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Courtly Love in the Caucasus:

Rustaveli's Georgian Epic, *The Knight in the Panther Skin*



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Dedicated to *fin' amor*.

Abstract

The Knight in the Panther Skin by Shota Rustaveli is the great medieval (ca. 1200) epic of Georgia, and its most distinctive feature is courtly or romantic love, which is its basic motivating force. This work seeks to establish in which respects *The Knight in the Panther Skin* resembles Western courtly love, and what the explanation for this resemblance might be. In this endeavor I have had to challenge a common (mis-) conception that Western courtly love was essentially illicit love.

One can easily demonstrate that the literary roots of *The Knight in the Panther Skin* lie in Persian literature rather than in direct contact with Western courtly love, but the reason for the resemblance to Western courtly love is more problematic. Various possibilities are entertained: namely, (1) that Arab love poetry gave rise to it in Georgia (and possibly also in the West, as has been held); (2) that Neoplatonism produced or constituted a philosophic underpinning for courtly love and that it was transmitted to Georgia and/or Western Europe (a) by Arab Neoplatonists; (b) by Western Christian Neoplatonists or (c) by Byzantine Neoplatonists. A third possibility is (3) that it arose due to social and political conditions.

And what were the social and political circumstances in Georgia and in Western Europe which, at the same historical period, produced and elaborated a culture so deferential to the ladies? And which, being absent in the Islamic world, did not produce courtly love there?

In Georgia a sovereign queen presided in the era of Georgia's greatest power, wealth and extent. Feudal servitors crowded the court, eager to gain honors and riches for themselves through preferment by the queen, virtually guaranteeing a cult of adoration of the queen. It is Sovereign Queen Tamar to whom Rustaveli dedicates his poem, and to her that he declares his undying love. In Provence, where there were many feudal heiresses, a similar incentive to "please the ladies" prevailed.

No direct influence from the troubadours and *minnesänger* of Southwestern Europe can be found. The evidence does not support Arab love poetry as a source of or conduit for courtly love, nor can Arab Neoplatonism have played a role. Byzantine Neoplatonism, however, was prominent in the courtly culture of Rustaveli's time, and the social and political conditions in Georgia likewise were favorable to the rise of a culture of courtly love. Thus both intellectual and socio-political conditions favored the blooming of courtly love in twelfth-century Georgia.

Synopsis

At the outset, King Rostevan of “Arabia” has crowned his only heir and daughter, Tinatin. Avtandil, a young military commander and son of the commander-in-chief, aspires to her love and hand. At the celebration feast of Tinatin's coronation, the king's party has an encounter with a mysterious knight clad in a panther's skin, who is challenged by, and kills some of Rostevan's men. The king is distressed that no one is able to discover the identity of this stranger. Queen Tinatin sends Avtandil on a quest to find the strange knight. He is to return within three years.

The knight in the panther skin is from “India,” a larger neighboring country. He is Tariel, son of its chief military commander, taken into the royal household when the king and queen had as yet no child. He was raised as crown prince—alongside the later-born princess—so long as both were children. When as a grown man he again beheld the king's daughter, Nestan-Darejan, he fell unconscious; she also was smitten. She sent him a letter by her handmaid, Asmat, in which she called upon him to do a love-service: to take an army against the Khatavians, who were delinquent in payment of tribute. Nestan and Tariel met and made vows to each other on a “sacred book,” the Quran. Though he completed his mission against Khataeti, the king and queen, apparently forgetting their implied promises to Tariel, offered their daughter in marriage to the prince of “Persia.” Nestan called upon Tariel to kill this prince if indeed he should arrive to claim her—lest India become a pawn of Persia—and this Tariel did. Nestan's aunt and chaperone, Davar, was blamed for this turn of events and threatened with death. She in turn blamed Nestan and had her spirited away by *kaji* (sorcerers or demons).

Tariel set off with his followers and the faithful Asmat to find Nestan, but his search had no success. When Avtandil found him he was living a cave, deserted by all but Asmat, and had completely “lost heart.” The two took an oath of brotherhood, but nearly three years having elapsed, Avtandil was obliged to report back to Tinatin.

Upon returning to his friend, Avtandil found that Tariel, in an unexpected encounter, had killed a female panther—a beautiful beast in which he now sees the grace, beauty, and fire of his lost love. Tariel being emotionally exhausted and depressed, Avtandil set out alone to seek Nestan-Darejan and soon heard reports of sitings. The first came from Pridon, king of Mulgansharo, with whom he also swears an oath of brotherhood. At last Avtandil got definite information of Nestan's whereabouts from the wife of a rich merchant, Patman. With her he had an amorous encounter, which he justifies to himself because it was only to get the information needed for his quest. She helps him get word to Nestan-Darejan, who is prisoner

of the Kajis (a race of sorcerers) in their fortress. Doubting her rescuers' success, Nestan sends a message pleading that they not risk it. In vain, of course.

Avtandil now bows to Tariel, who takes the lead in the attack on the Kaji fortress. The attack is a success, and a great happy entourage returns to Arabia, where two weddings are celebrated. Asmat is rewarded with a fief of her own. Nestan-Darejan's parents have died, but the people of India welcome Tariel and Nestan, choosing him by acclamation to rule alongside her. The vow of brotherhood between the men is extended to vows of peace and brotherhood between the two realms. Love and peace reign supreme.

Introduction

During the reign of Georgia's Sovereign Queen Tamar, and probably between 1189 and 1207, Shota Rustaveli produced his great epic, *The Knight in the Panther Skin*.¹ The Western literary world has not taken much notice of it. Perhaps this is not surprising, since the Western world has taken little notice of Georgia itself, which lies on the periphery of our Eurocentric culture, perennially under the rule of some stronger neighbor. Nor are we quite sure that Georgian culture—Christian, but deriving from Byzantine Christianity and bearing many marks of Persian, Arab, and Turkic culture—fully belongs to our world.

It may come as a surprise, then, at one's first encounter with *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, that it is bathed in the familiar colors of courtly love. That is, it exhibits a set of the chivalric and romantic traits that are considered to be among the defining characteristics of Western literature and society. How did it come to be that *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, so much akin to the lyric poetry of the troubadours and *minnesänger*, to the romances of Chrétien de Troyes and Gottfried von Strassburg, should put in so strong an appearance in an area so distant from Western Europe and, at the time (ca. 1200), under the influence of the Muslim Near East? How, indeed, if there was no direct contact? Neither Georgian nor Western literary scholars postulate more than fleeting contact between Georgia and Provence and generally credit Georgia with having invented her own courtly love, "freshly and unaided."²

This essay seeks to establish in which respects *The Knight in the Panther Skin* does resemble Western courtly love and what might explain this resemblance, as well as any differences. In characterizing Western courtly love, I have relied primarily upon the love lyrics of the early troubadours (eleventh to mid-twelfth century), *The Art of Courtly Love* by Andreas Capellanus (1170s–1180s), the Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Troyes (1170s–1190s), and the prologue of Gottfried von Strassburg's

Tristan (1210). In this endeavor I have challenged a common misconception of Western courtly love as essentially illicit love.³ That is important to my thesis because, if it were true, *The Knight in the Panther Skin* would differ from the Western tradition particularly in this respect.

One quickly discovers that Rustaveli was consciously writing in the tradition of the Persian epic, which was preeminent in the Muslim world in his time. I will explore (1) the ways in which *The Knight in the Panther Skin* resembles the Persian epics he cites and how it differs from them with respect to courtly love. Here I rely for comparisons upon the *Shah-Nama* by Firdausi, *Visramiani* by Gorgani, *Layla and Majnun* by Nizami—plus the Georgian epic by Mose Khoneli, *Amirandarejaniani*.

Whether Western courtly love had its origin in themes and poetic forms borrowed from Islamic Spain is a much-explored but not entirely resolved question. (2) I will review the evidence, and also explore the possibility of the influence of Arab treatises on love. Chief among these are: *A Treatise on Love* by Avicenna (Ibn Sina, d. 1037) and *The Ring of the Dove* by Ibn Hazm (d. 1064). This topic will lead to: (3) Neoplatonism, which will be examined as it influenced both the Christian and Muslim traditions. *The Knight in the Panther Skin* was certainly influenced by the teachings of Ioann Petritsi, the great Georgian Neoplatonist and translator of Greek Neoplatonists.

(4) Finally, though there may have been a courtly love “contagion” abroad in the twelfth century, not all those exposed to it caught the “infection.” Why not? Do any special political, social, or economic circumstances pertain in the areas where courtly love flourished? In particular, did the status of, and social dynamic for, elite women play a role here? One cannot fail to be impressed by the role of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughters in spreading courtly love in northern France and England, nor by the fact that Rustaveli dedicated his poem to Georgia's great Queen Tamar and her consort, Davit Soslan, proclaiming with reference to her: “A lion's cub is a lion still, be it male or female.”⁴

Part I: Courtly Love Compared: Georgia and the South of France

“I speak of the Love that is highest, Heaven's in kind,” Rustaveli tells us in the prologue to *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, “Love that exalts and gives men wings for upward flight” (verse 20, 36). Nothing is more basic to the conception of courtly love than that love is an ennobling passion and calls men to great deeds in their striving to be worthy of the lady's love. “*Fin'amour*—pure love, noble love,

true love”—represented in the twelfth century a new conception of love between a woman and a man (verse 20, 36).

What prepares one to attain “the Love that is highest, Heaven’s in kind?” asks Rustaveli (verse 20, 36). (For it cannot be approached directly.) It is “hardly to be described or by the tongue expressed.” “Not by the thinker’s wit is that one Love attained.” No, it is *human passions* of which the poet sings, passions that, “not impure, imitate the divine and to the heights aspire” (verse 21, 37). Like Dante’s Beatrice, this love leads the lover onward and upward to divine love. However, Rustaveli proceeds, there are in the Arabic tongue, “madmen” driven mad by a passion they cannot satisfy or quench.⁵ “Some in their high ascent approach to the divine; others here below flutter in beauty’s flame” (verse 22, 37). At any rate love is no mere game; it is not dalliance, not idle sport. “Love-play without love detestable I find” (verses 25–26, 37–38). Love has nothing to do with lust or lechery, but is miles apart—in no way do they mingle (verse 24, 37). Love is distinguished by constancy; whether near or far from his beloved, the lover is faithful. He is patient if his love is not at once returned: “Constancy becomes a lover; not faithless he, nor in absence ever to venery inclined, long-languishing though the below’d upon him frown” (verse 25, 37).

Andreas Capellanus, ever the wry wit, in *The Art of Courtly Love* defines love as suffering, emphasizing the fears of each party of losing the other and the constant conniving to see and be alone with the beloved.⁶ A generation later, among the German *minnesänger*, Gottfried of Strassburg in *Tristan and Isolde* wrote of “pure love” and “noble hearts” in the same idealistic vein: “Love is so blissful a thing, so blessed an endeavor” but “He that never had the sorrow of love never had the joy of it either.” Moreover, “I see so few who, for their lover’s sake will suffer pure longing in their hearts—and all for the wretched sorrow that now and then lies hidden there!”⁷ In other words, one must be willing to make oneself vulnerable in order to have the joy of love. Rustaveli’s opening stanzas implore God to grant him—besides the strength to resist evil—“love’s desire until death to cherish” (verse 2, 34). It is this *desire* that is desirable; desire that for Rustaveli is the essence of pure love, as it was for the troubadours.⁸

Whence this desire? Love is kindled by beauty. Rustaveli praises the beauty of Queen Tamar, whose jet hair, ruby cheeks, and crystal gaze have set his heart aflame. To his “dazzling Sun,” Tamar (and to her consort, the “Lion,” Davit Soslan), Rustaveli dedicates his poem (verses 3 and 10, 34–35). As a vassal must serve his lord, so the lover is called to serve his beloved. “He shall court her, toil for her . . . , singing for her alone [whom he sets above all else]” (verse 18, 36). Poetry is the

service Rustaveli is most fitted to perform, and tells us “from the loose pearls of a Persian tale” he has composed his epic, has “strung a necklace” in the Georgian tongue (verse 9, 35). (No such Persian tale is known.)

In *The Knight in the Panther Skin* there are two sets of lovers; in each case the young woman is a princess who, as the only child, is to inherit the throne in these neighboring realms. Their respective lovers are feudal vassals and in line to become chief military commanders of the realm. The objective of both young pairs is marriage, which is realized in the end. Both pairs suffer in each other's absence, conceal their mutual devotion from all but their most intimate friend and ally, and are faithful to one another in mind and heart. One of the lovers succumbs to physical relations with a married woman of the merchant class, but only for the sake of receiving intelligence on the whereabouts of his friend's beloved, who has been captured and spirited away. Thus he too is “faithful” to his true love. Faithfulness to the love relationship is the acid test of true love. It is considered psychologically impossible to be “in love” with two persons at one time. Rustaveli agreed entirely with Andreas Capellanus that men who are “slaves to . . . lust” are “not fit to bear the arms of love” (Prologue, verse 25, 37).⁹ For scholars of *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, the question of romantic love outside the bonds of marriage has not been a problem, as the leading characters are single, aim to marry, and do marry.¹⁰

A. J. Denomy, a notable scholar of the troubadour love lyric, has argued that from the very beginning—from Guillaume (William) IX of Poitiers (1071–1127)—there has existed a constant conception and tradition of pure love (*fin'amors*).¹¹ The texts—that is, the poetry of the early troubadours, dating from the early twelfth century—concur on the conception of pure love as “arising from contemplation of the beauty of the beloved” and “effecting a union of the minds and hearts” of the lovers.¹² This “pure love” is sensual and permits the delights of kissing and touching, seeing one another in the nude, lying beside one another nude—everything, that is, short of sexual intercourse.¹³

According to Andreas Capellanus, desire is the essence of true love; its satisfaction weakens or ends desire. Then pure love is replaced by “mixed” love, *amor mixtus*, although mixed love is also good if practiced by faithful lovers.¹⁴ But when “success” in terms of sexual conquest is the object, when lovers are unfaithful, duplicitous, or venal, then this is “false love”—*amars*—and it is the source of great evil. It gives a bad name to love and is at the root of much social evil.¹⁵ In fact, the troubadours take on social reform with their concept of *fin'amors*: Love, according to Marcabru, had become promiscuous, venal, and unrestrained. This false love that springs from lust and consists in the physical possession of women for its own sake,

had made “strumpets of women and lechers of men.”¹⁶ All that was praiseworthy in mankind was thereby debased. In its wake had come perversity, infidelity, cowardice, cupidity, and niggardliness.

If “mixed love” is still praiseworthy, if it is a love of worth and a power for virtue, still “the source of all good things,”—can adulterous love ever be so regarded? Yes, apparently. The troubadour Bernard Marti, in a poem attacking false love, admits that a married lady may have a courtly lover, but only one. To her husband she is legally and morally (according to the requirements of the church) obliged to submit, regardless of love; but she may be faithful in love to her courtly lover.¹⁷

In the Western tradition, the fundamental concept that “love is an ennobling passion” is not accepted by several scholars who find courtly love immoral, distasteful, and heretical because (a) by condoning adultery it conflicts with Christian precepts, and (b) that in its “veneration of the lady” it created a “cult of woman” or “religion of love” that conflicts with Christianity.¹⁸

General agreement exists that a code of social behavior—chivalry and “courtesy”—pertain, that the knight owes his lady “service” in the form of brave deeds or, indeed, whatever service the lady requires of him. This is obviously modeled on the relationship between lord and vassal. “Humility” is also not a controversial attribute; the lover is humbly deferential before his lady as she stands on a higher moral and—often—social plane than he.

Apart from the wholesale rejection of courtly love on grounds of the sin of adultery, the controversy in Western literature has focused on whether romantic love is possible only between people who are not married to one another. The strong association of courtly love with extramarital relationships in Western literature is due to the fact that the man who coined the term, Gaston Paris (1883), was writing about a particular story: Chrétien de Troyes’ *Knight of the Cart*, which pertains to the illicit love of Lancelot and Guinevere. It was Gaston Paris who created the association of “courtly love” with adulterous and furtive love. The story of Tristan and Isolde also features adulterous love, but there are a great many medieval romances, including most of those from the pen of Chrétien de Troyes, in which the lovers marry (and continue to love), or are seeking to marry. *Erec and Enide* and *The Knight with the Lion* are examples, but they have never enjoyed the popularity of the Lancelot-Guinevere tales. (Chrétien de Troyes also presents the same-sex friendship of Gawain and Yvain as love, as well as the devotion of the Lady-in-Waiting Lunette to her mistress, Laudine.) Subsequent scholars usually have generalized from Gaston Paris’ use of the term “courtly love,” ignoring the fact that his reference was specific.

The responsibility for perpetuating the notion that romantic love necessarily occurs outside the bonds of marriage falls in large measure upon *The Art of Courtly Love* by Andreas Capellanus, an effect that may have been unintended on his part. The translation of his Latin title, *De arte honeste amandi*, is unfortunate, and has been a barrier to clear thinking on the subject. Literally his title means “the art of loving honorably,” and might have been better rendered as *The Art of True Love*, as closer to his terms *amor purus* and *fin' amor*. The English title has also contributed to misunderstanding by binding his treatise willy-nilly to the definition of courtly love as adulterous love. Occasionally this misunderstanding has extended to associating Andreas's little handbook with Ovid's treatise, *The Art of Love*, in which the lover is frankly manipulative and duplicitous.

Andreas Capellanus's treatise is delivered by multiple “voices” expressing inconsistent messages. The authorial voice seems to shift between an ironic and a straightforward manner of discourse. Many readers have escaped from the thicket of contradictions by lighting upon Andreas's thirty-one enumerated “Rules of Love,” which come near the end of the text and might be supposed to summarize the treatise. Rule No. 1 reads: “Marriage is no excuse for not loving.”¹⁹ On this slender peg hangs the conclusion that courtly love is essentially adulterous, though the artful ambiguity of the statement ought to be a red flag. The thirty-one rules are preceded by a chapter titled “Various Decisions in Love Cases,” in which absurdly legalistic reports are delivered to a “Court of Love.” The pronouncements of this “court” are hostile to the idea of married love. The peculiar formulation of Rule No. 1 reflects a “case” before the court concerning a woman who refuses a lover because she claims to love and be loved by her husband. The court declares that “love can exert no power between husband and wife,” and thus delivers a verdict against the lady's claim (17). It is in this context that “Marriage is no excuse for not loving” acquires a double meaning: one may, in fact, love one's spouse. Or—if one does not, and given the political nature of marriage alliances at the time, it cannot be expected—one may love faithfully one person outside of marriage. Love is its own justification—quite a modern view of romantic love!

Much of Andreas's book is written alternately in the voices of “a woman” and “a man.” The woman argues that romantic love can continue within marriage: “I ought to choose a man to enjoy my embraces who can be to me both husband and lover, because no matter what the definition of love may say, love seems to be a great desire to enjoy carnal pleasure with someone, and nothing prevents this feeling existing between husband and wife” (18). The man counters with arguments based on Holy Writ and the church, to wit: “a too-ardent lover, as we are taught by the apostolic

law, is an adulterer with his own wife” (19). This voice continues in a forbiddingly religious vein, demonstrating that “if you choose to serve God you must give up all worldly things,” even “the enjoyment of good company and of encouraging others to do works of love” (20). This seems to be an ironic statement, implying that the church’s precepts deny all joy and are impossible to live with. Indeed, the man’s voice concludes: “I believe you would do better to enjoy love thoroughly than to lie to God under cloak of some pretense. I believe . . . that God cannot be seriously offended by love” (20). This man (the author?) continues by recommending chaste love as “pure love—omitting the final solace,” but allowing (within this definition), kissing, embracing and “modest” nude contact. Should a couple “not omit the final solace,” even their “mixed love” (*amor mixtus*), while posing greater risks to both persons, is also “real” love and like *amor purus* is also “the source of all good things.” The case is sealed with an ironic “test”: in *The Parable of the Two Suitors*, a woman is advised to tell two suitors that they must choose between her upper and lower halves. By their answers she will know which truly loves her! (21–22).

Both Chrétien de Troyes and Andreas Capellanus were courtiers at the court of Marie, countess of Champagne, Eleanor of Aquitaine’s daughter. Both were writing to please the countess: Chrétien confesses that “the matter and the meaning” of his works were dictated by his patroness.²⁰ Accordingly, in *The Art of Courtly Love* we read about a “Court of Love” presided over by a “Queen of Love,” who delivers rulings according to the “Rules of Love” as promulgated by a “King of Love” (chap. 8, 34–43). The “Queen of Love” and judge in this court cites the Countess Marie repeatedly, but in ambiguous terms: “We *dare not oppose* [emphasis mine] the opinion of the Countess of Champagne, who ruled that love can exert no power between husband and wife” (chap. 7, 34).

Both Andreas Capellanus and Chrétien de Troyes would seem to write with tongue in cheek, shifting between sly humor and forthright statements that carry the weight of their own convictions. In several places Capellanus seems to be mocking Marie of Champagne’s well-publicized convictions with respect to love, implying that she treated love as an idle game played by courtiers. He juxtaposes his own convictions with respect to loving honorably, nobly—*honeste*. *De arte honeste amandi* resembles Machiavelli’s *The Prince* in that its quotable maxims display a cynicism that is in many cases belied by a close reading of the examples. The explanation for the statements accepting adultery is that, should a marriage be loveless, each party is justified in establishing a love relationship outside of marriage, provided it be an exclusive one. Indeed, the test for true love is exclusivity (4).²¹

Andreas Capellanus's final chapter, "The Rejection of Love," repudiates everything which has been said on behalf of romantic love and warns young "Walter," the ostensible recipient of this handbook, to avoid love altogether—while admitting that he does not expect him to follow this advice. "A woman's desire is to get rich through love" (48). "That which above all you seek in love—the joy of having your love returned, you can never obtain . . . because no woman ever returns a man's love" (52). This cynical view he bases upon God, Scripture, and physiology ("by love man is weakened"). This final chapter is remarkable for its contrast with all that has heretofore been said about romantic love. It can hardly be believed to represent the author's true views. On the other hand, every reader will find his/her own convictions represented somewhere in this book and thus feel free to choose the "real" message. Book 3 has the merit of giving all that has gone before "deniability" in the eyes of the church (52).

Rustaveli did not approach the subject of true love with irony or humor. His is a passionate, deeply serious tale, much more like the story of Tristan and Isolde than any of Chrétien's stories. His irony is saved for an occasional swipe at organized religion (resembling the ironic jabs at the Church in Chrétien's romances).

Thus we have shown 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 a union of minds and hearts, (3) it is linked to divine love, (4) it involves the nearly religious veneration of the beloved lady, (5) it requires humility before and deference to the lady as morally superior, (6) it requires service to the lady like that of a vassal to his lord, (7) it proves the lover's worth, (8) it requires fidelity, discretion, and patience until, perhaps, love is requited, (9) it links joy and sorrow, pain and ecstasy, (10) it prolongs love's desire by deferring fulfillment, by defining the excellence of the courtly lover in terms of prowess, courage, and nobility of spirit—as well as youth, joy, generosity, leisure, and eloquence. Much of this eventually entered into the definition of a gentleman.

Fin'amors was not platonic love, not Christian *caritas* (benevolence toward all). This love admitted the sensual and permitted kisses and caressing, while deferring "the final solace," and rejecting lust and sex without love. It accepted that love normally culminates in marriage and may continue within marriage, albeit with diminished passion. It recognized that married people are not necessarily in love, and that *in this case* love may be sought outside marriage.

While *The Knight in the Panther Skin* thus fits in all essential characteristics the troubadour ideology of romantic love, there is a serious discrepancy between it and the spirit in which Chrétien de Troyes' romances are written. Chrétien's stories are

light-hearted, written with a sense of irony and deliberate artifice, while *The Knight in the Panther Skin* is idealistic and ardent and nearly always serious in tone. In the time of Chrétien and Andreas Capellanus the ideology of courtly love was about one hundred years old; *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, though written in the same era as these works (ca. 1200), has the freshness and whole-hearted sincerity of a relatively new idea. Though *The Knight in the Panther Skin* has its dark side and a tragic dimension (murder, suicide), it has a happy, triumphant ending. It also has the unplumbable mystery of passionate love, which finds its metaphor in the panther.

Part II: Courtly Love among the Persians?

Visramiani by Gurgani

Shota Rustaveli was consciously writing in the tradition of the Persian epic, and if he were borrowing features of courtly love, these would be the most likely sources. Rustaveli specifically mentions three Persian epics: *Visramiani* (1040–1054) by Gurgani, *Layla and Majnun* (1188) by Nizami, and *Shah-Nama* (1010) by Firdausi. The poem also contains specific references to two Georgian epics, *Amirandarejaniani* by Mose Khoneli, *Dilgaretiani* by Sargis Tmogveli, and a cycle of Georgian odes, the so-called *Abdul-Mesia* by Shavteli. *The Shah-Nama*, *Amirandarejaniani* and *Dilgaretiani* precede the culture of courtly love and *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, much as *The Song of Roland* predates courtly love in the French literary canon: These epics focus on knights as warriors and either ignore women entirely or include them as merely incidental to the hero's replicating himself in warrior-sons. But in *Visramiani*, *Layla and Majnun*, and *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, the love-relationship is the focal point.

Visramiani is mentioned in *The Knight in the Panther Skin* three times, but the points of comparison with *The Knight in the Panther Skin* are innumerable. Considered with respect to courtly love, however, the points of contrast are more notable. *The Knight in the Panther Skin* is both a national and a romantic epic, while *Visramiani* is strictly a romantic epic. While the two couples in *The Knight in the Panther Skin* never lose sight of the interests of state, in *Visramiani* concerns of state are the merest backdrop to the love story. In *Visramiani* there is no quest on the part of the lover to prove his mettle and devotion while also serving his country. On the contrary, in *Visramiani*, Shah (King) Moabad, who asserts a claim to Vis's hand, is also brother to Ramin, her lover, who must either evade or overthrow Moabad to gain Vis. In *The Knight in the Panther Skin* there are two sets of lovers;

in each relationship the princess is heiress to the throne, and her lover's hopes and claims lie in serving his beloved as her chief military commander, to which each man has a feudal claim as son of a king who "voluntarily" joined his realm to that now claimed by the princess.

In *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, love is an ennobling passion. Both Avtandil and Tariel serve their lady loves by warrior exploits; by that service their mettle is tested, the lady's regard for them is deepened, and they themselves become better men. "[As for Tinatin, beloved of Avtandil] her joy was greater still [than at his safe return from his quest], for the love she had implanted in him had grown and come to flower."²² Departing for the second time in his quest on behalf of the dark knight, Avtandil left behind a "Testament" for the king in which he declared, citing the authority of the Apostles, "love ennobles us!" (199). This declaration had reference to helping Tariel, already his sworn brother. Same-sex friendship throughout *The Knight in the Panther Skin* is granted claims on a par with heterosexual love, and all parties accede to this norm. A conflict of duty between friend and lover either is not allowed to arise, or is resolved in order of urgency. Both women were to become reigning queens, and they have as much concern for their nation's welfare, served by this sworn brotherhood among knights, as they have for their lover personally.

In *Visramiani* we have no assurance that the passionate love of Vis and Ramin will make either one a better person. Beyond the petty lies and dissembling necessary to conceal their love, there is also a much heavier sense of conflict with religious norms in sexual matters in *Visramiani*: Vis and Ramin foresee that their love will lead to shame and disgrace, that it is "harmful to the body and irksome to the soul" and "its pleasure is as fleeting as the wind."²³ Vis's former nurse counsels her to find solace where she can, and that she will never find so great a lover as she finds in Ramin. Vis calls this "evil discourse" (76–77) and later blames her nurse—and fate—for what happens (206). Nurse and Vis long contend over the propositions that (a) "God made it thus between a man and a woman"—thus says nurse or "paradise is preferable," as Vis would have it. A parable on this topic ends: "How brief is gratification, but shame and disgrace are eternal." For Vis, purity (virginity) is of great moment, and she sacrifices it with trepidation, yet deliberately. "Shall I close the barn door when the horses [of passion] are stolen? Must I burn with longing forever?" At her first union with Ramin, she acknowledges that she is entering upon sin, but if Ramin will vow to be true to her unto death (which he does), she will do this, despite her expectation of grief and shame (102).

For Vis and Ramin, the possibility of marriage is remote. In *The Knight in the Panther Skin* there is no such conflict among principles: the consummation of

their love will await marriage. Vis defies her mother in loving Ramin, though she feels in the wrong by doing so. Purity, godliness, and the threat of shame contend in Vis's heart with love and the desire for its gratification (96). In the end, nurse's argument prevails: "God has guarded thee a virgin . . . that he might give thy person to Ramin; be he and thee our sovereigns [by overthrowing his brother, Moabad], and let him remove thy seal. It can only be done by him, for he will be thy lord and thou shalt taste for him a wife's love, and you shall rejoice in each other" (93). This argument—and the sight of the handsome Ramin—turns Vis's heart, and makes her forget about any obligation to her brother, Viro. Despite the lordship that Ramin will assert over her if they marry, however, Vis also senses her own power as a woman: "Women . . . are ravishers of the heart and have the strength of lion-like heroes." Yet Vis and Ramin, in taking their vows to one another privately, name "the Creator" as their witness. As in *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, the dictates of organized religion are contrasted with recognition of a universal creator-God with respect to whom all love is sacred.

The idea of love kindled by beauty is upheld by numerous references in both *The Knight in the Panther Skin* and *Visramiani*, and all the principals are distinguished by "unsurpassed" beauty, while the men are also "peerless knights." Ramin (*Visramiani*) and Tariel (*The Knight in the Panther Skin*) both fall unconscious when they first see their fated lovers as adults, though in both cases the couples had spent much time together at court as children. Avtandil (*The Knight in the Panther Skin*) was also "dazzled" by the sun-like radiance of Tinatin, while she saw him as "well-favoured" and "shapely as a cypress,"²⁴ With Tariel we have "a stranger lord, wondrous to look upon; his beauty filled the heavens and earth too with light"²⁵ (Emphasis on "radiance, light" are a Neoplatonic element [q.v., below]).

Another essential aspect of courtly love is the deference and service to the lady that it requires, and the position of the lady as "lord" in the feudal compact between lord and vassal. This, as discussed above, is fully realized in *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, but is weakly developed in *Visramiani*. In *Visramiani* there is no quest or task through which the knight can prove his mettle and his devotion to his lady. There is no deference and service to the lady at all in *Visramiani*. All interest and emphasis is upon the obstacles to the love of Vis and Ramin, their lovers' quarrels, and Ramin's unfaithfulness to Vis while he is regent in a far-off city. The plot revolves around the mutual passion of Vis and Ramin as a form of madness. Here the Arabic term *majnun* (madman) is used by Ramin to describe his own passionate feelings, distinguishing such wild and reckless love from affection or devotion, with which it may nonetheless coexist. Vis writes to Ramin while he is regent in

Gorab and where he has, in a moment of weakness, taken a wife, Gul: “My passion [*mijnuroba*] has become an easy thing to thee. Thou hast forgotten my devotion [*siqwaruli*].”²⁶ *Siqwaruli* has a Georgian root, whereas the term *mijnuroba* comes from the Arabic,²⁷ where it expresses love-madness or passionate love. When Ramin grows sated and bored with Gul, once again his old passion for Vis overmasters him, and his affection for Vis is renewed.²⁸ King Moabad also comes under the spell of *mijnuroba*, calling it madness and pain. Moabad makes himself despicable by trying to “buy” Vis’s consent with dubious promises. “Thou art sovereign over my head and body;” he says to Vis, “if thou once showest me thy heart, I shall spend my days in thy service. . . . If thou findest me worthy, I shall render thee service—accept me as thy slave.” But this is base bribery, not exalted devotion. While King Moabad is offering Vis his crown and realm, she and Ramin settle for brief interludes together when they manage to evade the king. *Mijnuroba* draws people as the moth is drawn to the flame—and by the flame is destroyed. Yet Vis declares that until her heart burned for Ramin, she had not lived.²⁹

Is romantic love, then, to be viewed as a dark, destructive passion? *The Knight in the Panther Skin* deals subtly with this problem in a chapter titled “The Slaying of the Lion and the Panther.” It is Tariel’s story. He has previously recognized in his beloved, Nestan-Darejan, the grace of a panther and a lion-like ferocity (when she believed that he had broken faith with her). But here, exhausted by his long search for Nestan-Darejan and having lost hope, he happens upon a lion and a panther, a pair of lovers, gamboling together, who then commence to fight fiercely. Tariel kills the lion to save the panther, but the panther then turns upon him, and in self-defense he is forced to kill her. Reminded of his own falling-out with Nestan-Darejan, Tariel agonizes and lies down to die. His sworn brother, Avtandil, rescues him and interprets for him: “Love is necessary to men; it brings us face to face with death, [but will bring happiness in the end].”³⁰

In *The Knight in the Panther Skin* passion is “domesticated”: both pairs of lovers marry and the fires, presumably, will be banked. In *Visramiani* the lovers fight bitterly all the way back into each other’s arms. To “rejoice in one another” refers to sexual union, as is implied in *Visramiani*.³¹ For *The Knight in the Panther Skin*’s star-crossed couples there is no hint that either would succumb to their passion before they are wedded. Even after Tariel and Nestan-Darejan have married, Tariel declares “I will be no husband to my princess until you [Avtandil] are married to yours.”³² For Avtandil, whose beloved is not in danger as Tariel’s Nestan-Darejan was, the political aim of seeing Nestan and Tariel on the throne of “India” takes precedence. Having accomplished the former, Avtandil will return to “Arabia” to his princess, and

then “It will rest with her to quench the fire of my love” (189–190). In *Visramiani* the culmination of the couple’s furious passion comes when their lovers’ quarrel has passed its fever-pitch, when Ramin has threatened to slay her and himself if she continues to refuse him. Then, “From head to foot, they did not separate from each other for a moment, nor was there room for a hair to pass between them.”³³

The battle of the sexes is in evidence throughout *Visramiani*. King Moabad threatens Vis with trial by ordeal and physically abuses her when in his cups. Moabad’s misogyny is explicit in his conclusion that “women are incomplete creatures, thus their desire always prevails [over reason and sober assessment of consequences] (78).

Does love, in either *The Knight in the Panther Skin* or *Visramiani* lead from earthly passion to divine love? Not in *Visramiani*. The couple enjoyed wedded bliss and produced two sons. “Sovereignty pleased me for thy sake,” said Ramin, “Through thee I was merry. . . . For thee I desired myself great, not for the multitude of treasure and hosts.” Ramin, it seems, lives in Vis, and dies soon after her death. In one version, Vis dies after eighty one years of joint rule, and Ramin enters her sepulcher to be seen no more (395). In another, after eight years of wedded bliss she dies and he immolates himself at her sepulcher.

Does *The Knight in the Panther Skin* make any claim that its principal characters rise, led by the hand of Love, to spiritual contemplation? No. It closes on a triumphant note, but that triumph is earthly and secular: coronations, weddings, feasts. Their good rulership effectively keeps the peace at home and abroad. By their rulers’ bounty the poor are enriched and economic inequalities are leveled “as though by snow.” This is taken as evidence of their beneficence, but there is no apotheosis or Holy Grail. It is a secular story and in it people gain in moral stature by their heroic, selfless deeds on earth. The poet declares that he would capture the fleeting moment of triumph and preserve it in song, and here the poet acknowledges by name and author other epics, Persian and Georgian, as immortal works. In *Visramiani* the principals also marry and rule justly. But by focusing narrowly on their passion for one another and all its vicissitudes, and not on a series of generous and courageous deeds, *Visramiani* fails to rise to the moral plane of *The Knight in the Panther Skin*.

Fidelity is the touchstone of romantic love, and in *The Knight in the Panther Skin* it is sacred and binding on men and women—although on men with qualification. Avtandil, in his search for Tariel’s beloved Nestan-Darejan, deliberately exploits the pleasure-seeking Patman, wife of a rich merchant, in order to get information on Nestan-Darejan’s whereabouts. He senses that his impulse to do so comes from a darker place: “Twilight is the nature of this world, and many things in it are ob-

scure.”³⁴ Avtandil feels degraded in consorting with Patman—“like a crow on a dung-heap.” Yet on her behalf he murders her former lover, who is blackmailing her. He seems to have underestimated the generosity of this woman, for even after he confesses to her, she behaves as a friend and helps him to find and eventually recover Nestan-Darejan. On the part of Tariel there is no infidelity; only Nestan-Darejan's fierce accusation that he “played her false” by not challenging her parents' (and his sovereigns') decision to marry her to a foreign prince. Tariel is then at pains to redeem himself in her eyes, which he does by killing his rival at her command. In *Visramiani* the principals vow fidelity to one another, but Ramin betrays that vow—backsliding temporarily. Appointed by his brother to be regent of a far-off province, Ramin is smitten by and promptly marries the daughter of a local notable. Finally, he tires of her and returns to Vis. Ramin's departure to this province is not heroic; he confesses to Vis that he had feared being killed by his brother if he did not leave, and he had preferred to retreat that he might “live in hope of her.”

Our tongue-in-cheek Western source on courtly love, Andreas Capellanus, accepted that a knight and faithful lover might “in meeting a little strumpet or serving-girl when Venus was urging him on . . . play with [her] in the grass.” The knight was not considered unfaithful unless he was an inveterate skirt-chaser or consorted with a second woman of noble station. True love applied only to well-born ladies and cavaliers; servant-girls didn't count. Whether this vignette is ironic or sincere on the part of Andreas Capellanus is impossible to say.

In *Visramiani*, the vicissitudes of love are the focal point, and this love is the sole concern of a long epic. In *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, the principals have individual concerns relating to a larger picture. In *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, we are shown kingdoms which succeed in uniting neighboring peoples in peace and prosperity. In overcoming obstacles to love, the two pairs in *The Knight in the Panther Skin* achieve the “marriage” of legitimate political authority with military prowess, often the aim of Western courtly love.³⁵ *Visramiani* turns its back on national destiny, seeking refuge in private feelings. (It is worth noting that, while Georgia in the age of Sovereign Queen Tamar was enjoying the peak of its expansion and prosperity, the prospects for Persian autonomy in the wake of Arab-Islamic conquest were remote.) Ramin concludes that the power and wealth to which he might aspire were important to him only for Vis's sake, that she might bask in the reflected glory of her husband's station.³⁶

It is not uncommon in Western courtly love sagas for the imperatives of rulership and romance to coincide. In *The Knight with the Lion* by Chrétien de Troyes, Sir Yvain is accepted by the Lady of Landuc, she needing a renowned military man

to defend her lands. While romantic love is important, the political partnership the marriage will create is no less so. Rustaveli as “troubadour” offers his “ode of praise” to his Sovereign Queen Tamar, idolized in the prologue for her beauty, and in the epilogue for her power to inspire fear in Georgia’s enemies. In *Visramiani* the “troubadour” plays an active role only as a singer of love. Ramin plays a harp and sings to Vis of their love the first time they are able to get away and spend some time together (134). Vis had once been reproached by her brother, Viro, that Ramin was “a man of no wealth, but merely a harp-player” (134–135). Eventually, minstrels everywhere are singing of the love of Vis and Ramin, and theirs becomes a legendary love (206). Her love haunts him through popular tales and songs when he has gone to the far-away region of Gorab (297–299). One of these songs celebrates their love in an extended metaphor of a meadow overspread by a great tree (Shah Moabad), with a lovely brook flowing through it (Vis), and a grazing bullock (Ramin). The tree reaches to the heavens and shades the land; it underlies and overspreads this “earthly paradise.” This imagery, with its unspoken implication that it is the bullock that drinks from the “fair stream,” drives Moabad to a frenzied anger.

Visramiani is more single-minded in its portrayal of *mijnuroba*, but *mijnuroba* is not courtly love in that it does not portray love as ennobling passion, does not require deference and service to the lady as though she were “lord” over her lover, and does not acknowledge a deep gulf between lust and love. Religious scruples, and not any requirements of “pure love,” are what deter Vis from a sexual relationship with Ramin. In *The Knight in the Panther Skin* this is not so; the lovers, having vowed their commitment to each other, seem to forbear happily until such time as they can marry. The requirements of service to the lady (or the sworn brother) interrupt this bliss, and postpone the fulfillment of love. Never does Ramin have to prove his mettle as a warrior or his dedication to his lady in this fashion. Ramin goes off on a hunt or to war with Shah Moabad, but “takes sick” so he can return to Vis without Moabad. When Moabad’s jealousy and anger threaten Ramin’s life, he avoids danger by going away to wait for Moabad to die. This is not the profile of a courtly lover.

The Knight in the Panther Skin shows us passions that are also *mijnuroba*, portrayed in the metaphor of the panther and the lion killed by Tariel. Nestan-Darejan’s grace and sleek beauty are seen in the panther, but also her ferocity when she believes her lover false. Tariel’s brooding passion and despondency nearly cost him his life when he saw the metaphorical beasts—the lion and the panther—dead by his own hand. It is a masterful stroke, keeping the *The Knight in the Panther Skin* on an elevated moral plane, while Vis and Ramin fight like a cat and dog.

Layla and Majnun by Nizami

If *Visramiani* is less than courtly love, *Layla and Majnun* is more. Commissioned by a Transcaucasian chieftain named Shervanshah, it was written by Nizami in 1188, and based upon various Arabic versions of the tale. (It may also be based upon a real pair of Bedouin lovers of the latter seventh century in the Western Arabian peninsula.) The Sufis, Islam's mystical sect, saw *Layla and Majnun*—not unreasonably—as a parable of man's quest for God.³⁷

Layla and Majnun left its mark on all classic Persian literature, and even today its influence is felt. Its literary strength, for non-Persian readers, lies in its strikingly original and vivid metaphors. The spirit which moves *Layla and Majnun* is more ethereal than that which moved the troubadours. Majnun is lover, madman and poetic genius—"a soul estranged in the world of men,"³⁸ Majnun (literally, madman) was born "Qays," son of a prince, and he fell in love with Layla when both were schoolchildren. (It seems that this was the only opportunity for unrelated nobility of the opposite sex to become acquainted.) As their schoolfellows noted their mutual affection, the pair was taunted and Layla's parents withdrew her from school. Qays, tormented by love and unable to see Layla, became a poet, sang of his misery and turned into *majnun*—the "madman" (24). After that, he saw Layla once, sitting in the entrance to her tent, and then never again until their final meeting "in the garden." Majnun's father took him to Mecca to ask God to cure him of this "strange passion," but Majnun subverted this effort, praying Allah for his love to grow stronger: "Let my love endure, even if I perish! . . . May I always be love's slave! . . . Woe to the heart incapable of passion!" Layla's love is fed by Majnun's verses, which every child in the bazaar was singing. She composes answers, committing to the wind these bits of paper—"Jasmine sends this message to the cypress tree"—the finders of which carried them to Majnun. "Born of pain and longing, their song had the power [to delight], to break the unhappiness of the world." Her love is expressed in imagery of a "garden of paradise" where she seeks comfort.

Majnun goes into the wilderness, and there "melancholic" and "a madman," he continues to compose poems, much as Tariel, when he despairs of finding Nestan-Darejan, goes into the wilderness to weep and waste away and have his emblematic encounter with the lion and the panther. Nawfal, a Bedouin chieftain, great warrior and friend of Majnun seeks him out in the wilderness and offers to help him win the hand of Layla by making war upon her father and his tribe. At this Majnun's tortured mind began to heal; he bathed, dressed, ate and became "a man among men" again. But Majnun could not take up the sword—not out of cowardice but because, as a

poet, he shared the sufferings of both sides. He is more a Christ-like figure than a warrior. “I want to die for my beloved, not kill. . . .” Layla’s father will not yield her to Majnun, whom he considers a “muddle-headed vagrant.” Majnun disappears once more into the wilderness, does penance for the war on Layla’s people, and accepts the friendship of wild animals. He loses all memory, except for Layla.

Layla’s own voice is first heard at this point and it is strong: “Hear what the deep-sea diver, sounding the ocean of the soul has to tell you!” Layla had been forced into marriage with a highly eligible suitor, but she refused to share her husband’s bed, and when he at last tried to force her, she hit him so hard “he went nearly deaf and blind” (112). She then warned him that she had taken an oath before God to resist him.

Word of Layla’s “marriage in name only” reaches Majnun. His own burning devotion, quasi-religious, informs his hermit’s life and his communication with wild creatures. Majnun has become a devotee in “the religion of love.” He prays, thanking God for grace: “I was earth, dark and heavy; your grace has changed me to pure water.” He has a beatific vision from which he awakens flooded with happiness. Layla, however, laments that as a woman she is not free to come and go, as Majnun is, not free to express her deepest feelings; even though she may rule over the soul of a man who loves her, as a woman she is unable to act. “[A woman] may thirst for blood and show the courage of a lioness—still she remains bound by her woman’s nature” (155). The one thing she can do is deny her husband the “diamond,” the “treasure of love,” which remains sealed (159).

Majnun’s mother seeks him out to plead for his return home, but Majnun responds with fatalism: “I have not chosen my fate voluntarily. . . . My home is my love. . . . You want me to free the bird of my soul from its cage? But this cage is my love! . . . What you call ‘home’ is to me but a second prison, where—I fear—I would die” (159).

Layla and Majnun have one near-meeting in their adult lives. It is “in the garden.” Layla approaches, but stops short of Majnun by ten paces.

“He was enveloped by a magic circle which she must not break....’I am like a burning candle. If I approach the fire, I shall be consumed....’ Proximity brings disaster; lovers must shun it. Better to be ill than afterwards to be ashamed of the cure....Why ask for more? Even Majnun, the ideal lover, does not ask for more.” (187)

She sends an old man as a messenger to Majnun, asking him to recite some verses. Majnun faints, recovers, and the verses begin to flow from his lips. When

Majnun finally flees from the garden he is “drunk with the scent of wine” but knows that “we may taste it only in paradise”(189).

Eventually Layla's husband dies, “freeing” Layla, but even so she is constrained by social custom. She is obliged to spend two years veiled and confined to her tent in mourning. She dies in the “autumn” of her life and her last message to Majnun, carried by her mother, was that her longing for him would not die: “Behind the veil of earth, you cannot see her eyes, but they are looking for you, following you wherever you go. They are waiting for you, and asking ‘When do you come?’ Tell him that, Mother” (204).

Majnun still sang of love “which is stronger than death,” but he himself went to Layla's sepulcher to await death. His companion animals guarded his body until what remained of it fell into dust. “The white shell, its pearl vanished, was washed clean and men let jeweled tears of mourning flow into it.” Their epitaph:

“Faithful in separation, true in love,
One tent will hold them in the world above.” (214)

Love in *Layla and Majnun* is both less and more than courtly love. It is “less” in terms of the pleasures and rewards of this life. It is other in that it makes of love an exclusively spiritual bond, one in which intimacy is mediated by poetry. The “ennobling passion” is, in *Layla and Majnun*, too noble for physical expression. Both Layla and Majnun halt when, in the garden, they might have approached one another, and Majnun lets his love flow out to Layla as poetry. In *The Knight in the Panther Skin* passionate love is also expressed in poetry, most of all in the poetry of Rustaveli, dedicated to his sovereign queen as beloved, though beyond attainment. To be sure, Rustaveli's concept of true love is “heaven's in kind” and wholly different from “lust or lechery,” yet sexual consummation is eagerly anticipated in his essentially secular tale, as it was in many courtly love tales. (On the other hand, the idea that love's sweetest longing is to be perpetuated only on condition that it *not* find sexual expression is also to be found in courtly love.)

The deference and service to the lady in *The Knight in the Panther Skin* is more like that of Western courtly love than that of Layla and Majnun, whose lives are so essentially constrained by the seclusion of high-born women, and hardly less so by their definition of love. In *Layla and Majnun* service to the beloved lady does not serve to prove the mettle and courage of the lover, and in this respect we see more clearly that *mijnuroba* in *Layla and Majnun* was essentially spiritual. Majnun

wanted to *die* for his love, not kill for her or even live for her. He became worthy of this ideal through his heroic asceticism, through the overcoming or obliteration of the Self—an ascetic feat, a martyrdom, which essentially leaves the lady out. Near the end Majnun says to a young pilgrim who has sought him out in his wilderness retreat: “Understand, I have risen above all that [the sensual, desire], I am the King of Love in majesty. . . . Love is fire and I am the wood. . . . Love has moved in . . . my Self has tied its bundle and left.” Fidelity, it goes without saying, is essential in *Layla and Majnun*, and we see none of the “exceptions” we see in *Visramiani* or in *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, where sex with another woman is found “not to count” for one reason or another.

Layla and Majnun resembles courtly love as found in *The Knight in the Panther Skin* more than does *Visramiani*. This hardly surprising; we are dealing with an ongoing literary tradition and *Layla and Majnun* (1188) is contemporaneous with *The Knight in the Panther Skin* (ca. 1189–1207), while *Visramiani* (1040–1054) precedes them by about 150 years. Given the propinquity of *The Knight in the Panther Skin* and *Layla and Majnun* in time, it is perhaps surprising that *The Knight in the Panther Skin* by comparison has its feet firmly planted on the earth, while *Layla and Majnun* expresses a rarified conception of “true love,” sublimated in poetic expression and trumped by spirituality. But generally speaking, *The Knight 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. We return now to the West, to Hispano-Arabic influence on the poetic forms and themes of the troubadours, and to the Arab treatises on love. Could these differences have come from, or through, Hispano-Arabic poetry?

Part III: The Hispano-Arabic Theory of the Origin of Courtly Love

The Knight in the Panther Skin differs so markedly from the Persian epics precisely in the characteristics it shares with West European courtly love, that we are obliged to seek some explanation for the resemblance. The possibilities that suggest themselves are (a) a shared inspiration from Arabic lyric poetry, (b) a shared grounding in Neoplatonism (c) a similar socioeconomic and political environment. The three are not, of course, mutually exclusive.

Poetic Forms

The notion that the troubadours borrowed forms and content from Hispano-Arabic poetry or song has a long history, reaching back even into the sixteenth century. So important has this matter of “origins,” “sources,” or “inspiration” been that it is by now the subject of an enormous body of scholarly literature.³⁹ The question has been considered to be of great importance because the Provençal lyric is seen as the first body of secular European literature in the vernacular and thus the fountainhead of the European literary tradition as well as the source of a uniquely Western view of romantic love. It has been controversial, probably because at times (particularly in the latter nineteenth century) hubris made Western scholars reluctant to accept an Arab inspiration for something so central to the Western self-concept.

The troubadours have not made it easy for us to discover their sources of literary inspiration. Allusions to other, native verse forms in the troubadour lyric are possible. It is also quite possible that William, the ninth duke of Aquitaine and seventh count of Poitou, may not have been the first to sing of courtly love, but only the first whose work was preserved or even written down. The controversy has been long enduring because the question is complex. The troubadours use varying rhyme schemes and various forms of song. Judgments can only be made by persons well-versed in both the Arabic and the Romance philological traditions. First, let us be clear that it is not simply a lyric tradition we are looking for: love poetry is truly universal. The characteristics that distinguish courtly love, however, are not.

The Arab love poetry in question consists in the poetic forms *zajal* and *muwashshah*—new and distinctive popular poetic forms in al-Andalus at the end of the ninth century, which challenged the preeminence of classical Arabic poetry from that time forward.⁴⁰ The *zajal* were written in the spoken Hispano-Arabic dialect, or “Mozarabic.” The first verses of the *muwashshah* were in literary Arabic and the final verse, the *kharja*, in the spoken dialect. These new, popular forms remained oral for some time, but were widely disseminated east and west in the Islamic world by the beginning of the twelfth century.

Proponents of the Hispano-Arabic theory of troubadour lyric origins claim that it resembles the Andalusian poetry in its rhyme scheme, number of strophes or stanzas (5–9) and in other features discussed below.⁴¹ However, a perfunctory examination of poems by the first several troubadours reveals a great variety in troubadour rhyme schemes and number of stanzas. Nor does troubadour poetry resemble the *muwashshah* in its construction, for the latter is a dialogue between a

male voice (in the classical Arabic or in Hebrew) and a female voice, comprising the last stanza or *kharja* in Mozarabic, the Romance vernacular of al-Andalus.⁴² A. R. Nykl, the leading interpreter of Hispano-Arabic poetry in the 1930s and 1940s, and hardly less well-versed in that of Provence, published extensively on this and related topics. Certainly not hostile to the Hispano-Arabic theory, Nykl nonetheless found it valid only in a general, not a specific way. In 1946 he summarized his conclusions: “What is now called Old Provençal poetry was *formed* in its beginning, about 1100 A.D., from elements which were partly autochthonous and partly imitated from the poetic activity in the neighboring Christian-Muslim world in such of its aspects as happened to please the contemporary Méridional taste, especially at the courts of noblemen. Guillaume IX, Count of Poitiers and the first troubadours gave these new forms a vogue.”⁴³

More recent research has found stronger correspondences for William IX’s poems with various strophic forms of religious music, and these I find compelling. According to Frederick Goldin all but one of William IX’s poems can be traced to religious analogues.⁴⁴ One such form, the *conductus*, was developed at the Abbey of St. Martial in Limoges, within William’s domain, in the years just preceding his birth (1071). The *conductus* filled short gaps in the liturgy (during a procession, in preparation for the next part of the mass, for instance). William’s Songs 4 and 7⁴⁵ conform precisely in meter and rhyme to the *conductus*, having six lines—four of eight syllables and two of four syllables—in the following order and rhyme scheme: *8a - 8a- 8a - 4b - 8a - 4b*. Examples are quoted here, the Latin *conductus* on the left, the vernacular song on the right:

In laudes Innocentium
 qui passi sunt martyrium
 psallat chorus infantium:
 Alleluia,
 sit decus regi martyrum
 Et gloria!

Farai un vers, pos mi somelh
 e m vauc e m'estauc al solelh.
 Domnas i a de mal conselh,
 E sai dir cals:
 cellas c'amor de cavalier
 Tornon a mals.

The *conductus*, as a “new song,” or *novum canticum*, could be composed free of the fixed structure of liturgical music proper.⁴⁶ Only William’s Song 8, “Mout jauzens,” (in which each verse has six lines and each line eight syllables, with the rhyme scheme *ab - ba - ab*), cannot be traced to a source; this became the most

typical metrical structure in later courtly love lyrics. Other studies upon which the claim for liturgical origins are based are by Hans Spanke and Jacques Chailley.⁴⁷

Acceptance of this source for William IX's poetic form does not necessarily negate the possibility of Hispano-Arabic influence. With respect to themes, a common conception of love, or the courtly style of musical performance, there may be parallels. We shall return to this topic below.

Etymology

The Arabists proposed that the Provençal word *trobar* (troubadour) derives from the Arabic *tarab*, meaning "music," or "song," or from *daraba*, meaning "to strike," as applied to the playing of string instruments. The *taraba*-troubadour etymology was first proposed by the Spanish Arabist Julian Ribera in 1928, and long rejected by Romance scholars as unthinkable.⁴⁸ In spoken Arabic of the Iberian peninsula, *tarab* would become *trob* and *ar* would be the standard suffix to make a verb.

On the other hand, *trobar* may derive from the Old French *trover*, "to compose" or "invent," or it may have other Latin or Greco-Latin derivations.⁴⁹ Nykl did not think that etymology could prove anything; however, while multiple etyma are possible, if only a derivation from Arabic were on offer, it would be a strong indication. That several musical instruments do definitely derive from Arabic is an important indication of musical cross-fertilization.⁵⁰ However, nothing can be said about musical influence, because so few troubadour melodies are preserved (of William's songs, only one).

Themes, Motifs

The correspondence of themes and motifs between Hispano-Arabic and troubadour songs is striking and suggests a relationship. The poet sings the joy of reciprocal love, the thrill of a rendezvous, the messengers of their love. He praises the beauty of his beloved, laments the suffering of unhappy love or of separation from the beloved. Slanderers and gossips crop up regularly in both.

Obviously some of these figures and themes may be attributed to the universality of human experience, but others seem more specific and more telling. There are several studies of the correspondence of themes and motifs. These include Lawrence Ecker (1934), A. R. Nykl (1939), Menéndez Pidal (1941) and others.⁵¹ Nykl, in his *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, cites D. Carolina Michaelis de Vasconcelos on the themes of the Old Portuguese *cansionero* (love song), written in Mozarabic.⁵² Both Michaelis de Vasconcelos and Ecker found negative (illness, madness, death)

as well as positive corresponding themes, but only Ecker finds “the ennobling quality of love” in Arab as well as in Provençal love songs. And he cites only one Arab source for it, that being Ibn Hazm’s famous treatise on love, *The Dove’s Neck-Ring* (1022), according to Nykl, the authoritative translator of that work.⁵³ In a chapter on the signs of love, Ibn Hazm explains that the lover consciously attempts to show his best qualities. “How many stingy men become generous, irascible ones cheerful, cowardly ones brave, slow-moving lively, dumb ones sharp . . . , careless ones well-groomed, old ones youthful, piously reserved ones exuberant.”⁵⁴ This is not quite the high moral plane of “ennobling love” found in the troubadour lyric, and certainly less poetic: “I am made better by one who is, beyond dispute, the best a man ever saw or heard. . . . But if ever any joy has put forth flower it should, before all other joys, bring forth fruit and shine in perfection above them, as when a dark day fills with light.” Or, “She must pick out what is best in me because she knows: in her alone I shall be restored.”⁵⁵

Nothing of the sort appears in the Hispano-Arabic love poems which are postulated as the source of troubadour love poetry. It is unlikely that the troubadours ever had access to Ibn Hazm’s treatise. On the other hand, in the same song quoted above, William does display some of the more pedestrian transformations we encounter in Ibn Hazm’s treatise.

The joy of her can make the sick man well again,
her wrath can make a well man die,
a wise man turn to childishness,
a beautiful man behold his beauty change;
the courtliest man can become a churl,
and any churl a courtly man.⁵⁶

In other words, with respect to a coincidence of themes and motifs as between troubadour and Hispano-Arabic love poetry, the evidence offers weak support for a Hispano-Arabic theory of origins.

However, in the Arab love treatises (Ibn Hazm’s *The Dove’s Neck-Ring* and Ibn Dawud’s *Kitab al-Zahra*), the love in question, while it is idealistic love, is not heterosexual love, as William’s most definitely is. Both Hispano-Arabic authors represent the tradition of Platonism, which assumed that “real” love was generally possible only between men. (See Plato’s *Symposium*.) Again, as Platonists, the Arab scholars, including Avicenna in his *Risala* or *Treatise on Love*, all urge chaste love and would have done so simply as members of a society that reacted very negatively to any suggestion of sexual behavior between men.⁵⁷ (More about this later.) At any rate, the “ennobling love” in Ibn Hazm’s *The Dove’s Neck-Ring* does not cor-

respond to that of courtly love, which the troubadours presented as heterosexual. They (William IX most definitely) did *not* postulate courtly love to be chaste love.

Socioeconomic and Political Environment

The practice of referring to the beloved lady as *midon*, the masculine for “lord” in Provençal, is sometimes assumed to be a mere courtesy—a convention of courtly love, which it was not. We know that William’s second wife, Philippa, had claim to territories and vassals of her own, whether as dowry or inheritance. (And so may his first, Ermengard, have had, for that matter.) In *The Knight in the Panther Skin* we encounter equivalent terminology, reflecting a feudal society in which a lady might also really be “lord.” *The Knight in the Panther Skin* reflects similar social conditions: “King” Tamar (she was and is so called by Georgians) inherited the Georgian kingdom as sovereign and feudal lord, as Eleanor of Aquitaine inherited her French territories. Both Georgia and Provence were feudal societies, and their literature simply reflected the sociopolitical realities of the time, a reality in which a lady was sometimes “lord”—and in need of a good military man to defend her territories. In the personal experience of both Rustaveli and William IX, such ladies figure prominently.

Arab love poetry also refers to the beloved as lord (*sayyid_*) and the lover as vassal (*mowl_ye*). (Nykl transliterates these *seyid_*, *maul_ye*.) But in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Near Eastern and Andalusian authors, the lover refers to himself as slave or servant (*ábd mamlaka*, with no pejorative connotation in either case, for it is also used of the believer, *ábd*, toward Allah). Thus the terminology is adapted to reflect the particular social structure, but always to indicate the subordination of the lover to his beloved.⁵⁸ When we look at Arabic literary history, the correspondence in any literal sense is less impressive but the term “love-service” (service to the lady) still constitutes a “bridge” of some importance.

A characteristic association of three elements—love, joy, and youth—is so frequent in courtly love poetry as to be formulaic. William IX, in a total of eleven poems, associates them all twice; “love” and “joy” appear together in four other places. Marcabru and Pierre d’Auverne, two early troubadours, use *amor* and *jovens* together, even allegorically: “My mother was Love; my father, Youth.” In Cercamon, *jovens* is the opposite of “the malevolent one.”⁵⁹ In troubadour usage the term *jovens* includes politeness (courtliness, courtesy) and generosity in its meaning (3).

A. J. Denomy surveyed every use of the term *jovens* in the poetry of the early troubadours, and related it to the similarly extended meaning of the term in Arabic

sources (1–22). The Arabic word for youth is *fiṭy_n* (sing. *fat_*) and the adjective, meaning “youthful, generous, brave,” is *futuwwa*. In other words, “youth” designated a social ideal or code for the Arabs, as *jovens* did for the courtly lover. Denomy traces the terms *fat_*/*futuwwa* in pre-Islamic Arab culture (where it is found applied in Bedouin tribal society) and institutionally to the *futuwwa* brotherhoods. Originally these were fraternities of young men, dedicated to nothing more than riotous living; later they were taken over by the Sufis, a mystical Islamic sect, who made of them vehicles for civic and philanthropic activity (14–20). Could these fraternities have been the vehicle for transfer to Georgian or Western ideals for knighthood? They *could* have been; they *could* have come back from crusade with William IX. But we have no specific indication that this was so.

In *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, “youth,” or *siqme* in Georgian, embraces all the knightly qualities: “generosity, leisure, wit, youth, plus eloquence, patience and might in battle to prevail” (Prologue, verse 23, 37n). Related to *siqme* are the words *qma* and *moqme*, both used by Rustaveli to indicate a knight or young man and embracing the qualities expected of a knight. S. B. Serebriakov wrote about the possible connection to the Arabic *fat_*/*futuwwa*, and he postulated, acknowledging the 1949 article by Denomy, that both Rustaveli and the troubadours learned this usage from their contacts with Arabic literary sources and/or society, and related it to the courtly love of which they sang.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, Serebriakov merely noted the comparability of the Georgian *siqme* to *jovens* and *fat_*/*futuwwa* and opined that Denomy’s thesis needed greater substantiation. It is not difficult to accept the likelihood of Rustaveli’s acquaintance with this special Arab conception of “youth,” though such acquaintance would be more difficult with respect to the troubadours. Denomy thinks that Avicenna, on the one hand, and the *futuwwa* brotherhoods on the other, explain the transmission of the ethical and social ideal of chivalry to the West. He dates the *futuwwa* of this stripe to the tenth to twelfth centuries.⁶¹ “*Futuwwa* [as it pertains to the warrior] is an ethical concept [containing] all that appears in the West as chivalry.”⁶²

Father Denomy’s series of scholarly studies dating from 1945 to 1953 have thoroughly plowed the field of ideological parallels and concrete possibilities of influence upon the troubadours by Arab literary and Neoplatonist sources. The yield is rich in parallels, substantial in documented contacts between the two camps, but devoid of specific attested instances of cultural borrowing in the area of courtly love. Like many others, Father Denomy has looked to all likely and some inevitable contacts. Like many others, but in greater depth, he has explored the congruity of Arab Neoplatonism with courtly love. But we still have no evidence that Avicenna’s

treatise on love was translated into Latin before 1130 and that would be too late for William of Aquitaine, who died in 1126. Nor can we prove that Ibn Dawud or Ibn Hazm (see below) were available to the troubadours. But apart from all this, does academic philosophy *ever* translate into a social ideal without intervening institutions or models? "It doesn't have legs," as my Russian colleagues would say.

If the Hispano-Arabic theory should have to be limited, as I think it must be, or discarded, scholarship still will have reaped the benefit of a mountain of evidence of cultural contact with the Islamic world in the European Middle Ages. However, at this moment we lack specifics with respect to the early troubadours' inspiration deriving from contact with Islamic poetry and song.

Contacts Between Medieval Europe and the Muslim World

It was widely believed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that contacts between Muslim culture and European Christian culture were minimal in the Middle Ages, that language and religion formed an effective barrier to cultural exchange. On the other hand, certain borrowings from the Arabs have long been recognized: "Arabic" numerals (borrowed in turn from the Chinese), algebra; other mathematical, geographical, and medical knowledge. But when it came to troubadour love poetry, a matter of Western *values*, any such acknowledgment was resisted. The values of our modern Western world were seen as unique, emanating from Judeo-Christian sources and Greek philosophy. We have learned a great deal in the interval about just how close the cultural contacts with the Islamic world were during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, when Islamic culture was on the leading edge of civilization.⁶³

We shall restrict our survey to the latter eleventh and early twelfth centuries, when the early troubadours were active, for we are interested primarily in the origins of courtly love. In this period Norman Sicily and the Iberian peninsula (Spain) were the primary European areas of contact with Arabic culture, and the latter was more important to Southern France. A great deal of this contact was facilitated by Mozarabs (Spanish Christians who had become arabized in culture). The Arabic language and culture had greater prestige than Spanish or Latin because the culture was so advanced and because Arabic was the language of the conqueror. Christian men who sought advancement and prestige adopted it. Bishop Alvaro of Cordoba in 854 C.E. complained that Christian men who wrote poetry in Arabic "could not write a decent letter in Latin."⁶⁴ Even allowing for exaggeration, it is likely that many of the Spanish Christian elite in the eleventh and twelfth centuries could read Arab love poetry and treatises in the original, so that travelers from Provence, themselves

not knowing Arabic, might have been exposed to this at second hand, through their Mozarabic counterparts.

The first documented event testifying to contact with Arab love songs is the siege of Barbastro in 1064 by William of Montreuil. William VIII of Aquitaine (father of William IX, the first troubadour) participated in it. It resulted in the capture, it is said, of a thousand girls who became slaves at the various courts of Southern France. Some of them, no doubt, performed as singers or dancers and became concubines at those courts.⁶⁵ Whatever influence they brought had been assimilated by the time William IX came on the scene, but may very likely have left traces in the musical culture. Moorish musicians were standard in the retinues of French princes at the time and were invariably present at weddings. Indeed, it seems that European jongleurs adopted the painted faces, long hair, and multicolored dress of their Arab counterparts.⁶⁶

Nearly all the early troubadours known to us visited the courts of Aragon and Castile, and some had patrons there. This includes William IX, Marcabru, Cercamon, Peire d'Auvergne (who spent his early career there), Aimeric de Peguillan, and Arnaut Daniel.⁶⁷ Inter-marriage between the feudal families of Northern Spain and Southern France was a major conduit for cultural exchange. William IX married Philippa of Aragon, his second wife, in 1094. Philippa surely came to Poitou with a retinue including entertainers. One fifth of the population of Aragon was Muslim at this time. One of William IX's sisters married Pedro of Aragon and another married Alfonso of Castile.⁶⁸

How much cultural contact resulted from the Crusades has long been the subject of contention by scholars, some of whom think that the crusaders were so divided from the enemy by language, faith, and warfare that there could have been only superficial contacts or technology transfer. On the other hand, a Christian aristocrat held for ransom for weeks or months or even years would have had considerable contact with his captors. William IX went to the Near East in 1101–1102 with an army of three hundred thousand. He spent five weeks in Constantinople where, given his interests, he may very likely have learned something of Byzantine musical culture, and perhaps something of Byzantine courtly love. It is now thought that all the eleven surviving poems of William IX were composed in the postcrusade period of his life.⁶⁹ (Not all embody courtly love; of this, more below.) There was considerable overlap between the ideals of Arab and European aristocrats, and some scholars believe that both chivalry (the military code of honor) and the idea of crusading (holy war/*jihad*) came to Europeans from Arab culture. The *futuwwa*, or fighting brotherhoods, which Europeans first met at the outposts of Moorish Spain, might have inspired imitation. It seems that heraldry appeared in Europe only after

the First Crusade (1095+).⁷⁰ However, the consensus at this point seems to be that chivalry, while consistent with or overlapping with the Arab warrior code, was not identical with or adopted wholesale from theirs.⁷¹

Norman Sicily, like Mozarabic Spain, constituted a “bridge” between Islamic and Christian culture. The height of cultural activity there was the early thirteenth century, under Frederick II Hohenstaufen (1194–1250). In the twelfth century, young men flocked to Spain to study. There were schools of translators both in Spain (Toledo, Barcelona, Seville) and in Northern Sicily (Salerno, Palermo, Montpellier). But it was only as the Reconquista proceeded, during the twelfth century, and massive collections of Arabic manuscripts were seized, that much Arabic learning was translated into Latin. In particular, we know that Avicenna's treatise on love was translated into Latin under the patronage of Raymond I, archbishop of Toledo, between 1126 and 1151.⁷² It seems unlikely to have been available in written form to the early troubadours. Ibn Hazm's *The Dove's Neck-Ring* survives now in a single Arabic manuscript copy; it is impossible to know how, other than by hearsay, it could have been available to the troubadours.

Thus we are left long on possibilities, but short on concrete evidence for a Hispano-Arabic origin for courtly love. We would be reduced to arguing by virtue of probability, and the answer could not be conclusive. A. R. Nykl's book, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry and its Relations with the Old Provençal Troubadours*, includes a long final chapter to the influence of Arab-Andalusian poetry. Nykl, a judicious scholar, similarly comes up long on the likelihood of general influence, but short on definite connections. He finds the “analogies” (of poetic forms) striking, and finds it “quite plausible to assume [that] the powerful personality of William IX was the melting pot in which ingredients were given new form.” He vacillates between “plausible” and “pointing decisively to” Arabic and Andalusian-Arabic influence. His general conclusion is that “Old Provençal poetry was formed . . . from elements which were partly autochthonous and partly imitated from poetic activity in the neighboring Christian-Muslim world.”⁷³

Pilgrimages to Spain, especially to St. James of Compostela, are thought to have resulted in considerable Hispano-Arabic influence on Southern France, and Denomy has researched the borrowing of Arab decorative motifs in late eleventh- and early twelfth-century Romanesque churches of Southern France.⁷⁴ In the same article he finds, in studying the use of the term *jovens* in early troubadour poetry that twenty-seven of thirty-nine instances are attributable to Marcabru, who early on traveled to Lérida and Leon and had close ties to his patron, Alfonso VII of Castile and Leon. Denomy is inclined to credit Marcabru for the adaptation of the Arabian *futuwwa* ideal into the *jovens* of the troubadours.⁷⁵

Speaking generally of troubadour poetry, it is indeed, as Nykl concluded, a mixed bag of “elements . . . partly autochthonous and partly imitated from poetic activity in the neighboring Christian-Muslim world.” But our concern is not *jovents*, not chivalry, not even poetic forms and rhyme schemes, which Goldin has after all demonstrated to be related to the Latin *conductus*, and not really to Arabic or Mozarabic forms at all. It is courtly love—heterosexual, not platonic, romantic, and ennobling. That element does not have a counterpart in the Persian, Arab, or Mozarabic world.

Part III: Personalities Mediating the Phenomenon of Courtly Love in the West

William IX, Duke of Aquitaine: The Person and His Poetry, 1071–1127

As far as we can tell, the troubadours were fairly literate. William IX certainly was, and all the courts had secretaries and translators. It cannot be ruled out that some of the troubadours discovered inspiration in their own reading of Hispano-Arabic sources. Still, they were entertainers, not scholars—or in William’s case, ruler, warrior, lover, and entertainer. Poitiers had two noteworthy schools in William’s day, the cathedral school and the school of St. Hilaire, but it is unlikely that William attended, their principal purpose being the preparation of clergy for the church and for service at the secular courts.⁷⁶ No sources on William mention any scholarly pursuits, although it is attested that he had a tutor at his side in 1104 and in 1111, at which time he was thirty-three and forty respectively.⁷⁷

We now turn to the record of William’s life and the poems themselves to discover clues to other contacts and influences. One’s first encounter with William’s oeuvre is jarring if one is anticipating courtly love. Half his extant poems are not written in the spirit of courtly love at all, but are rather bawdy songs, replete with the artful gamesmanship of Ovid’s classical treatise, *The Art of Love*, which William is almost sure to have known. No such songs are found among the compositions of other troubadours, except in those of William’s contemporary, Bernart de Ventadorn.⁷⁸

There is an obvious break in the treatment of love between the first five and the last six of his poems, which Nykl attributed to influences William was exposed to during his eighteen months on crusade in 1101–1102. But this judgment is undermined if, as is currently believed, all eleven of William’s extant poems stem from the postcrusade period of his life.⁷⁹ “I have two good and noble horses for my

saddle” reads the first (in the traditional, but not necessarily chronological ordering), “but I can’t keep them both; one can’t stand the other.” He concludes by declaring his embarrassing predicament: “I can’t decide which to keep, Lady Agnes or Lady Arsen”—and he names the “horses” masters by castle and fief. In Song 2 (Goldin) the troubadour proclaims “I shall tell you about cunt, what its law is, / . . . / . . . As other things diminish when you take from them, cunt increases.”⁸⁰

Both of these poems are about the futility of keeping a watch on wives. Here the spirit is jesting, but in a later troubadour, Peire de Valeria, it has become one of the idealistic tenets of courtly love: “for I do not want to place a guard on her except her own excellence and intelligence.”⁸¹ The *gardador* (guard) now signals disrespect for the lady. And in William’s celebration of rampant sexuality the guard himself is a likely contender for the lady’s favors: “if she is separated from Worthiness, she will make an accord with Baseness”—a reference to the relative social standing of lords versus guards.⁸² Likewise, “Anyone would sooner drink water, than to die of thirst.”⁸³

Song 5 (Bond) is a bawdy tale, told by the singer-narrator, who is a sly fellow in pilgrim’s guise. He feigns inability to speak, and with alacrity the ladies Agness and Ermessen take him in, as one very suitable to their purpose—illicit sex. The ladies test his muteness by dragging a cat across his bare back. Having thus tested him, they let him stay for a week; he crows that he “screwed them one hundred eighty-eight times!”⁸⁴ and laments the wear and tear on his “equipment.”

Song 6 shifts in mood from bravura to some sense of “true love”; from celebration of his own mastery of technique in verse and in bed to a more sober sense of values:

I know what wisdom is, and foolishness
And I know what honor is, and shame,
I can tell bravery and fear;
And set before me a game of love,
I am no such fool
But I can tell the best chances from the worst.

The “game” motif ends in bawdy hilarity:
My Lord, said she, your dice are too small;
I challenge you to start again.

.
And I raised her gaming table a little
With my two arms.

And when I had raised the gaming table
I threw the dice
and two of them rolled,
and the third sank.

And I made them strike that table hard,
and it was played.⁸⁵

Finally, in the later songs we encounter what we recognize as courtly love. Song 7 (Goldin), for example:

I never had the joy of what I loved,
And I never will, as I never did.
For I am aware,
I do many things and my heart says
“It is all nothing.”

And so I know less than anyone what pleasure is,
Because I want what I cannot have.
And yet, one wise saying tells me
The certain truth:
When the heart is good, its power is good,
If a man knows patience.

A man who wants to be a lover
.....
Must know how to do
The things that fit at court,
And must keep, in court, from speaking
Like a vulgar man. . . .
Let my verse, since I myself do not,
Appear before her,
Mon Esteve,⁸⁶ and let it be the witness
For my praise. (39–41)

In Song 8 (Goldin) the poet sings:

My lady is trying me, putting me to the test
To find out how I love her.
Well now, no matter what quarrel she moves for that reason,
She shall not loose me from her bond.

Instead, I become her man, deliver myself up to her,
And she can write my name down in her charter.

.....
I have caught such a hunger for her love
.....
If I do not get help soon
And my lady does not give me love,
By St. Gregory’s holy head I’ll die
If she doesn’t kiss me in a chamber or under a tree.

.....
All the joy of the world belongs to us,
Lady, if we both love each other.

.....
For this one I shiver and tremble,
I love her with such a good love. (41–43)⁸⁷

In Song 8 (Goldin) the lady is twice addressed as “lord” (*midons*). It is classic courtly love.

I begin, rejoicing already, to love
A joy that I want to most settle down in.
.....
For I am made better by one who is, beyond dispute,
The best a man ever saw or heard.

Every joy must abase itself
And every might obey
In the presence of Midons, for the sweetness of her welcome,
For her beautiful and gentle look;
And a man who wins . . . the joy of her love
Will live a hundred years. (43–45)

The last of these poems in the spirit of courtly love is Song 9 (Goldin):

In the sweetness of this new season

The woods leaf out, the birds
Sing each one in its latin
After the verses of a new song.
Thus it is right that each man settle down
With what a man wants most.
.....
Our love goes this way, like a branch of hawthorne
On the tree, trembling
[In] the rain, all night,
Till the next day when the sun spreads out,
All through the green leaves and the branches.

It still reminds me of one morning
When we made an end to war,
And she gave me so great a gift,
Her love and her ring. (47)

But William's courtly love never escapes its grounding in the flesh of this-earthly passion (Song 9, Goldin):

God let me live long enough
To get my hands under her mantle.

Because I do not care for the strange, exquisite gibberish
That keeps me away from my Fair Neighbor;⁸⁸
For I know how it is with words,
A short speech goes on and on and on . . .
Such others go around talking big of love,
But we have a morsel of its bread and a knife. (47)

In Song 11 (Bond), the last of William's extant poems, he sounds old and tired, pious and repentant, expecting death. There is no more *amor, joy e jovens*:

I was very charming and gay,
But Our Lord wants no more of that.

.....

Everything I used to love I have thrown away:⁸⁹
Knighthood and worldly pride;

.....

I pray all my friends to come
And honor me greatly at my death;
For I have had joy and pleasure
Far and near in my domain.⁹⁰

From this brief sampling of William's poetry, we move to a sketch of his experiences which might indicate what sources fed his poetic imagination. We have already noted his dynastic links to the courts of Aragon and Castile, his five-week sojourn in Constantinople, and his eighteen months on crusade in the Near East in 1101–1102. There is no direct testimony about specific influences from these contacts, except that William did sponsor a tournament early in 1103, following his return from the disastrous crusade. At this tournament he performed songs of his own composition, exhibiting his great prowess as a singer-songwriter. Not everyone admired his performance. The chronicler William of Malmsbury, to wit: "There lived then, William, Count of Poitiers [and Duke of Aquitaine], a foolish and shifty man who, after leaving Jerusalem . . . returned to loll in the slough of every vice, almost as if he believed that the universe ran by chance, and was not governed by providence. Furthermore, coating his little bits of nonsense with a certain superficial charm, he passed them off as wit, distending the jaws of his audiences with chuckling."⁹¹

Born in 1071, William from an early age was groomed to succeed his father and did so at age fifteen. His was an immense realm, but loosely controlled, and all his life William was in conflict with disloyal vassals. He married Ermengarde of Anjou at age eighteen in 1086, she being five years his senior, and repudiated her in 1091, on grounds of ostensible consanguinity. The fact that they had no children is very likely the real reason. In 1094 he married the twenty-two-year-old widow of King Alfonso I of Aragon, Philippa of Toulouse. Acting on Philippa's claim as heiress, William invaded Toulouse in 1097, as soon as its master had left on crusade, and established Philippa as ruler there.⁹² It was only after the birth of his son, William, in 1099 that Duke William began to organize a crusading army. His was the largest

of several armies that participated in the First Crusade (beginning in 1095, several distinct and separate armies departed).

As to his personality, there is ample testimony to William as a great wit, superlative creator and performer of songs, urbane courtier, and avid lover of women. "Bold and worthy and very funny, outdoing even the witty professional entertainers," wrote Orderic Vitalis, a monk of Saint Evroul and a chronicler.⁹³ In his thirties and forties William had many affairs, and four out-of-wedlock children are attested to. With respect to his qualities as a warrior, he is praised as "bold, valiant and fierce" by more than one report, but his audacity sometimes appeared as the "youthful recklessness of [this] foolish leader"—so reports Orderic Vitalis, who was not otherwise a hostile witness.⁹⁴

William's part in the First Crusade was certainly inglorious. He may have been betrayed to the Turks by the Byzantine emperor.⁹⁵ At any rate Turkish armies awaited him at the border of the Byzantine Empire, and nearly his whole army of three hundred thousand was lost, excepting only the small party of noble warriors with whom William escaped. After recovering for six months at the court of Bohemond I, prince of Antioch, he returned home—hardly the conquering hero.⁹⁶ His early boastful and bawdy songs should be viewed in this context.

In his poetry Duke William flaunts his prowess as a warrior, lover, and poet. We can attest only to the last, but there his achievement is unique and superlative. His use of the vernacular in songs conveying the courtly image and a certain understanding of love was revolutionary, and several other masterful poets succeeded him, reflecting and building upon both the form and content of Duke William's songs, creating as they did so a new understanding of the intimacy possible between a man and a woman. Nykl attributes William's "genius and independence of mind" to his position as a grand seigneur with a propensity for amorous adventure, giving him the confidence necessary to break free from other styles in songwriting and start new ones—whether suggested by what he'd heard in the Near East or from Andalusian musicians who had come with Philippa in her retinue from Aragon. We will never know.

Despite his participation in the First Crusade, William had a very rocky relationship with the church and was excommunicated several times. The church's attempts, as part of the Gregorian reforms, to impose its rules upon the sex lives of secular magnates were frequently flouted. King Philip of France was excommunicated for adultery in 1100; William supported Philip, his liege lord, in this case. The chronicler-monk William of Malmesbury reports an anecdote concerning William and the bishop of Angoulême, who denounced and excommunicated William and

ordered him to put aside his mistress Maubergeonne, countess of Châtelleraut, and take back his lawful wife, Philippa of Toulouse. William is said to have replied to the bishop, “‘You will be able to curl that hair receding from your forehead before I will repudiate the Viscountess.’ This, to a man whose skimpy bits of hair required no comb.”⁹⁷

In 1114 when Peter II, bishop of Poitiers, publicly excommunicated him, William threatened to kill the bishop on the spot. Again, from William of Malmesbury:

William, seized with a violent rage, pounced for the prelate’s hair and, waving his drawn sword, said “Now you’re going to die unless you absolve me.” Then indeed the prelate, pretending to be terrified, begged for a little chance to speak so that he could follow faithfully through with what remained of the excommunication. . . . Having completed his assigned duty as he saw fit, and thirsting for the trophy of martyrdom, the Bishop extended his neck. “Strike!” he said. “Strike!” But William, now grown contentious, bore his customary humor to the fore and said, “Indeed, I hate you so much that you’re unworthy of my hatred, and you’re never going to enter heaven with these hands as your servants.”⁹⁸

William did, however, imprison the bishop, who died in custody early in 1115.

Apparently William did not entirely abandon his legal wife. He invaded Toulouse on her behalf in 1113, on the invitation of supporters of their underage son, and reestablished his wife as countess of Toulouse. In 1115 Philippa bore him a second son. After August 1115 we find no more communal acts, that is, acts signed by the count/duke and his wife. It is thought that William must have renounced Maubergeonne in 1117, for his excommunication was lifted in that year. It apparently did not lead to a reconciliation with his wife, for Philippa entered the monastery of Fontevraud in 1117. (William’s first wife, Ermengarde, entered Fontevraud in 1112 and left either in 1116, the year its founder, Robert of Arbrissel, died, or in 1117.⁹⁹ William lost Toulouse finally in 1123. In 1119 the countess of Poitou appeared before the papal Council of Rheims claiming loss of marital rights because of Maubergeonne. (Philippa was still resident at Fontevraud.) A decision was postponed because of the count’s illness, which is thought to have been *bona fide*, and to have been the occasion of his last surviving poem, Song 11 (Bond), in which he anticipates his own death. But he recovered, and in 1120 he joined a crusade led by the king of Aragon against the Moors in Spain, perhaps as penance for his affair with Maubergeonne. This crusade was successful.

It is not known when William’s son and heir married Maubergeonne’s daughter Ainor, but the first child of that union, born in 1122, was Eleanor, who inherited her father’s domains in 1137. (This is the Eleanor who married first the king of France

and then, later, Henry Plantagenet, who in 1154 became king of England. Eleanor and her daughters played a major role in disseminating the tradition of courtly love—especially Marie, as countess of Champagne and patroness of Chrétien de Troyes and Andreas Capellanus, the leading lights of late twelfth-century courtly love literature.

Let us turn to the significance of Count William IX's love life for his amatory poetry. Songs 1 and 5 (Bond), the simplest in form, are thought to relate to William's experiences on crusade and are assumed to be among his earliest creations. The year 1102 is considered to be the earliest date of William's compositions because two chroniclers independently report that William began to write and perform his songs only after he returned from crusade late in 1102. There is reason to date Song 5 to 1106; Song 1 may precede or may follow it, but is also the production of an early date. The remaining songs come between 1106 and 1119, as close as we can come to dating them.¹⁰⁰

Some, however, can be ordered provisionally according to formal and internal evidence.¹⁰¹ The songs written in the spirit of courtly love are 7, 8, 9, 10 (with 8 of questionable attribution). These will be of interest to us as we seek connections between them and the events and persons in William's life.

Robert of Arbrissel

The most important individual relative to William's conception of courtly love is the priest and monk Robert of Arbrissel. Robert preached and practiced a doctrine that gave preference to the female sex. He also won the attention and devotion of William's two wives. Robert was a gifted preacher and a charismatic personality, whom people flocked to hear. He had recently left the cathedral school at Angers to establish a hermitage and preach when, in 1096, the pope visited Poitiers at William's invitation in order to consecrate a church at the monastery of Montierneuf, where William's parents were interred, and where William himself would be buried.¹⁰² The pope invited Robert of Arbrissel to appear before him and to preach on the occasion. Robert passed muster, and the pope gave his blessing to him as "apostolic missionary." Robert preached all over Aquitaine, and many women and men followed him in his peregrinations. Robert's superiors began to fear disorder and scandal among these many followers. That may have influenced their permitting him to found his own order in 1101. Robert founded a "double" monastery, housing both men and women; it was under the authority of the nuns generally, and an abbess in particular.

Both of William's lawful wives, Ermengarde of Anjou and Philippa of Toulouse, were close to Robert of Arbrissel, founder of the monastery of Fontevraud. Ermengarde lived at Fontevraud from 1112 until 1117, and her family, the House of Anjou, lavished gifts upon it. It seems likely that her departure was related to Robert's death in February 1116, unless it was related to the entry of William's second wife, Philippa, to Fontevraud in 1116 or 1117. Ermengarde was a capable and cultivated person, and she had a long and active life, ruling for years on behalf of her son. She met Bernard of Clairvaux in 1130, when she was over sixty, and he made her prioress of the monastery Larrey-of-the-Veil. She died in 1147, being then nearly eighty.¹⁰³ Philippa remained at Fontevraud until her death in 1130. So William had some reason to be jealous of Robert of Arbrissel.

We can document three public encounters between Robert of Arbrissel and William: (1) In 1096 when Robert spoke at the dedication at Montierneuf, probably stealing the limelight from William, and (2) in 1100, where a dramatic encounter occurred at the Council of Poitiers. The 141 church representatives present were about to pronounce renewed sanctions upon the adulterous King Philip when William appeared in defense of his liege lord and ordered his men to tear the clothes off the clerics and whip them to death. Robert of Arbrissel and Bernard of Thiron alone held their ground while the others fled in all directions. (William did not carry out his threat.) The story is reported by Bernard of Thiron's hagiographer.¹⁰⁴ Robert and Bernard became heroes, if not martyrs, and the following year Robert was able to found Fontevraud on lands donated by a local lord. (3) In 1105 Robert, William, and certain bishops and abbots met to condemn attacks by one of William's unruly vassals, Hugh of Lusignan, upon the abbey of St. Maixent. In this case, William and Robert were on the same side.

In 1107 William gave land to one Fouchier, a disciple of Robert's, to found a new monastery at Orbestier. This has been cited as evidence of William and Robert's collusion, but Fouchier may have been one of the dissenters from Robert's pro-female policies. Robert more than once offered men at Fontevraud the option to "go in peace" if they disagreed with his policy of female leadership. It seems likely that William sympathized with such dissenters out of rivalry with Robert. R. R. Bezzola in 1940 first identified a rivalry between troubadour and monk as operational in the formation of the "doctrine" of courtly love—a rivalry expressed in giving preeminence to women.¹⁰⁵

Robert of Arbrissel began his career as a priest in his home of Arbrissel in Brittany. His father and grandfather before him had been priests. It is probable that he himself was married and also that he was guilty of simony in that he had helped

(as was expected of him) the district's feudal lord to become bishop of Rennes in 1076, even though this man had no qualifications (such as the priesthood or education). When the pope deposed this man two years later, Robert probably had to depart. Thus he was affected very personally by the Gregorian reforms. He seems to have accepted the Church's condemnation of himself and so many others who had been following practices of long standing. There are many references in the documentation to a keenly felt sinfulness and a desire to atone.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps he also felt sympathy for the many women—like his own wife?—who were casualties of the era's sexual politics. There were many women in his following who had been set aside by a cleric-husband. There were also many women of the noble class who were refugees from abusive marriages, or wives who had been set aside because a more advantageous match offered itself to the husband. And then there were widows.

As an enormously popular preacher and a charismatic personality, Robert—even before the foundation of Fontevraud—collected a large number of followers who moved about Aquitaine with him, camping in the open. There were many former sex workers under Fontevraud's protecting wings. (For them, it may have been an attractive retirement option.) It is the subject of a particularly dramatic story of mass repentance in his *Vita*. Robert himself from the beginning associated more closely with his female than male followers and took counsel primarily with an inner circle of the older women. He also slept (chastely) among the women, deliberately subjecting himself to temptation as an ascetic practice—a deliberate act of self-denial. His followers, men and women together, served the sick in hospitals and pilgrims at hostels. For all this he was reproached by his earliest biographer, Marbod of Rennes. But it was important to Robert that men and women live and work together. When he founded Fontevraud the men and women often worked side by side clearing the land and erecting the necessary buildings, but were housed separately. They lived a hard ascetic life as “Christ's Poor” with Robert as their “Master.”

While there were virgins among the Fontevraud nuns, Robert gave preference, as a practical matter, to the matrons. On his deathbed he rationalized his choice of a lay sister to be abbess, saying, “I long for Mary in heaven, but I choose Martha, who understands earthly matters” (123). The men were subordinated to the abbess specifically and to the women of the cloister generally. (However, the women were enjoined to seek counsel among the men on decisions affecting all.) The rationale for the priority of women was that the men needed to humble themselves for the sake of their own salvation. That is, they were to place themselves willingly under the authority and in the service of these worthy women, thereby taking a first step on Jacob's spiritual ladder. Whether or not this was a rationalization designed to make

female leadership palatable, it did not always work. On more than one occasion Robert “invited” men who could not accept the primacy of women to depart in peace.

The images that served to characterize the female sex in the Middle Ages were those of Eve, the Temptress, through whom Adam’s fall was accomplished, and of the Virgin Mary, Queen of Heaven and intercessor with her son at the Last Judgment on behalf of mercy toward sinners. The Great Cloister of Fontevraud was dedicated to Mary, the bearer of mercy. But Robert made particular use of Mary Magdalene in his teaching, as the fallen but repentant woman, tender in humbling herself before and ministering to her Lord. Honored as one of the three women who were the first persons to bear witness to Christ’s resurrection, she constituted a role model that any woman could look to, seeing that Christ extended hope and mercy to females. Robert rejected the notion that woman is intrinsically evil on account of Eve’s sin. A woman was a sinner only if she herself had sinned and even then, if she repented, the mercy of Christ would save her. Robert’s second biographer, Andreas of Ménelay l’Abbaye, recounts how Robert contested a tradition at Ménelay l’Abbaye, where women were not allowed to enter the church on pain of being struck down dead by the saints. Robert challenged this tradition, bringing some of his female followers to the church, then upbraided the locals for their “stupid superstition.” “If a woman can take the blood and body of Christ in communion, then think how stupid it is to believe she should not enter any church” (106–118).

One of the most dramatic events of Robert’s career took place one inclement day when he had entered a brothel in Rouen to take refuge from the weather and, as he warmed himself by their stove, preached to the women Christ’s mercy even for such as themselves (82–93). According to this story, the prostitutes left the brothel and became his followers, joining him in his then-wandering pastorate. He encouraged them in a goal of celibacy each day “just for today,” and left to them their choice of penance (89). No wonder then that Robert’s superiors became anxious to have him settle his followers in a cloistered and regularized life.

The organization of the mother house, Fontevraud, eventually consisted in four “houses”: (1) the Great Cloister, dedicated to the Virgin Mary; (2) the Magdalene house; (3) St. Lazarus, for lepers; and (4) Saint-Jean for the men, both ordinary monks and priests. At first only the virgins, generally girls of some noble house, were assigned to the Great Cloister. All the rest went to the Magdalene house: the former sex workers, but also those who had been married—any woman who had “known” a man. Later Robert assigned widows and displaced noblewomen to the Great Cloister, leaving as “Magdalenes” only the former sex workers and the ex-priests’ wives. Since these were generally lower-class women, it made the cloister much

more class-segregated. Robert's reason for preferring the high-status Magdalenes was that he had to have as administrators women of practical capabilities, women with experience in running a large establishment. He himself was frequently absent, preaching or founding offshoot houses, of which there were many, since he continued to attract followers (xvii–xviii, 120).¹⁰⁷ Most of the men—priests included—were from the lower social orders. They did the hard labor. Those men who were trained in it conducted mass and sang psalms (145). As he lay dying, Robert confessed that he had accepted praise for founding many cloisters, while the credit really belonged to the women who had assembled around him.

Whether due to jealousies or simply that the succeeding head of Fontevraud, Petronilla, was not strong enough to overrule those who would flout the founder's wishes, it seems that, with the death of Robert, the women's one worthy vassal-servitor had gone. Perhaps it was the loss of the charismatic personality, but it is also true that both church and society were moving in the other direction: against the feudal rights of women, against the double monasteries and the unique authority women had in them, and toward the cloistering of nuns. Robert's unique order lost its inspiration, yet it did survive. In the seventeenth century the sisters tried to revive Robert's memory because the monks were refusing to obey them, but it was too late. They sought Robert's canonization, but the necessary testimony had never been gathered, and the documents had disappeared.

The "love-service" of the troubadours was more successful in affecting social ideas in the long term than were the double monasteries, such as Fontevraud. Both for men and women, courtly love offered validation of the unique individual in eyes of the other and recognition of their love as a positive force, yea the first step on Jacob's ladder. As such, courtly love was deeply appealing; it has undergone vicissitudes over the last nine hundred years, yet in romantic love mutuality and trust remain the ideal.

In another generation Bernardine mysticism gained ascendance in the church. The later life of Ermengarde of Anjou is interesting in this respect. She spent much of her life as a woman of this world, ruling on behalf of her second husband when he was on crusade and later, on behalf of her son. Her close relationship to Bernard of Clairvaux as revealed in her letters to him, speak of the centrality of love in religion for both of them. This—and his enlistment of her as a lay person to serve as a prioress—testify to a congruity between Robertine ideology and Bernardine mysticism.

But important to us is the juxtaposition of the ideas of Robert of Arbrissel with those of William IX with respect to (a) recognition of a moral superiority of women; (b) "service" by the lover to the female beloved—in Robert's case, for the sake of

Christ, because the nuns are “Christ’s brides,” and because, for the men, submitting themselves to the authority of women was humbling, and a first step on “Jacob’s Ladder”; and finally, in either case, (c) the ennobling effect upon *men* of such love-service. The religious and secular forms of this ideology may have been competing consciously (at least where William is concerned) for the allegiance of women and thus played a part in the formation of the culture of courtly love.

The spirit of rivalry between William IX and Robert of Arbrissel was established early on, probably at the start of Robert’s career when in 1096 the pope invited him to preach at Montierneuf. It was intensified in their confrontation at the Council of Poitiers. William was absent on crusade in 1101 when Fontevraud was founded in the diocese of Poitiers, but his wife Philippa was already at this time very close to Robert. (Fontevraud owed feudal allegiance not to William, but to the count of Anjou, Gauthier of Montsoreau, who endowed it with the needed lands.) Fontevraud was richly endowed in these early years (xvii, 7, 60–61, 120). We do know that when William returned in October 1102, he found Philippa, much to his annoyance, engrossed in Robert’s movement. William of Malmesbury reports that William composed a witty and scandalous song about Fontevraud, making much of the presence there of former sex workers. “The Count of Poitou” (William), he tells us, “at a certain castle called Niort built some little houses, almost like monastic huts, and wildly proclaimed that he would found an ‘Abbey of Whores.’ And he sang that he would establish this girl or that one, whom he named, all from famous brothels, as his abbess, his prioress, and his other officials.” Unfortunately, this song does not survive.¹⁰⁸

Among the songs which might very well be taken to reflect William’s relationship with Philippa upon his return from crusade was Song 5 (Bond):

There are ladies who are ill-advised,
And I can say which:
Those who turn a knight’s love
Into pain.

A lady who does not love a loyal knight
Commits a great mortal sin.
But if [she loves] a monk or a priest
She is in the wrong!
By right one ought to burn her
With [firebrands].¹⁰⁹

If there is a strong presumption that Song 5 has reference to Philippa, one can do no more than guess about the others. One must suppose that at least some of the

courtly love songs were addressed to the Viscountess Maubergeonne of Châtellerauld, the great love of his forties (ca. 1112–1119), from whom only the church parted him. In Song 6 (Bond) William refers to himself as the “Perfect Master” (*maistre serto*) of love. (Robert of Arbrissel had his followers address him as “Master” rather than the more common “Lord” or “Abbot.”) (61–62)

The great importance of Robert of Arbrissel and Fontevraud to the creation of the courtly love lyric is that, on the one hand, they provide a person and institution as mediator of a new departure in social thinking—one giving preference to the ladies. Philosophy does not travel well without such “legs.” Nor are social institutions copied without local “need,” which the Gregorian reforms created in greater abundance than was the norm. Scholars have long looked for a connection between Neoplatonism, with its emphasis upon love as the motor of spiritual growth, and courtly love. Father Denomy scoured the sources in search of such a link in the 1940s and 1950s, and finally—his exasperation is palpable—declared that the congruity of the two ideologies is so strong and the avenues of contact so many, that they *must* have been connected. In 1940 R. R. Bezzola first connected Robert of Arbrissel to William's poetry. Later scholarship (1980s) has produced biographies of Robert that substantiate links between the two men. It may be that the personal competition of William IX with Robert of Arbrissel and his double monasteries provided an impetus to courtly love. But though we may see Robert himself as a positive impetus, was he steeped in Platonist love philosophy?

Looking for Neoplatonism in Robert's education and in his ministry, one turns to the content of his studies in Paris (1078–1088 or 1089) and Angers (1093–1095). His early biographers are not much help, nor do the letters of Gottfried of Vendôme or Marbod of Rennes specify Robert's course of study in Paris or Angers. Anselm of Laón, one of the great masters of the time, taught in Paris from 1076 to 1089, but we have no concrete evidence of his having influence on Robert.¹¹⁰ Robert did report a spiritual awakening in Paris, but there is nothing to connect this with his academic pursuits. In fact, according to his first biographer, Balderich of Bourgueil, Robert's experience in Paris determined in a decisive way his spiritual evolution, but prepared him “to serve God,” rather than to follow an academic master. It is plain that Robert did not become an intellectual—a subtle theologian—but a fire-and-brimstone preacher and a man of action. At Angers, Robert was exposed to Marbod, a scholar of Latin poetry who later became bishop of Rennes and a colleague. Robert earned his “Magister” at Angers; he also took up wearing a metal-studded undershirt as penance. However, he never became a recluse; rather, he preached and gathered followers and by 1101 established Fontevraud, motherhouse of his monastic order.

Jacques Dalarun, Robert's modern biographer, connects Robert's mysticism (though not directly) to the Neoplatonist Denys or Pseudo-Dionysus, as recovered by John Scot Eriugena during the Carolingian Renaissance: "The universe is a cascade of light which pours out from the 'uncreated' over heavenly and earthly creatures."¹¹¹ Eriugena also translated the Neoplatonist Maxim the Confessor, with his "Two Hundred Theses on Love." Eriugena had charge of the palace school of Charles the Bald at Laón.¹¹² The work of these ninth-century philosophers was gathered by Remigius of Auxerre in Paris about 900 into the form in which it continued to be studied into the twelfth century.¹¹³ This is the form or source from which Robert would have acquired Neoplatonism, if he did, in the eleventh century. Neoplatonism, then, was present in the course of theological or philosophical studies in Paris when Robert was there, and had been for a very long time. Robert could hardly have missed it entirely, yet that says very little about any specific role of Neoplatonism in Robert's thinking.

There was, however, another possible source of Neoplatonism, the so-called Loire poets, who sang of the friendship of men as an ennobling force. Two of them, Baudri of Bourgueil and Marbod of Rennes were very close to Robert; the latter was one of his biographers. The Loire poets sang in Latin of platonic male friendship in letters and in works intended for public ceremonial occasions. Gerald Bond suggests that their poems formed part of a public "discourse of love" that, from about 1100 on, included women, was written in the vernacular, and was performed at court entertainments. The relationship of this public discourse to the lyrics of William IX cannot be specified, but they would have reinforced one another. Robert's sentiments merge with them.

With Robert, as with his close male colleagues, Marbod of Rennes and Gottfried of Vendôme, there was a sense of redeeming the daughters of Eve through the Virgin Mary, though for Robert more through Mary Magdalene as a fallen but repentant woman. Bernard of Clairvaux taught (too late to have influenced Robert) that this-earthly love is the first step on the spiritual ladder. His theology of love had a debt to Eriugena. As recorded above, William's first wife, Ermengarde, later corresponded with Bernard of Clairvaux about the primacy of love in religion. This postdates both William and Robert, constituting a congruence, though not a connection, between Robert's thinking and Bernardine mysticism. It serves to substantiate the role of Neoplatonism in the era.

William IX himself was illegitimate, hence reprobate in the eyes of the church. He returned from the second crusade a failure as a warrior and perhaps a coward as well, for he and his retinue of nobles fled from the battlefield, leaving their armies to be destroyed by the enemy. William, as mentioned above, returned to Provence

to find his wife and his ex-wife more interested in the charismatic priest-monk than in a “loyal knight.” William’s behavior upon his return was outrageous: he flaunted his mistresses publicly, defied the church, scandalized the community with his “abbey of whores,” parading obscenities in his songs. Finally, though, William gave up such tactics, choosing, perhaps, to try to beat Robert at his own game. He juxtaposed his secular, courtly love—a “secular mysticism,” scholars have called it—to Robert’s charismatic love and religious mysticism. For this, he won the appellation of “first troubadour.”

It is not difficult to see a parallel between the elevation of women’s status in Robert’s religious context and in William’s secular one. Nor in their desire to break down barriers between men and women. The historian Michelet viewed Fontevraud as “the troubadour cloister” where woman was queen and men willingly subordinated themselves to the nuns for the sake of their own souls. On his deathbed in 1116 Robert prayed for everyone from the pope on down, ending with William, who then stood under excommunication. William alone he mentioned by name—as though William were his alter ego—praying that William might “return to the way of truth.”¹¹⁴

Thus we have, among the personalities contributing to the culture of courtly love an embarrassment of riches: William, in disavowing vulgarity and praising mutuality in male-female love relationships; Robert, in his determination to respect women and found Fontevraud on the authority of women; and the Loire poets, who sang the joys of love in same-sex friendship, inspired by their reading of the Neoplatonism of Eriugena, Duns Scotus, and Denys or Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

There is a fitting coda to William’s life, which was a failure in many ways: William had been forced by the church to renounce his great love, Maubergeonne, but her daughter and his son married and produced Eleanor of Aquitaine. One might see in Eleanor and her daughters the victory of her grandfather William’s culture of courtly love. Or the debasement of it.

And Neoplatonism? Did it permeate the era of courtly love’s founding? Or was its presence too dim, too hazy, too general to be said to have played a formative role? It was *there* in the background, and ideas congruent with it were there. But in William’s songs, love as an ennobling passion arises more demonstrably from his rivalry with Robert for the ladies’ interest and from his romantic feelings for his true love and mistress Maubergeonne. Robert introduced in his religious order a social order more demonstrably connected with his personal sense of the injustice done to women—including, probably, his own wife—by the Gregorian reforms, perhaps underpinned or augmented by encounters with the influence of Neoplatonism, specifically, that of his colleagues, the Loire poets. There are many and various

avenues here of a Neoplatonist infusion, and this is seen even more clearly in the love mysticism of Bernard of Clairvaux, following upon the lifetimes of Robert and William. Thus the conclusion, with respect to Neoplatonism in Western courtly love is vaguely positive, but more supportive than fundamental to its origins. Like Father Denomy, one might wish for a more definite finding, yet perhaps intellectual ideas catch on more often simply because they are “in the air” rather than through specific communications.

Part IV: Neoplatonism West and East

Quite different is it with Neoplatonism in *The Knight in the Panther Skin*. As the Georgian scholar S. I. Nutsbidze puts it: “The basic ideology underlying *The Knight in the Panther Skin* is the ancient one of Neoplatonism.”¹¹⁵ This is generally accepted by Georgian scholarship, although Georgian ecclesiastical authorities do not accept it. The 1977 scholarly translation into English by R. H. Stevenson accepts the Neoplatonist influence, while that by Katharine Vivian, also 1977, does not.¹¹⁶ The philosophical-religious views and terminology that are so evidently Neoplatonist to “some,” Vivian says, “others” reject, “holding that they should be interpreted according to the inner or esoteric essence of the Christian faith” (22). (Which is exactly as Christians more sympathetic to Neoplatonism, East and West, *would* see it.) The whole controversy seems curious, as the Eastern Church, sympathetic to Platonism, absorbed the ideas of Denys, or Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (ca. 500), as one element of its theology among many.¹¹⁷ Neoplatonism retained its identity, its basic (Greek) texts remaining accessible to the academically more advanced Eastern Church in the Middle Ages.

The earliest scholarship on Neoplatonism and Rustaveli was published in the early years of the twentieth century by the renowned Russian linguistic scholar, Nikolai Iakovlevich Marr.¹¹⁸ Basic research on Neoplatonism and Rustaveli was published by Nutsbidze in 1967—a revision of his 1947 book—as *Rustaveli and the Eastern Renaissance*, under the auspices of the Georgian Academy of Sciences. The Neoplatonic corpus was brought to Georgia at the end of the eleventh century when Efrem Mtsire, a Georgian scholar, translated Denys/Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite into Georgian. Ioann Petritsi, Georgia’s foremost scholar in the time of King David the Builder (d. 1125) translated Proclus Diadokh’s *Elements of Theology*, known in the West as *Liber de causis*. These are fifth-century Neoplatonist works and complementary. Proclus was the last great systematizer of Neoplatonism. Petritsi also translated *On the Nature of Man* by Nemesii Emeskii (fourth–fifth centuries).¹¹⁹

Only the royal protection of King David the Builder made it possible for Petritsi to publish the Neoplatonists, as the Georgian church did not approve.

Nevertheless, Neoplatonism permeated the literary and intellectual life of twelfth-century Georgia. Rustaveli belonged to this literary and intellectual world, with its wide-ranging ties to Byzantine Greek, Persian, and Arab culture. He is very likely to have studied in Byzantium at one of the several Georgian monastic academies there, then considered the best schooling available for boys of the Georgian elite. He was educated at first in Georgia, perhaps at the Ikalto Academy, or otherwise at Gelati, the other Georgian academy, and then probably in Greece. The Georgian monastery-academies at Mt. Athos and Olympus were popular. Rustaveli knew Greek, Persian, and Arabic and studied the literature and philosophy of those learned traditions. He probably knew the reworking of the ancients' ideas in the works of Petr Iver, Ioan Laz, Ioan Moskh, Efrem Mtsire, and Ioan Petritsi, yet he quotes only Denys. Abashidze considers it proven that Rustaveli was Queen Tamar's treasurer, one of four "vizirs."¹²⁰ If so, he may have been part of a delegation to Saladin after Saladin's conquest of Jerusalem in 1187, sent by Queen Tamar to arrange the purchase of the Monastery of the Holy Cross there. We do know that in his later years he retired, perhaps as an exile, to that monastery, where he remained until his death. Evidence of this is a fresco depicting Shota Rustaveli, alongside the Neoplatonists Maximus the Confessor and Ioann of Damascus, which was discovered by a Georgian research party in 1959 (fig. 1).¹²¹

Stepping into the atmosphere of Rustaveli's epic poem is like stepping into the fresh light of day: it is exhilarating in its celebration of life and beauty and justice and statesmanship. It is a profoundly humanistic work. It is obvious that it is not dependent upon the church or Christianity specifically. While there is much mention of God, the Creator, the One, and "the invisible power," the only specific reference to the Bible is, "Have you not read what the Apostles wrote of love, how their praise of it resounds? 'Love ennobles us!' Their words ring out like the [chime] of bells" (119). God is invoked in prayer regularly, but there is no mention of any Christian rites, churches, or priests. Rustaveli's Christianity is emancipated from church dogma and authority; the church's hostility to Rustaveli and his work is long standing. The Quran is mentioned as the "Sacred Book" upon which Nestan-Darejan and Tariel took a vow to one another (79, 91), but the mullahs who surround Tariel, praying, reciting the Quran, and pronouncing Tariel to be possessed by Beelzebub, are not well-regarded (72). After *The Knight in the Panther Skin* first was published, in 1712 by King Vakhtang VI, the church destroyed as many copies as it could find.

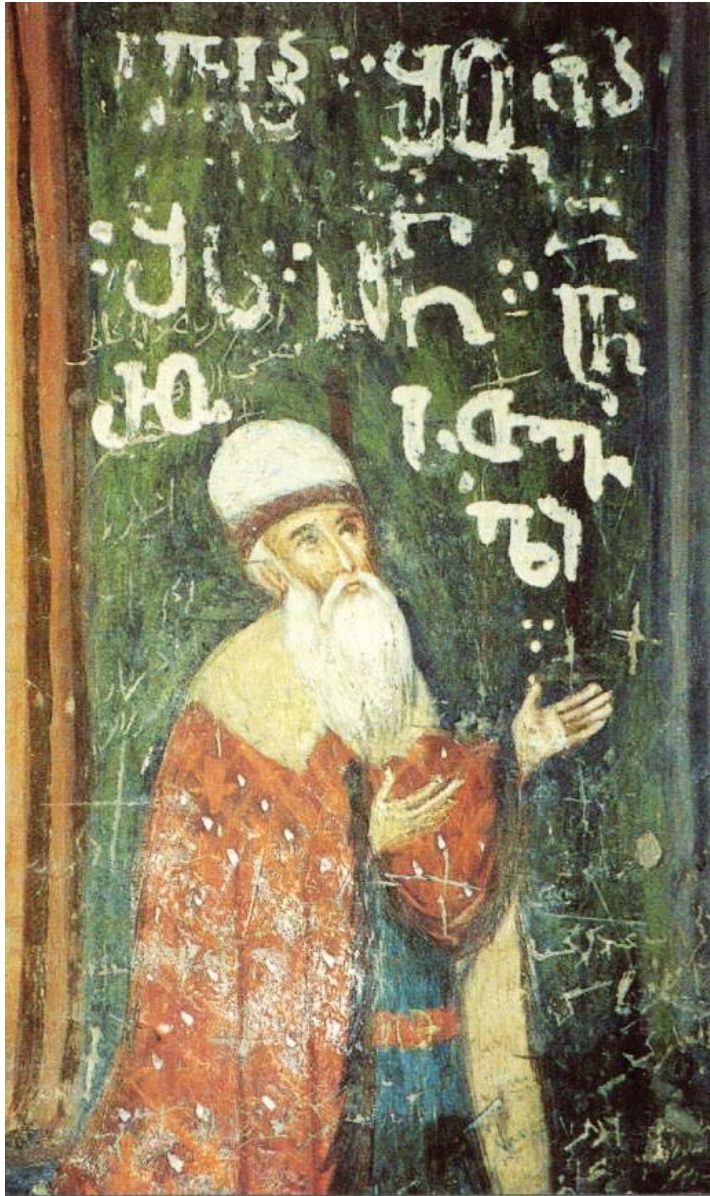


Figure 1. Shota Rustaveli shown in an eleventh-century fresco, Monastery of the Cross, Jerusalem, Israel before it was defaced in 2004. Public domain, image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, Wikipedia Foundation.

The most striking Platonist feature in Rustaveli's poem is the repeated invocation of the sun. Hardly a page is without it, no hero or heroine is praised without comparison to the sun. "He is sun-like to behold;" "she is radiant as the rising sun;" "oh my shining sun, what can I say but that I will do anything to serve you; God has created you to be a sun whom the heavenly bodies obey, and I will be your slave and go anywhere in the world for your sake!" Anyone who has read the "Allegory of the Cave" in Plato's *Republic* will recognize the concept of the sun—the source of all "light"—as an image of, or metaphor for, God. It is the original Platonism. The sun had particular appeal to the Georgian mind, as pre-Christian Georgians worshipped it. It is the reason for the distinctive Georgian cross—the Bolnisi cross—inscribed within a sun-disk (fig. 2).



Figure 2. Bolnisi Cross: shown in a fourth-century CE stone carving, exterior of Jvari Monastery, in Mtskheta, Republic of Georgia. Public domain, image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, Wikipedia Foundation.

The sun is also used in the eleventh-century epic by the Persian Homer, Firdausi, in the *Shah-nama*: Firdausi created the world of shining suns that Rustaveli's characters move in. Rustaveli refers to the poem just once, mentioning its central hero, Rustam.¹²² Rustaveli's use of the sun-image is distinctive—and those distinctions point to Neoplatonism.¹²³ “Sun, who are like to my beloved as she is to you.” “Great Sun, power supreme, within whose power it is to raise up the humble, to confer sovereignty and joy on men, do not deprive me of my beloved or let my day be turned into night” (chap. 32, 136–137). “He, the invisible power sustaining every creature on earth, setting bounds to everything finite, reigning immortal, God in Godhead: He in an instant can create unity from a hundred, hundreds out of one. Nothing can come to pass but that which he has willed” (chap. 26, 119–120). Or, “Most high God, supreme in Heaven and earth, who dost send us at times affliction, at other times good things: incomprehensible, inexpressible, lord of lords: Thou who hast sway over the passions of men, grant me the mastery of desires!” (chap. 27, 121–122).

Nestan-Darejan: “When I heard news of you, I glorified the Creator and praised God, and all the sorrow I had known was transformed into joy. To know that you are alive, that is enough to give hope to my wounded heart. . . . Pray to God for me, that He deliver me from the travail of this world, from the bonds of fire and water, earth and air . . . [She prays only to die]. . . in the realm of the sun I shall behold you” (chap. 41, 171). “Oh God, how can I serve and repay Thee, who has turned darkness into light? . . . Now I am assured that evil is short-lived, while Thy goodness is enduring” (chap. 49, 185). And Tariel: “Your brothers have given their lives for us. Now in truth they have gained eternal bliss: they are magnified a hundred and twenty times in communion with the One” (chap. 49, 187).

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in *The Divine Names* addresses those who make the effort to contemplate God, though God is essentially unknowable. He speaks of the ray which enlightens people, toward which they turn. For “the great, shining, ever-lighting sun is the apparent image of the divine goodness, a distant echo of the Good.” “It is responsible for the origins of life and perceptible bodies, nourishing them and causing them to grow, perfecting them, purifying them, and renewing them.” “So it is with light, with this visible image of the Good. It draws and returns all things to itself, all the things that see, that have motion, that are receptive to illumination and warmth. . . .”¹²⁴ “The old myth used to describe the sun as the provident God and creator of this universe. I do not say this.”¹²⁵

Among the “divine names of God” are “the One, the Good, and the Creator of the universe,” all of which are in the God-vocabulary of Rustaveli. “The One” is particularly identified with the third-century philosopher, Plotinus—generally con-

sidered the first Neoplatonist. For Plotinus, multiplicity cried out for explanation: tracing it back to primordial unity accomplished that. Thus everything became an emanation of the One; all beings yearn to return to it.¹²⁶ However, only Pseudo-Dionysius is quoted directly by Rustaveli and seems to have been his immediate source. He does not mention Proclus or Proclitus or any other Neoplatonist.

The treatment of love in Neoplatonism is distinct from that of traditional Christianity, and the prologue to *The Knight in the Panther Skin* is a disquisition on courtly love:

I speak of love that is highest, Heaven's in kind
Hardly to be described by the tongue or expressed
Love that exalts and gives man wings for upward flight:
Great trials are his who ventures upon that quest.¹²⁷

This is the love of which William IX sang a century earlier. It is the love of Dante for Beatrice in *The Divine Comedy*—the love which led him higher in his quest for God, when Reason could take him no further.

In Pseudo-Dionysius the lover is touched by the rays of the sun, which draws all living things to itself. As longing grows, the sun gives more of itself. They call it “the beautiful, the good, the beloved. I yearn for its beauty.” “Love for it came upon me like love for a woman. The divine yearning brings ecstasy so that the lover belongs not to the self but to the beloved. . . . The sacred writers lift up a hymn of praise to the Good. They call it beautiful, beauty, love and beloved. They give it names which convey that it is the source of loveliness. . . . Beauty . . . is given this name because it is the cause of the harmony and splendor in everything . . .”¹²⁸

The beautiful is the same as the Good, for everything looks to the Beautiful and the Good as the cause of being, and there is nothing in the world without a share of it.”¹²⁹ This—the One, the Good, the Beautiful—is in its uniqueness the Cause of the multitudes of the good and the beautiful.¹³⁰

“And so it is that all things must desire, must yearn for, must love, the Beautiful and the Good.¹³¹ “Yearn for her and she shall keep you; exalt her and she will extol you; honor her and she will embrace you.”¹³² The value of yearning or longing is reiterated in *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, starting with the Prologue, verse 2: “give me the love of a lover longing unto death.”

Pseudo-Dionysius admonished the “lowly men” who think there is something absurd in the verse “Love for you came upon me like love for a woman;” that what is seen in this case is “a particular commingling of the Beautiful and the Good.”¹³³ In *The Divine Names*, “On the love of the beautiful,” Pseudo-Dionysius reproduces

part of a speech by Diotima to Socrates from the *Symposium* to the effect that love is a means of ascent to the contemplation of the divine.¹³⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius combined the Neoplatonic idea about God *as* love (*eros* or *agape*—he argues them to be equivalent) with the notion of God’s “ecstasy.” Love is defined as essentially “ecstatic”—that is, the one who loves is drawn *out of himself* and centers his being on the object of his love.¹³⁵ In the time of Pseudo-Dionysius (late fifth century), Christian ascetic literature saw the suppression of passions as the goal of the struggle. Pseudo-Dionysius, saw the transformation or redirection of passions to be the right way to *apatheia* or freedom from passion. That line of thinking continued in Maximus the Confessor.¹³⁶

Pseudo-Dionysius transformed the Greek notion of *eros*. For him, *eros* is a yearning love, an overflow of divine goodness. It needs nothing; it is the source of everything.¹³⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius’s conception of love deeply colors his understanding of reality. God created the world out of his goodness, out of love. God sends good and good only; evil is not his creation. He gives the bad but a moment, the good he wills to endure.”¹³⁸ This doctrine of the insubstantiality of evil and the essential goodness of human beings is distinctive in Neoplatonism.

St. Augustine rejected Neoplatonism in part because he believed in the “fallen” nature of humankind. The acceptance of carnal love—the view that *agape* and *eros* are both, essentially, love, and are both part of the ascent to God—separated Neoplatonist mysticism from mainline medieval Christianity. To paraphrase Pseudo-Dionysius: Neoplatonism sees evil as resulting from a weakness or defect, but God and his creation are essentially good. There is no evil in our bodies. The body is not the cause of evil in the soul.

Evil has no substance; it exists as an accident. It is contrary to “progress, purpose, nature, cause, source, goal, definition, will and substance.” But how is it that evil can achieve something? Because evil is often mixed with good. Evil things are not totally evil in every respect. It is easy to see that the above fits ill with the Augustinian doctrine on the evils of carnality and the need to mortify the flesh to be holy. However, it serves well to support the idea of courtly love. Rustaveli asserts the Neoplatonist doctrine on evil formally, in quoting Pseudo-Dionysius, and casually, from the mouth of Patman: “Now I am assured that evil is short-lived, while Thy goodness is enduring.”¹³⁹

Pseudo-Dionysius’s conception of love deeply colors his understanding of reality. Love is a force—a force as powerful as anything we know, and its goal is unity.¹⁴⁰ Unity is equated with peace—love extended to the political realm. The young ruler-lovers will pursue peace for their realms, turning their friendship and love to

that task. But what of love-madness or *mijnuroba*? Throughout *The Knight in the Panther Skin* we are reminded of “love-madness,” and that the lover is a “madman.” In the prologue Rustaveli refers to Nizami's classic Arab tale, *Layla and Majnun*.

“Madman [*majnun*] they who love are called in the Arabic tongue
Mad from the pangs of love beyond attain.
Some in their high ascent approach the divine;
Others flutter here below in beauty's flame.”¹⁴¹

Indeed, the Georgian word for lover, *mijnuri*, is derived from *majnun*.¹⁴²

Though we find the core of courtly love, as expressed in the prologue of Rustaveli's epic, there are singularities which, like the Arab *mijnuroba*, call for closer examination. In fact, the central feature of this story, a knight in a panther skin, presents itself as an extreme. Both knight and panther present a dimension that does not necessarily depart from Western courtly love, but gives it a dark hue.

The love at the center of this tale is a passionate, fierce love for which the panther is the emblem—a *mijnuroba*. The panther skin that cloaks the mysterious stranger suggests the force—and potential destructiveness—of this passion. Central to the poem, and mysterious, is Tariel's account of the lion and panther which he slew and then, seeing a correspondence between the (female) panther and Nestan, collapsed and nearly died of a broken heart. Rustaveli shows us Nestan as a panther. He refers to her grace—like a panther's—and her ferocity. In her eyes—as in a panther's—lightning snaps. She has the life force of this powerful and graceful animal, but likewise a taut intellect. (She blames Tariel bitterly for not having protested her parents' intent to marry her to a Persian prince.) The parable involving lion and panther seems like a dream, with elements that correspond to “reality,” but a story structure that is “fantastic”—without precise correspondences to reality. Rustaveli offers the following: “Love is necessary to men; it brings us face to face with death, and causes the learned to lose their wits, and those who are untaught to become learned.” Rustaveli (and Avtandil) come away from the parable with their optimistic Neoplatonist views intact. But Avtandil's love has saved Tariel, who says, “Were it not for you, death would be welcome to me” (133).

Both Avtandil and Tariel are called *mijnuri* in their love of their respective ladies although, when they first meet, it is Tariel who is in the grip of madness (106). He confesses to Avtandil: “There was a time when I was like other men—men who have not lost their reason. . . . Now love-madness is my lot and my actions are those of a madman” (134). Avtandil replies with the “wisdom” of Neoplatonism to Tariel, “adjuring him, as one who had shown himself to be familiar with the teaching of

Denys the Wise (Pseudo-Dionysius), to bring intelligence as well as courage to bear upon the situation.”¹⁴³ Rustaveli proceeds to paraphrase Pseudo-Dionysius in characteristic Neoplatonic terms: “How can you say that God is powerless to save you, when it is He who causes every plant and every seed to grow? He who creates also nourishes and preserves; He who separates lovers, in the end unites them” (134).

There is a question as to whether Queen Tamar and Davit Soslan are meant to be identified with Tinatin and Avtandil—or whether they can be identified strictly with either fictive couple. The *focal* couple in the story are Nestan and Tariel. On the other hand it is Tinatin, as ruler to her knight and as lady to her lover, who sends Avtandil to seek out the mysterious knight and learn his story, providing the motive force of the story. Maurice Bowra thinks Tinatin and Avtandil are Tamar and Davit, while A. G. Baramidze sees them as Nestan and Tariel. King Rostevan crowned his daughter Tinatin in his lifetime, as Queen Tamar’s father had done. On the other hand, both pairs had been raised together as brother and sister in early childhood. Certainly Nestan’s courage and judgment under duress were exemplary. The grand and dark passion that overwhelms Tariel only disables him, not her. Yet would it have been flattering to impute so grand and dark a passion as we see disabling Tariel to the Queen’s consort? Is some ambiguity perhaps intentional on the part of the author?¹⁴⁴

Avtandil was Tariel’s teacher as well as his friend; he challenged Tariel to be a man and face adversity. But he recognized that his confidence-bolstering talk could not restore Tariel’s spirits. “In your present state you can achieve nothing if I do nothing on your behalf.” So he left Tariel to Asmat’s care, extracting only a promise to “Be careful of yourself, preserve your life and health” and to meet Avtandil in the same place one year hence (134–135). Avtandil goes off to discover where Nestan is being kept. This he accomplishes, and finds the opportunity to send messages to her, asking for the information needed to attempt her rescue.

Nestan-Darejan replies, enclosing a letter for Tariel. That letter reveals her more than any other part of the poem. It is Neoplatonist in philosophical framework, and its courtly love goes beyond the classic Western cultural phenomenon. Nestan expects the worst: that she will never see Tariel on this earth again, and that she will die, by her own hand if they should attempt to give her to another man. Knowing that he is alive gives her joy and strength and hope—but not expectation of rescue. “You cannot rescue me,” she writes, “you can only increase my sorrow by your death in making the attempt.” Writing in the spirit of Neoplatonism, she tries to comfort him: when she, pray God, is released from the bonds of fire, water, earth and air, then, “in the realm of the sun I shall behold you, who will flood the darkness of my heart with light.” She commends her spirit to his keeping (171).

Rather than attempt her rescue, Nestan would have Tariel turn to statesmanship. In the manner of courtly love, Western and Georgian, Nestan directs Tariel to “go your way to India and bring aid to my father. He is beset by hostile forces, with none to support him” (172). It is, of course, an order destined to be disobeyed, and Avtandil's immediate assumption is that Tariel will go to Nestan-Darejan's rescue (172). They apprise Asmat of the good news: “We may rejoice,” says Avtandil, “for our griefs and trials are at an end. We have come out of the darkness into the light of the sun and good, that is by its nature eternal, and has prevailed over evil” (177).

In the final section, Tariel steps to the fore, taking the lead from Avtandil. His plan of attack is accepted as a matter of course. There are celebrations of the marriage of Nestan and Tariel, both in Mulghazanzar and Gulansharo, but the marriage of Avtandil and Tinatin is no foregone conclusion, as Avtandil had departed from his lord's realm without express permission. It is Tariel who makes diplomatic approaches to King Rostevan on his behalf.

Tariel tells the king how deeply he is indebted to Avtandil, and asks that he bless the love that exists between his daughter and Avtandil (194). The king gladly acceding, all retire to the palace and join Queen Tinatin. It is Tariel who pleases to see Tinatin, “Sun of suns,” ascend her throne, and directs Avtandil, “Lion of lions,” to take his place beside her. Now it is Avtandil who “grows faint with love.” Rustaveli declaims: “not even Vis and Ramin can be compared to them!” King Rostevan, Neoplatonist that he is, intones “the saying of Denys the Wise—that in the end, love conquers all!” He invokes the blessing of God on the bridal pair, commands the army to do homage to Avtandil as their sovereign. “This day he is created king by the will of God and he receives the throne from me” (196).

In this latter part of the story, the fact that the “Kingdom of India” is much larger and richer than “Arabia” comes into play. For this and for reasons of the drama, Tariel moves to the fore. But it is also true that Tariel does not have possession of the throne of India, and the land itself is beset by enemies. Tariel needs the aid of his sworn brothers, Avtandil and Pridon, to make good his claims. However, in a spirit of cheerful assent, “the people acclaim Tariel sovereign and protector,” making any struggle to assert the rulership of Tariel (and Nestan) superfluous.

The question of sovereignty is handled loosely by Rustaveli. There was no doubt that Queen Tamar was a fully sovereign queen—she is actually titled “Tamar-Mephe” in Georgian history, meaning *King Tamar*. (Sometimes rendered in English by the less awkward *Sovereign Queen*.)¹⁴⁵ But Rustaveli, while recognizing that Tinatin had been crowned by her father, still refers to Rostevan as king and accords him sovereign authority in many instances. Avtandil obviously relates to both father and

daughter as having sovereign rights, while the ending refers only to the three male blood brothers as sovereigns. Artistic license? Deference to all parties? Rustaveli chose inconsistency.

Neoplatonism is the philosophic foundation of *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, but this implies no rejection of Christianity—or Islam. Both Denys the Wise and the Apostles are named and credited as sources of wisdom. And in a fullness of open-mindedness, the Quran is called into play as a Sacred Book, vows being sworn upon it. Love reigns supreme, not doctrine; love and vows of brotherhood between rulers extend to peace and justice in and among their realms: “The three sovereigns [Avtandil, Tariel and Pridon] did not forsake their friendship, but visited one another as often as they pleased. Gloriously they reigned, increasing their renown, suppressing insurrection and enlarging their domains. Their bounty like snow leveled inequalities, enriching the poor and bereaved, so that none had need to beg. They were the bane of evildoers—not a lamb could steal another’s milk under their rule, and wolf and goat would graze together” (201).

Conclusions

There was no direct relationship between Western courtly love and the origins of courtly love as seen in *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, but Neoplatonism may have offered a fertile soil for the spread of courtly love in the West and certainly constituted much of the spirit informing *The Knight in the Panther Skin*. Neoplatonism was central to Rustaveli’s education and outlook. The Neoplatonism that may have provided a receptive medium for the courtly love of the troubadours was not a factor in its creation by William IX (if, indeed, he was the first singer of courtly love). The shadow of doubt that yet hangs over the authorship of the prologue and epilogue to *The Knight in the Panther Skin* is perhaps not so serious as it might appear. With respect to courtly love, they make explicit—in beautiful form, compact and quotable—what is contained in the story itself.

Both versions of courtly love, William IX’s and Rustaveli’s, had a receptive medium in the social conditions of the day. In both cases, feudal heiresses inherited lands in their own right and needed strong military commanders to defend them. The possibility of holding feudal lands or a feudal kingdom was often linked to a woman who had legal familial rights. Thus poetry and song “pleasing to the lady” were the order of the day, in Georgia as in Provence.

Both in southern France and in Georgia there was an economic prosperity which could be secured and augmented by uniting and defending feudal holdings.

The era of Sovereign Queen Tamar was the peak of Georgian power and wealth, and it depended upon holding feudal servitors, mostly men, united under her authority. Thus the social conditions of landholding involving feudal heiresses were an important and perhaps essential underlying condition for the creation of a culture of courtly love. (We do not, however, have specific information about women other than Queen Tamar who held such rights in Georgia.)

The Knight in the Panther Skin becomes something more than courtly love in “love-madness.” *Mijnuroba* is seen in the figure of the panther, signifying the ferocity of Tariel and Nestan's love. This aspect of *The Knight in the Panther Skin* owes a debt to Persian literature—to the figures of Layla and Majnun and of Vis and Ramin where, however, it is not joined with qualities of courtly love. Yet even in *mijnuroba* there is a spiritual quality quite apart from bringing the lovers together. Majnun's spiritual exile in the desert or the missives Layla writes on slips of paper and sets adrift on the wind is undying love taking on a life of its own, a spiritual dimension for which the extended separation from the beloved is necessary. Rustaveli's poem exploits that separation, but the happy ending remains firmly rooted in the earth.

Thus *The Knight in the Panther Skin* speaks to us in the colors of courtly love, with the voice of humanism,¹⁴⁶ but also with a spiritual “madness” that hails more distinctly from the East.

Endnotes

A note on translations: Marjory Wardrop's translation, *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, published in 1912, is considered most precise and closest to the original. The 1977 translations by R. H. Stevenson (*The Lord of the Panther Skin*) and by Katharine Vivian (*The Knight in Panther Skin*) are free translations, designed to be as comprehensible and attractive as possible to the modern reader. For an authoritative discussion of English translations, see Elguja Khintibidze, *Rustaveli's "The Man in the Panther Skin" and European Literature* (London: Bennet and Bloom, 2011), 96–98.

1. Donald Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia, a History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 73–74). "Stylistic evidence suggests, however, that the prologue which introduces the poet and his ideas may be by a different hand from that which penned the body of the text. [However], if we suppose that the prologue was written by Rustaveli, and if we assume that Rustaveli is invoking the living, not eulogizing the dead, then his praise of Tamar and, by implication, of her consort Davit Soslan, leads us to date the work from the time of their marriage (1189–1207)." (It is still in doubt whether Rustaveli himself wrote the prologue and the epilogue.)

2. Peter Dronke, *Medieval Latin and the Rise of the European Love-Lyric*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 15–19; Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia*, 76–79.

3. C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

4. Shota Rustaveli, *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, trans. Katharine Vivian (1977; repr. London: Folio Society, 1995), verse 20, 40. Hereafter, Rustaveli, trans. "Vivian." All quotations are from this edition unless otherwise noted. Citations in the text are to verse (or chapter) and page number.

5. The Arab term is *majnun*, from which the Georgian terms *mijnuri* (lover) and *mijnuroba* (passion, love-madness) derive.

6. Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, ed. F. W. Locke, trans. J. J. Parry (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1957), bk. 1, chap. 1, "What Love Is."

7. Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, trans. A. T. Hatta (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), Prologue.

8. A. J. Denomy, "Fin'Amor: The Pure Love of the Troubadours, Its Amortality and Possible Source," *Mediaeval Studies* 7 (1945): 142–149.

9. See Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, bk.1, chap. 4.

10. In the dedication of the poem (assuming for the moment Rustaveli's authorship), Rustaveli made himself the emblematic lover of the queen. The queen he was eulogizing was married. He includes her spouse in his dedication, yet his courtly ardor is directed at her. Has Rustaveli

created a political version of courtly love, much as was the case at the court of Queen Elizabeth I? He does not call upon her to reciprocate his feelings. His feelings are meant to honor her. But did the romantic dedication get him in trouble? It has been suggested that this was the reason for his retirement to a monastery in Jerusalem.

11. Denomy, "*Fin' Amor: The Pure Love of the Troubadours*," 142–149.
12. From Guillaume (William) IX and including Bernard de Ventadour (d. 1190s)
13. Denomy, "*Fin' Amor: The Pure Love of the Troubadours*," 142.
14. Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, 21.
15. Denomy, "*Fin' Amor: The Pure Love of the Troubadours*," 143, citing the troubadour Marcabru (ca. 1130–1148).
16. *Ibid.*, 143, citing Marcabru.
17. *Ibid.*, 154, citing the troubadour Bernart Marti (ca. 1250).
18. These views are shared by C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*; by Father A. J. Denomy, *The Heresy of Love*; and by N. Ia. Marr in his "Vstupitelnyia i zakliuchitelnyia strofy 'Vitiazia v barsovoi kozhe Shoty iz Rustava' . . . s etiudom 'Kult zhenshchiny i rytsarstvo v poeme,'" *Izdaniia fakulteta vostochnykh iazykov imperatorskago S. Peterburgskago universiteta*, 5 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia imperatorskoi akademii nauk, 1910).
19. Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, 42.
20. "Her command is more important in this undertaking than any thought or effort I may expend." Author's prefacing remarks in *The Knight of the Cart*, in *The Complete Romances of Chretien de Troyes*, trans. David Staines (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 170.
21. *Ibid.*, chap. 3, 4. "[Love] adorns a man . . . with the virtue of chastity, because he who shines with the light of one love can hardly think of embracing another woman, even a beautiful one."
22. Rustaveli, trans. Vivian, 110.
23. Gurgani, Fakhr al-Din, *Visramiani: The Story of the Loves of Vis and Ramin: A Romance of Ancient Persia*, ascribed to Sargis Tmogveli, trans. Oliver Wardrop (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1914), 304; 120.
24. Rustaveli, trans. Vivian, 40.
25. Rustaveli, Shota, trans. R.H. Stevenson, 15.

26. *Visramiani*, 273
27. Rustaveli, trans. Vivian, 37n.
28. *Visramiani*, 288.
29. *Ibid.*, 114-115.
30. Rustaveli, trans. Vivian, 133.
31. *Visramiani*, 87, 93, 105.
32. Rustaveli, trans. Vivian, 189.
33. *Visramiani*, 359.
34. Rustaveli, trans. Vivian, 150.
35. *Ibid.*, Ch. 18.
36. *Visramiani*, 394.
37. Boase, Roger, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love; A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), 94, citing L.A. Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love Among the Arabs* (1971).
38. Nizami, Ganjavi, *The Story of Layla and Majnun*, trans R. Gelpke (Oxford: Cassirer, 1966), Postscript, 219.
39. See bibliography in Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977).
40. Alois Richard Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry and Its Relations with the Old Provençal Troubadours* (Baltimore: J. H. Furst, 1946), lxxvi–lxxxvi; Anwar Chejne, *Muslim Spain: Its History and Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 233–44.
41. Chejne, *Muslim Spain*, 233–244; Marina Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 84.
42. Menocal, *The Arabic Role*, 95–100.
43. Nykl, 373; see also 379–80; 382–83; 394.
44. Frederick Goldin, trans. and ed., *Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouvères* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1973), 14–15.

45. I follow the ordering and numbering of Gerald A. Bond, ed. and trans., *The Poetry of William VII, Count of Poitiers, IX Duke of Aquitaine*, Garland Library of Medieval Literature 4, series A (New York: Garland, 1982).
46. *Ibid.*, 14.
47. Hans Spanke, "Zur Formenkunst des ältesten Troubadours," *Studi Medievali*, N.S. 7 (1934), 72–84; Jacques Chailley, "Autour de la Chanson de Geste," *Acta Musicologica*, 27, no. 1/2 (Jan.–Jul., 1955): 1–12; *L'École musicale de Saint-Martial de Limoges: jusqu'à la fin du XI^e siècle* (Paris: Impr. S.P.I., 1960).
48. Menocal, *The Arabic Role*, xi.
49. Boase, *The Origin and Meaning*, appendix I, 131–32.
50. Menocal, *The Arabic Role*, xi.
51. Boase, *The Origin and Meaning*, 63, citing Ecker, *Arabischer, Provenzalischer und Deutscher Minnesang: Ein motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Bern U. Leipzig: Paul Haupt, 1934); Alois R. Nykl, "L'influence arabe-andalouse sur les troubadours," *Bulletin Hispanique* (Bordeaux), 41 (1939): 305–315; Ramón Menéndez-Pidal. *Poesia árab y poesia europea* (Madrid: Austral, 1941).
52. Nykl, (1946), 396–98, citing De Vasconcelos, *Revista Lusitania* 22 (1920).
53. Ibn Hazm, *A Book Containing the Risâla Known as "The Dove's Neck-Ring,"* trans. and ed. A. R. Nykl (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1931) chap. 2, *Signs of Love*, 12–13. See also Chejne, *Muslim Spain*, 253 and Ecker, *Minnesang*, 150.
54. Ecker, *Arabischer, Provenzalischer und Deutscher Minnesang*, 150 (translation mine), quoting Ibn Hazm, *The Dove's Neck-Ring*, 12–13.
55. Golden, *Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouvères*, no. 8, 45.
56. *Ibid.*
57. Avicenna [Ibn Sina], "A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina," trans. and ed. E. L. Fackenheim, *Medieval Studies* 7 (1945): 208–228.
58. Ecker, *Minnesang*, 156–165.
59. Alexander J. Denomy, "Jovens: The Notion of Youth Among the Troubadours, Its Meaning and Source," *Mediaeval Studies* 11 (1949), 3.
60. Sergei B. Serebriakov, "Rustaveli and the Provençal Troubadours" (original article in Georgian), in *Voprosy drevnegruzyinskoi literatury I rustavelogii* (Dzveli kartuli mtserlobis da rustvelologiiis sakitkhebi) 5 (Tbilisi: Izdatel'stvo Metsnreba, 1973), 28–49.
61. *Ibid.*, 19–20.

62. As a precursor in this line of thought he cites Hermann Thorning. "Beiträge zur Kenntnis des islamischen Vereinwesens," *Türkische Bibliothek* 16 (Berlin, 1913), 192–93.
63. Menocal, *The Arabic Role*, 47.
64. Boase, *The Origin and Meaning*, 68–73.
65. Menocal, *The Arabic Role*, 27; Nykl (1946), 374.
66. Boase, *The Origin and Meaning*, 72.
67. Denomy, "Jovens," 21–22.
68. Boase, *The Origin and Meaning*, 69, citing René Nelli, *L'érotique des troubadours* (Toulouse: Edouard Privat, 1963), 44.
69. Bond, *The Poetry of William VII*, 1.
70. Boase, *The Origin and Meaning*, 73.
71. Norman Daniel. *The Arabs and Medieval Europe* (London: Longman, 1975).
72. Boase, *The Origin and Meaning*, 71.
73. Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, 3390, 379, 373.
74. A. J. Denomy, "Concerning the Accessibility of Arab Influences to the Earliest Provençal Troubadours," *Mediaeval Studies* 15 (1953), 147–58.
75. Denomy, "Jovens," 21.
76. Bond, *The Poetry of William VII*, xliii.
77. *Ibid.*, xix.
78. Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, 385.
79. Bond, *The Poetry of William VII*, ed. and transl, xlix–lv.
80. Goldin, *Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouvères*, 23.
81. Bond, *The Poetry of William VII*, 60 n3.
82. *Ibid.*, no. 2, 7.

83. Ibid., no. 2, 9.

84. Ibid, no. 5, 23.

85. Goldin, no. 5, 33–37.

86. A cover name (*senhal* or *signal*), for the courtly lover never reveals the lady's name.

87. Bond considers the attribution of this song to William doubtful.

88. Again, a cover name—"Bon Vezi."

89. A reference to his lover Maubergeonne, perhaps. The church ban placed upon him in 1114, because of their illicit relationship, had finally been lifted in 1117. Otherwise, possibly a reference to his wife, Philippa, who entered the monastery of Fontevraud about 1117.

90. Bond, no.11, 40–43.

91. Ibid., Appendix A, "Historical Documents," p. 10, the *Gesta Regum Anglorum* by William, monk of Malmesbury, ca. 1107.

92. Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, 376.

93. Bond, *The Poetry of William VII*, Appendix A. 8a, Ordericus Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica* X, 20 (ref. March 1101), 116–17.

94. Ibid., xlvi; Appendix A.8b (ref. June 1101), 116–117.

95. Ibid., Appendix A. 8b (ref. June 1101), 116–117, and no. 9, citing Guilbert, Abbot of Nogent, *Gesta Dei per Francos* VII, 23 (ref. summer 1101) 118–119.

96. Ibid., l–li.

97. Ibid., Appendix A, no. 15, citing William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, V, 439 (ref. 1112–15), 128–29.

98. Ibid.

99. Jacques Dalarun, *Erotik un Enthalttsamkeit: Das Kloster des Robert von Arbrissel*, foreword by Georges Duby, trans. Johanna and Gunter Woltmann-Zeitler (Frankfurt am Main: Athenaum, 1987), 101. Originally published as *Robert d'Arbrissel; fondateur de Fontevraud*, 1986. Dalarun casts doubt on whether the Ermengarde and William, though betrothed, were ever married. See Jaques Dalarun, *Robert of Arbrissel: Sex, Sin and Salvation in the Middle Ages*, trans. Bruce L Venarde. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 98. Originally published in French as *Robert d'Arbrissel, fondateur de Fontevraud* (1986).

100. I rely here on Bond, *The Poetry of William VII*.
101. *Ibid.*, 1–liii.
102. *Ibid.*, xv.
103. Dalarun, *Robert of Arbrissel*, 98.
104. Dalarun, *Robert of Arbrissel*, 104, citing “Geoffrey the Fat,” *Life of Bernard*, section 48 (Beck, Saint Bernard de Tiron, 364–365; PL 172: 1396).
105. *Ibid.*, 78–79, citing Reto R. Bezzola, “Les origines et la formation de la littérature courtoise en Occident (500–1200),” 3 vols. (Paris, 1944–1963), 2: 275–292.
106. *Ibid.*, 10–14. Text citations in the following discussion are to this volume, Dalarun’s *Robert of Arbrissel*.
107. There were more than twenty priories at the time of Robert’s death. Fontevraud and its daughter-houses were, by that time, well on their way to becoming the largest and wealthiest order of monasteries for women in Europe and remained so until the time of the French Revolution.
108. Bond, 121, citing William of Malmesbury’s *De Gestis* (ca. 1125) ed. Stubbs, 510.
109. Bond, 19; see also Textual Notes, 65, lines 7–8 (as noted there).
110. Jean-Marc Bienvenu, *L’étonnant fondateur de Fontevraud, Robert d’Arbrissel* (Paris: Nouvelle Editions Latines, 1981), 22.
111. Dalarun, *Robert of Arbrissel*, 88.
112. John Joseph O’Meira, *Eriugena* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 198–99.
113. *Ibid.*, 211.
114. Dalarun, *Robert of Arbrissel*, 144.
115. Shal’va Isakovich Nutsbidze, *Rustaveli i vostochnyi renesans* [Rustaveli and the Eastern Renaissance] (Tbilisi: Literatura da khelovneba, 1967), 324.
116. Shota Rustaveli. *The Knight in the Panther Skin*. trans. Katharine Vivian. (1977; repr., London: Folio Society, 1995) 22, rejects the influence of Neoplatonism on *The Knight in the Panther Skin*. She says nothing of the church’s position, but my interview with the head of the seminary in Tbilisi in 2003 confirmed the church’s denial of Neoplatonism in Rustaveli. Hereafter cited as “Vivian.”

117. Dionysius the Areopagite, or Pseudoareopagite, traditionally was St. Paul's first convert in Athens. (He is called "Denys the Areopagite or Denys" by Andrew Louth (1989). Scholars in Georgia (Nutsubidze) and Western Europe (Ernst Honigman, Belgian) have proposed that he is identical with the Georgian prince Petr Iver; H. Engberding (German scholar) has argued against it. Thus scholarly opinion is divided.

118. N. I. Marr, *Ioann Petrititskii, gruzinskii neoplatonik XI–XII veka*, Zapiski Vostochnogo Otdeleniia [ZVO] Russkogo Arkheologicheskogo Obschestva, 19 (1909), pp. 53–113.

119. Ioanie Petritsi. *Rassmotrenie platonovskoi filosofii I Prokla Diadokha*, Intro. G. V. Tevzadze (Moscow: ANSSSR Institut Filosofii. Izdatel'stvo "Mysl", 1984), 3–5.

120. Irakli Abashidze, introduction to *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, Zabolotskii translation (1984) 10.

121. *Ibid.*, 11. Abashidze was one of the 1959 party that uncovered the fresco of Rustaveli and these companion-frescoes.

122. Shota Rustaveli, *The Lord of the Panther Skin*, trans. R. H. Stevenson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), xiv–xv. Hereafter cited as "Stevenson."

123. Firdausi and the whole Muslim world also had access to Plato and to Neoplatonism in some form.

124. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, Series: The Classics of Western Spirituality, Ed. Jaroslav Pelikan. New York: The Paulist Press, 1987, 74 (697 C, D).

125. *Ibid.*, 75 (700 B, C).

126. *Ibid.*, 77 (704 B), 81 (709B).

127. Vivian, #20, 36.

128. *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 75-92 (701 A–728 C).

129. *Ibid.*, 77 (704 B).

130. *Ibid.*, 79 (705 C).

131. *Ibid.*, 79 (708 A)

132. *Ibid.*, 80 (709 A), quoting Proverbs 4:6 and 8.

133. *Ibid.*, 81 (709 C,D).

134. Cited by Louth, 21.

135. Louth, 94.

136. *Ibid.*, 46.

137. *Ibid.*, 95.

138. Stevenson, 179.

139. Vivian, chap. 49, 185.

140. *Ibid.*, 95.

141. Stevenson, 5.

142. *Mijnuroba* was espoused by the Muslim mystical sect, the Sufis, and this side of it appears in *Layla and Majnun*. “Majnun,” frustrated in his love for Layla, takes refuge in the desert wilderness as did, traditionally, the God-seeker. His quest is a mystical love-madness, deliberately made parallel to God-seeking. It is a mysticism which, in Sufism, connects directly to Neoplatonism. Rustaveli does not exploit this mysticism.

143. (Pseudo-Dionysius) Stevenson, 23, 179.

144. See the essay in Stevenson, 230-31. This again relates to the suggestion that Rustaveli was *exiled* to Jerusalem when he retired to the Monastery of the Cross, but neither that nor the reason for it is verifiable.

145. Georgians will brook no imputation that Tamar was a mere consort queen and will insist upon *King* Tamar.

146. Nutsbidze’s *Rustaveli and the Eastern Renaissance* develops materials indicating an East European “renaissance” preceding the Western, Italian Renaissance, resembling it in its humanism in literature and art, which was largely suppressed or at least obscured by the Mongol domination after, roughly, 1240.