M. Wardrop (1912), V. Urushadze (1968), R. Stevenson (1977), K. Vivian (1977) and L. Coffin (2015).

Generally, literature is restricted by linguistic limitations and without translation, it would be impossible for the world to get familiarized with it. That is why the correct perception and adequate translation of Rustveli's poem into foreign languages, in particular, in English, is of crucial significance, as the latter represents the widespread language worldwide. All English renderings of the poem are based on those findings and data that Rustvelology had achieved by the time of their rendering. Rustvelology, as a branch of philology, started by the Georgian king, Vakhtang VI, who studied and printed the poem as early as in 1712. A century later it was Teimuraz Bagrationi, who offered meticulous definitions and explanations for each stanza, paying particular attention to the lines and significant words. Nowadays we mostly refer to the editions published in 1951 and 1957 as a result of studies and editorial work by A. Baramidze, K. Kekelidze and A. Shanidze [6], alongside with the one offered later by N. Natadze [7].

With regard to the English translation of the poem, it is to be noted that whilst representing *The Man in the Panther's Skin* at an international level, it is highly important for the philosophical ideas expressed by Rustveli in the poem to be reflected in translations in an adequate and appropriate manner which is not always true.

European readers were acquainted with the adequate representation of the text of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* by Marjory Scott Wardrop, whose translation of the poem was first published in England in 1912, following her death. The Preface to her translation was written by her brother, a famous diplomat and researcher Sir Oliver Wardrop ( the preface, along with the comments and appendices was enclosed to the first edition by Sir O. Wardrop. However,

the text may not have been elaborated only by O. Wardrop. While translating the text of the poem, M. Wardrop made the footnotes and expressed her opinions regarding the issues related to the text. The comments made by Wardrop have never been studied by researchers, although they comprise interesting findings and data with regard to the above-mentioned issues [1, p. 11]) and which is rendered by researchers (studies by T. Sakhokia, A. Gatserelia and S. Tsaishvili) as one of the best works written on Rustveli.

It is worth mentioning that at the threshold of XIX and XX centuries, when Marjory Wardrop started translation of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* into English, Rustvelology had not had clarified and explained a range of issues related to the poem. The complex problems connected to the comprehension of artistic, metaphoric, rhythmic and worldview issues were not resolved either. That was why Sir Oliver Wardrop, British diplomat, and a high-rank representative of the United Kingdom to the South Caucasus and Georgia, deemed that the translation of his sister – Marjory Wardrop was “a contribution to Georgian studies in Europe, a stepping-stone to help others in a difficult task” [12, p. 14]. And this corresponded to reality since having studied the Georgian language, Marjory Wardrop managed to comprehend the linguistic phenomena of Rustaveli. Her translation also provided future translators of the poem into Russian and European languages, with the proper guidance.

It needs to be noted that M. Wardrop manages to reflect the substantial essence of the original text into her translation effortlessly by applying translating skills of the highest level.

### **ორიგინალი**

ამ საქმესა დაფარულსა  
ბრძენი დივნოს გააცხადებს:  
ღმერთი კარგსა მოავლინებს  
და ბოროტსა არ დაბადებს...

### **1. Translation by M. Wardrop**

This hidden thing Divnos the sage  
reveals:  
God sends good, He creates  
no evil...[12, p. 329]

This is how the lines to be analyzed under the present article are translated by M. Wardrop:

M. Wardrop suggests „**this hidden thing**“ for “ამ საქმესა დაფარულსა”, which represents the adequate translation of the respective line.

The name “Divnos” is also maintained in the translation; hence the translator here complies with the principle of the untranslatability of personal names, unlike other translators, who unveiled the identity of Divnos, i.e. of Dionysius the Areopagite.

In the second line M. Wardrop adequately and precisely reflected the essence of the original text in her translation and thus represented the attitude of Dionysius towards Good and Evil. This also complies with the modern methodology of translation studies, i.e. when the original and the translated texts are evaluated as per representation and realization of at least four types of information (substantial-factual, substantial-conceptual, sub-textual and substantial-representational) [4, p. 288].

In the second half of XX century, the translation of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* was made by Venera Urushadze, who had contributed much to the translation theory by translating a number of samples of Georgian poetry into English. Her translation of the poem was first published by the Publishing House “Soviet Georgia” in Tbilisi in 1968. This translation was preceded by the translator's preface and the introduction by famous English Kartvelologist David M. Lang. The editors of the translation were Kevin Crossly-Holland and Niko Kiasashvili [14].

The initiation of the new translation of the poem was based on objective reasons. According to Kevin Crossly-Holland, there were few copies of the English translation by Wardrop available. Moreover, the need for the new translation arose due to the recent changes in the English language [1, p. 31].

According to V. Urushadze, she was in debt to Marjory Wardrop, since the translation by Wardrop had served as a stepping-stone in the difficult task [14, p. 8].

Here is the stanza in the translation by V. Urushadze:

### ორიგინალი

ამ საქმესა დაფარულსა  
ბრძენი დივნოს გააცხადებს:  
ღმერთი კარგსა მოავლინებს  
და ბოროტსა არ დაბადებს...

### №2. Translation by V. Urushadze

Dionysius the sage has  
revealed the following wisdom to us:  
“God is the giver of good and not  
the creator of evil.....[14, p. 151]

The first line of the stanza in V. Urushadze’s translation is close to the original from the point of view of the meaning. However, unlike the opinion expressed by Rustveli, who represents the teaching of Areopagite as an eternal phenomenon, the same doctrine is represented by the translator as an action that already occurred the past, i.e. the action that happened only once ( has *revealed*). There are inclusions by the translator in the text: e.g. „ the *following wisdom*“. There is neither the word “following”, nor “wisdom” (although *wisdom* may mean the *thing*) in the original text.

In the second line, V. Urushadze's variant is closer to the original and expresses the attitude of Dionysius the Areopagite to Good and Evil, maintained by Rustveli in his text. This certainly speaks in favour of the translation of these specific lines.

The translator follows the line by Rustveli from the standpoint of the meaning of the text and approximates the translated version to its original. By adding her own words and expressions, V. Urushadze intensifies the dynamic nature of the text, without making substantial changes to the content. This is a positive side of the translation since neither substantiality nor essence of the specific philosophic doctrine (Neo-Platonism) is violated.

In the XX century, the poem was translated in prose by an English Kartvelologist, Robert Stevenson. [1, p.10]. It took R. Stevenson almost 25 years to translate the poem, and this translation was published by UNESCO in America, in 1977 [3, p 152]. R. Stevenson's translation was published with a very interesting work enabling the readers to get familiarized with the challenges arising in the process of translation and the possible ways for their solution.

Below there are the lines of the line in question as translated R. Stevenson:

**Original**

ამ საქმესა დაფარულსა ბრძენი  
დივნოს გააცხადებს:  
ღმერთი კარგსა მოავლინებს და  
ბოროტსა არ დაბადებს...

**№3. Translation by R. Stevenson**

Denys the wise has revealed  
this arcane truth to us:  
God sends good, and good only;  
evil is not his creation. [13, p. 179]

It is worth mentioning that R. Stevenson transposed Divnos as Denys, which is different from all of the other versions suggested by other translators. The basis for such a decision might have been *Dennys* (*Dennis*, *Denis*), originated from the Greek-Roman name that represents the modern interpretation of Divnos.

Concerning the issue that we are interested in, in particular, the Neo-platonic teaching, it needs to be noted that the main essence of the lines under the study is neither lost nor changed in Stevenson's rendering.

Among the translations of Rustveli's poem, the fourth variant of the translation, done by the English writer and translator Katherine Vivian, is also significant. The fact that K. Vivian studied the Georgian language and translated the poem in English in tight cooperation with Georgian Rustvelologists is of high importance (S. Serebryakov, M. Karbelashvili, M. Gigineishvili, etc.) [1, p. 69]. In 1972 Vivian arrived in Tbilisi and, with the help of Georgian scholars, she elaborated and revised her translation which was published by "Folio Society" in London in 1977. It is also known that she was assisted by Academician A. Baramidze concerning the understanding of the complex language of the poem.

Unlike previous translations, Vivian's rendering represents a popular, so-called shortened version of the poem. According to the translator, it is a "free prosaic rendering" of the poem that somehow clarifies missing of certain passages in this version. With regard to the lines under question, this stanza is also omitted in her translation. Therefore, we are unable to explore how K. Vivian



understood the stanza referring to the idea of Neo-Platonism in the original text.

The recent translation of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* by an American Poet and Translator Lyn Coffin was published in Tbilisi in 2015. According to the publisher N. Alkhazishvili, for this translation, L. Coffin employed the text published in 1966 by the State Commission for the Ascertaining of the Text (editorial board: I. Abashidze, A. Baramidze, P. Ingorokva, A. Shanidze and G. Tsereteli). According to N. Alkhazishvili, the text was compared to the so-called "School Edition with Commentaries" published by Nodar Natadze. The Prologue to the poem was translated first using the word-for-word translation by Gia Jokhadze. Later Prof. Dodona Kiziria prepared the verbatim translation of the whole poem. Critical comments and corrections suggested by N. Natadze were also incorporated into the text. The text benefited from the comments and suggestions provided by Prof. Levan Gigineishvili [13, p. 358], who also wrote the Afterward to that text.

Rendering of the poem represents an attempt to translate the poem in verse. The original meaning, in some cases, is violated concerning various parameters of the text related to the factual, meaning, sub-textual or representational aspects. Unfortunately, Lyn Coffin does not speak Georgian that might be one of the hindering factors regarding the understanding the depth of the text. Moreover, it is obvious that this translation does not take into consideration successful interpretations and findings of previous translators. Below is given the stanza as translated by L. Coffin:

**Original**

ამ საქმესა დაფარულსა  
ბრძენი დიუნოს გააცხადებს:  
ღმერთი კარგსა მოავლი-  
ნებს და ბოროტსა არ  
დაბადებს...

**N25. Translation by Lyn Coffin**

This hidden truth was revealed to us  
by Dionysus, the wise  
God creates only good;  
He lets no evil in the world arise...[15,  
p. 318]

As it was noted above, the attitude of Dionysius the Areopagite towards Good and Evil is associated with eternity. As for Lyn

Coffin, she expresses the same idea in her rendering in the past tense, by which she narrows down the depth of Neo-Platonism, expressed by Rustveli in his poem. It is also worth mentioning that translations of these specific lines, suggested by V. Urushadze and L. Coffin, are closer to each other rather than to the original text: “*Dionysius the sage has revealed the following wisdom to us*” (V. Urushadze), and “*This hidden truth was revealed to us by Dionysus, the wise*” (L. Coffin).

In the second line of the same stanza, the translator expresses the attitude of Dionysus to God and Evil in a correct tense (present simple). However, the main content of the line related to Neo-Platonism is breached. The original text says: “*God... creates no evil*”, whereas the rendering by L. Coffin maintains: “*he lets no evil in the world arise*”, that does not correspond to the above referenced and reviewed Neo-Platonism thinking about Good and Evil. Moreover, this interpretation is against the Christian doctrine. While reading the stanza, an English-speaking reader of the variant by L. Coffin might ask: *if God does not let evil in the world arise*, then how is it possible that evil does exist on earth? This is an example of how the unjustified content maybe created in the translated version of the text.

Because Lyn Coffin, who does not speak Georgian, utilized the explanations and clarifications by N. Natadze while translating, it is interesting whether she shared the interpretations offered by N. Natadze or not. Here emerges the following question: what was the interpretation by Natadze for the above-mentioned lines? We have checked the interpretation of the lines by Natadze and found his understating of Rustveli’s text concerning Neo-Platonism correct. It seems to us that Coffin was not aware of the comments by Natadze and other Georgian scholars. That is why she did not share correct interpretations of the line in question although it was translated adequately in all English renderings, suggested first by M. Wardrop and later by V. Urushadze and R. Stevenson.

Along with all the above-reviewed translations, the Russian rendering of the lines by Shalva Nutsbidze is also of considerable

interest: „Мудрый Дивнос открывает дела скрытого исток: лишь добро являет миру, а не зло рождает бог... ” [10, p.330]. Nutsubidze was an acknowledged Rustvelologist and Philosopher and Neo-platonic doctrine was precisely and adequately translated by him.

In the context of the stanza in question, we may conclude that the translation by M. Wardrop represents the most adequate interpretation of the essence. While renderings by V. Urushadze and R. Stevenson of the particular stanza might be considered successful, the content of the same lines by L. Coffin is substantially breached. English readers will be looking forward to a better version of *“The Man in the Panther’s Skin”* of our century for the poem to contribute to the world culture and be granted the deserved recognition at the international level.

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