

## The Rustavelian Aesthetic Thought and Classical Conception of Beauty: Rinterpreting Some Key Terms from the Prologue to *The Man in the Panther Skin*

Abstract: *The Man in the Panther Skin (MPS)* – the epic poem by XII c. Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli - is highly regarded by intellectuals and scholars as one of the landmarks of world literature (Bowra 1955: 45-67; Khintibidze 2011: 90-142). The objective of the present paper is a novel interpretation of some key terms from the poem's Prologue. This is important for a proper understanding of the Rustavelian aesthetic thought depicted through his theory of poetry, in which, as it turns out, the Classical Western conception of beauty is embodied, although in somewhat modified form.

Key words: Rustaveli, *The Man in the Panther Skin*, Theory of poetry, Classical conception of beauty, Parts and whole.

“*MPS* is the peak of Medieval Georgian literary and socio-political thought. The poem clearly echoes the progress of European Christian thought from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. This process [...] is reflected in *MPS* not only in its artistic system but in its theoretical-discursive form as well – mainly in the Prologue. This fact imparts special significance to this section of the poem. Though Rustaveli's language of the Prologue is plain Georgian; with its theological-philosophical connotations it differs essentially from modern Georgian philosophical definitions. [...] The conceptions found in the Prologue of *MPS* rest firmly on biblical – largely New Testament – theology, [...] and Greek philosophy [...], namely Plato, Aristotle and Dionysius the Areopagite [...]” (Khintibidze 2012: 9).

Taking into consideration the above circumstances, the objective of the present paper is a new or alternative interpretation of some key terms from the Prologue to *MPS* (Rustaveli 1966), which are important for a proper understanding of the stanzas depicting the Rustavelian theory of poetry (*MPS*, 12-17). Namely, the reinterpretation of these terms makes it possible to demonstrate that while formulating his aesthetic thought Rustaveli takes into account the Classical Western conception of beauty, according to which “[...] beauty consists of an arrangement of integral parts into a coherent whole, according to proportion, harmony, symmetry, and similar notions. This is a primordial Western conception of beauty, and is embodied in classical and neo-classical architecture, sculpture, literature, and music wherever they appear” (Sartwell 2016: 2.1). The first notion of the above conception, according to H. Dieckmann, is formulated already by Socrates (Xenophon, *Memorabilia of Socrates*, III, x, 1), and it is further developed by Plato and Aristotle; the same conception modified by Plotinus, Saint Augustine (and, finally, by Saint Thomas Aquinas) is at the origin of much of Western aesthetic thought (Dieckmann 2003: 196-202).

“The classical conception [...] treats beauty as a matter of instantiating definite proportions or relations among parts, sometimes expressed in mathematical ratios, for example the ‘golden section.’ The sculpture known as ‘The Canon,’ by Polykleitos (fifth/fourth century BCE), was held up as a model of harmonious proportion to be emulated by students and masters alike: beauty could be reliably achieved by reproducing its objective proportions” (Sartwell 2016: 1.). It has been discovered long ago (Tsereteli 1973: 9-115) that in the case of the so-called law shairi, which is one of the two forms of *MPS*'s poetic metre, the application of the principle of *golden section* is found. Namely, each half-line comprised of 8 syllables is divided into two units, each consisting of 5 and 3 syllables. Hence, the structure of the whole Rustavelian line is following: 5/3 // 5/3; thus, the proportional relations among parts, expressed in mathematical ratios - as it is the case with the so-called golden section - is revealed: 8:5 = 5:3. (In addition to the above-said, it is worth noting that another form of the poetic metre characteristic to *MPS*, the so-called high shairi, demonstrates, again, a clear sign of proportion and symmetry, since its rhythm is based on the alternation of 4 syllables: 4/4 // 4/4.)

According to Aristotle's *Poetics*, "[...] the mimesis of action in a story must represent an integrated whole, i.e., there must be the multiple, the parts or incidents, and the unity, a connection so close 'that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole' (Ch. 7[8]). Beauty is thus [...] judged by the standards of the perfection of form" (Dieckmann 2003: 197). The reinterpretation of some key terms of the Rustavelian theory of poetry reveals exactly the above Aristotelian understanding of beauty, based on the same criteria of formal perfection: *within the six stanzas Rustaveli considers, actually, the issue of a mutual relationship between the whole composition and its parts*. In this regard - apart from distinctive, or innovative, in my view, definition of poetry (*MPS*, 12.4b) - one of the main issues discussed by Rustaveli might be put under the following question: is the clearness of an artistic design the only, that is, universal criterion for the definition of optimal magnitude, i.e., the "natural limit", of the action; hence, *to some extent* of the whole composition itself? Taking into consideration Aristotle's *Poetics* - almost unanimously regarded as the main methodological source for the Rustavelian theory of poetry - the above question requires a positive answer (cf. Chapter 7, namely *syndēlos*, or "clear on the whole" - 1451a10-11). The Rustavelian approach to the issue, however, is extraordinary (*MPS*, 13-17; esp. 17.3-4) and it is caused by his own understanding of "good poetry"; fully revealing this approach, nevertheless, requires reinterpretation of some key terms found within the theory under question.

According to the statement found within the opening stanza (12) of the Rustavelian poetic theory, namely in the second part of its first line, "[poetry, first of all] is a [lit.: one] *branch* [დარგ-ო / darg-i] of wisdom [სობრძნ-ობ / sibrdzn-is]" (12.1b). In Rustaveli studies the above thesis is traditionally interpreted as poetry is a branch [darg-i, i.e., *part*] of wisdom [sibrdzn-e, i.e., *philosophy*]", since the concept of the word "sibrdzne" (wisdom) is generally linked with "philosophy", and in modern Georgian language "dargi" means, in fact, "part" (literally, "the part, or the branch, of sciences").

In old Georgian, however, the word "wisdom" (sibrdzne) had several meanings, of which only one was philosophy (Philosophia); meanwhile, one of the basic connotations of the word under question was itself "wisdom" (Sophia). In my view, the word "wisdom" found in 12.1b, taking into consideration the context under question, is more justified to be interpreted as Aristotelian (*Nicomachean Ethics* - another methodological source for *MPS*) "wisdom", that is, the ability to comprehend through intellect, or reason ("Sophia", or wisdom, is linked by Aristotle directly with intellect (noys) and it is understood as creator of happiness, or Good; cf. *N.E.*, 1141b2-3, 1144a1-6); thus, the Rustavelian "wisdom", at this point (12.1b), might not be understood as "philosophy" (Philosophia).

As for the Rustavelian word "branch" (darg-i), found only once in the *MPS* (in particular, in the half-line under discussion), I think it is not used, at this point, in its modern Georgian meaning, that is, "branch" as a "part"; instead, it has a sense of "planted" (დარგ-ულ-ო / darg-ul-i), as far as it is formed of the verb "to plant" (დარგ-ვა / darg-va), and, at 12.1b, had not yet acquired its current meaning of "part of something". The point is that Sul Khan-Saba's Dictionary (17th-18th cc) reveals well how the word - "branch" (dargi) turned from "planted" to "planted part", while in modern Georgian the "branch" has only the meaning of "part": "[...] the "dargi" is when we say in reference to cornfield or vineyard - "lower dargi" [lower planted part], "upper dargi" [upper planted part], here and there and so on [...]" (Sul Khan-Saba 1965: 202).

Thus, Rustaveli's opening statement - "Poetry is, first of all, a branch of wisdom" (12.1) may be comprehended not as - "Poetry is, first of all, one part of philosophy", which is by itself a controversial view (sometimes mistakenly attributed to Aristotle). Nevertheless, according to Rustaveli, "poetry is, first of all, one plant of wisdom" (12.1) - i.e., poetry is one fruit, or product, of intellect; thus, it belongs to the field of the intellect. (However, poetry is not understood by Rustaveli as cognitive, which is the main feature of philosophy.) This is why, within the immediately following half-line (12.2a), Rustaveli indicates that poetry

is, again, *intelligible* (გასა-გონ-ი / gasa-gon-i, which is the old-Georgian philosophical term derived from the root – “-გონ-”, with the meaning of both “intellect” and “listening” / “understanding”. Through its first meaning, or intellect, the word – “gasa-gon-i” corresponds to the ancient Greek philosophical notion; namely, “noētos”, that is, “intelligible”, “cognizable”). The issue is that Rustaveli, as it turns out, takes into consideration Plato’s well-known requirement (cf. *Republic*, X, 607d-e; the treatise, especially its 10<sup>th</sup> book, is, without doubt, considered to be methodological source for *MPS*). However, contrary to the philosopher’s standpoint, Rustaveli provides certain arguments to demonstrate that “poetry is highly *useful* for its listeners” (12.2b); and thus, it is not only pleasant (12.3). (More specifically, according to the line 12.3, “*in addition* [or *on the other hand*], the person, who is fit to listen to [the poetry], is pleased here [i.e., in this earthly world], as well”.)

But it is worth noting that in the above half-line (12.2a), Rustaveli does not refer to the poetry as simply intelligible, as he considers it “divine, [and] divinely intelligible” (or if taken literally: poetry is “divine”, [and it is] “for being divinely cognized”). The words under question were interpreted by M. Gogiberidze as reference to ecclesiastical poetry, namely, hymnography (Gogiberidze 1961: 123; due to various reasons the interpretation is still accepted by the majority of scholars). The issue is that the scholar was the first to focus attention on the resemblance between the famous Aristotelian statement – “poetry is a more philosophical and more serious thing than history” (*Poetics*, chapter 9, 1451b5-6) and the above discussed opening thesis (“poetry is a branch of wisdom” - 12.1b) of the Rustavelian theory of poetry (Gogiberidze 1961: 115). Hence, the scholar’s interpretation of the above half-line (12.2a) ought to be explained through his failure in further revealing similarities between Aristotle’s poetic standpoint and the Rustavelian aesthetic discourse referring to god. In my view, however, the reasoning found within the first two lines of the opening 12<sup>th</sup> stanza, through which Rustaveli demonstrates the beneficial character of poetry, still rests (from a methodological point of view) on Aristotle’s standpoint; however, on an ethical conception (and thus, not on the aesthetic one), depicted within the 10<sup>th</sup> book (Chapters 7-9) of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. More specifically, Rustaveli, presumably, rests on the famous Aristotelian definition of perfect happiness, which is understood as philosophical contemplation through *intellect* (noys), that is, the most *pleasant* human activity, for it is “in accordance with *wisdom*” (1177a24; cf. the Rustavelian terms “wisdom”, “intelligible” and “pleasant”). As for the problematic issue, i.e., the link of “intelligible” with “divine”, according to Aristotle, the intellect is the only divine part of human being and the divine activity is nothing else but contemplation. Hence a man, whose activity is according to intellect, is most beloved of the gods and thus, the wise man, is the happiest among human beings (1178b-1179a). As it reveals, from the methodological viewpoint, the Rustavelian way of reasoning is very similar to that of Aristotle: poetry is linked with intellect, which is divine itself and thus, poetry is divinely intelligible. However, through the Aristotelian way of reasoning, Rustaveli comes to the conclusion, which is somewhat different from that of Aristotle, since Aristotle never defines clearly that poetry is useful; although, the notion of useful poetry is not contradictory to his standpoint. As it seems to me, the concept of “useful poetry” is not simply a response to Plato’s above mentioned demand but it is, taking into consideration the double reference to “divine”, the Rustavelian reinterpretation of Aristotle’s aesthetic conception from a Christian perspective, in order to proclaim poetic standpoint of his own harmonized with his religious faith. The above discussed reasoning (12.1-3) is followed by the summarizing statement (12.4) of the whole stanza, the second half-line (12.4b) of which depicts the Rustavelian definition of poetry.

According to the author of *MPS*, “a long word is told briefly [lit.: shortly], poetry is, therefore, good” (12.4). While taking into consideration N. Marr’s interpretation of the line under question (Marr 1910: 9, 40), the researchers of Rustaveli’s poem unjustifiably, in my view, regarded its first half-line – “*a long word is told*

*briefly*” (12.4a) - as a principle depicting one of the stylistic aspects characteristic of poetry, that is, the brief, or laconic, manner of artistic speech (Nadiradze 1958: 146). In particular, according to N. Marr’s interpretation, the “word” herein means “thought”; thus, the half-line 12.4a might mean - “a long, or extensive, *thought* is told briefly”, that is, concisely and laconically.

Nevertheless, since “a long” or even “an extensive thought” is not a common expression for Georgian language, in my view, Rustavelian “word”, at this point, better corresponds to its second meaning, also found in *MPS*; that is, “the subject of a talk” (Gogiberidze 1961: 117), and namely, its connotation – “tale”, or “story” (cf. *MPS* 599.2b, 1249.4, etc.). Hence, taking into account the entire context of the 12<sup>th</sup> stanza, that is, reasoning dealing with the essence of poetry, the Rustavelian “a long word” (12.4a) might be understood as “a long tale”, or - taking into consideration the terms of contemporary literary criticism – “a long story”, i.e., “an epic fabula”. In this regard, as it seems to me, the Rustavelian term “word” corresponds to Aristotle’s “myth”, or “plot” (*Mythos*; *Poetics*); the main and initial meaning of which in Homeric poems, as well as generally in ancient Greek language, was “word”, as well.

As for the Rustavelian words “is told briefly” (12.4a), they, presumably, mean “clearly and distinctly stated” (cf. *MPS* 238.3, 1520.4). The drawing of comparison between the lines 12.4 on the one hand, and 238.3 and 1520.4, on the other, reveals that in the artistic world of *MPS* the brief depiction of the subject of a talk, in particular, of a story means its easily understandable, or *clear*, narration, i.e., its depiction in orderly arranged form. Thus, the 12.4a thesis, in my view, should be considered as a principle dealing with the composition of the poem (cf. Aristotelian conception of Homeric, or dramatic, unity depicted in *Poetics*); hence, as it turns out, the 12.4a thesis - in contrast to its generally accepted interpretation - does not deal at all with the style of the poem.

As already mentioned above, the second half-line – “poetry is, therefore, *good* [კარგი / *kargi*]” (12.4b) depicts the Rustavelian definition of poetry. The last word, that is, “good”, at this point, is usually understood by scholars literally: “good”, i.e., “fine”, or “not bad” (Gogiberidze 1961: 117). This makes Rustavelian definition of poetry quite ordinary, if not banal. The issue is that in Rustaveli studies attention has not been focused on the possibility of interpreting the “good” (*karg-i*) of 12.4b - apart from its principal meaning (“fine”, “not bad”) – as a philosophical and ethical term - “goodness”, or “Good”. However, this is exactly the meaning of the word under question in some stanzas of *MPS* (cf. 665.3a, 186.4a) and most obviously in the half-lines 2a and 3b within the famous stanza 1491, related to Dionysius the Areopagite (“God creates *good* [*karg-sa*]...”). Thus, bearing in mind that in previous half-lines of the same stanza (12) poetry is referred to as both useful (12.2b) and pleasant (12.3a), as it turns out, Rustaveli declares poetry to be good (*agathon*)! The way of reasoning is both Platonic and Aristotelian: something, namely, poetry and friendship being simultaneously useful and pleasant finally appears to be good (cf.: *Republic* X, 607d-e and esp. *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII, 1157a1-3 and 1158a33-34). But it is worth noting that “good”, at this point, does not correspond to Plato’s Form, or idea, of the Good (cf. *MPS* 20-21), since in the present context, presumably, it is referred to as an ethical term, that is, happiness, as in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which “the Supreme Good” is proclaimed to be “happiness” (1097a28-1097b23). Thus, taking into consideration the Rustavelian statement that poetry “pleases also here”, or in this earthly life (12.3a), the author of *MPS* – similar to the worldview of the Renaissance age - proclaims poetry to be happiness due to its ability of making people happy during this terrestrial life(!).

However, within the *MPS*, as well as in old Georgian language, in general, the word “good” also has a third meaning, that is, “beauty”. This is why, according to N. Marr’s interpretation of the half-line 12.4b (Marr 1910: 9, 39), Rustaveli declares poetry to be beauty! This interpretation was never accepted by the researchers

of *MPS*, since it had been provided by the scholar without any argumentation. Nevertheless, N. Marr's above interpretation, as it seems to me, reveals yet another methodological source for Rustaveli's statement under question (12.4) - namely, Aristotle's well-known concept of beauty found in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Poetics* (1450b36-37): "for beauty [cf. Rustavelian "good"] consists in magnitude [cf. "a long word"] and ordered arrangement [cf. "is told briefly"]". Hence, as it turns out, Rustaveli agrees with the Classical conception of beauty (see above); thereby, in Rustaveli's view, the beauty of an object is connected to its form. Consequently Rustaveli's understanding of beauty is based, in general, on the standpoint of Aristotle and in this way it differs from the conceptions of both Plato and Plotinus, according to which beauty originates from the Form, or idea, of Beauty. Nevertheless, Rustavelian statement (12.4a), still, differs from the Aristotelian viewpoint, as well, regarding the size of composition (see below).

Thus, as it appears, according to the Rustavelian definition (12.4), *poetry is both beauty and goodness!* In my view, through this summarizing thesis Rustaveli formulates his *own innovative* standpoint, since the identical attitude on the issue is not detected within the various aesthetic, ethical and philosophical theories of either classical or medieval, in particular, pre-renaissance periods. Namely, the Rustavelian statement under question differs, first and foremost, from the corresponding aesthetic doctrines of both Plato and Plotinus; it differs apparently from the Aristotelian standpoint, as well, according to which, "poetry is a more philosophical and more serious thing than history" (*Poetics*, chapter 9, 1451b5-6). I mean the following: according to Aristotle, poetry is, still, a branch of productive sciences, aiming "at the creation of beautiful or useful objects [...]" (Shields 2016: 2.), and thus, it does not belong to the highest form of sciences, that is, theoretical, which "seeks knowledge for its own sake". Thus, according to Aristotle, although "poetry is a more philosophical and more serious thing than history", all the same, philosophy itself is, still, higher "thing" than poetry. This is why it happens that for Aristotle - unlike Rustaveli - poetry is beautiful, however, not goodness. Contrary to Plato, Plotinus, as it is known, considers poetry as beauty; however, beauty, in the understanding of both Plato and Plotinus, is a fully philosophical notion, rather than aesthetic or even ethical: "Plato's account in the *Symposium* and Plotinus's in the *Enneads* connect beauty to a response of love and desire, but locate beauty itself in the realm of the Forms, and the beauty of particular objects in their participation in the Form. [...]" (Plotinus, 22 [*Ennead* I, 6])" (Sartwell 2016: 1.). Influenced by both Plato (although indirectly) and Aristotle (*Poetics*), the poet and Neoplatonic thinker of the Renaissance age Torquato Tasso in his *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* (ca. 1562-65; published in 1587) attempts to "mak[e] poetry philosophy": "[...] Aristotle and Tasso succeeded in raising art and poetry to the status of philosophy [...]" (Orozco 2012). Rustaveli, however, considers philosophy and poetry equal, but does not equate them completely. Thus, while proclaiming poetry both beauty and goodness Rustaveli, in fact, innovatively modifies the Aristotelian – and not Platonic or Neoplatonic - standpoint: according to the author of *MPS*, "poetry is, first of all, one [among the others] plant [or seedling,] of wisdom [or reason]" (12.1); however, it is not a human activity that is simply separated and independent from philosophy, but it is also equal to it, and, still, not identical to philosophy or *not depending on its authority* (although, *MPS* is no less a philosophical poem than Dante's *Divine Comedy*).

The rest of the Rustavelian theory of poetry, or remaining five stanzas (13-17), in my view, deals chiefly with still another aspect of the Classical theory of beauty; namely, the relation of a coherent whole, or a composition on the whole, and its integral parts. As it turns out, the Rustavelian standpoint, from the methodological viewpoint, is, again, influenced by Aristotelian conception of beauty. However, its Rustavelian reinterpretation, once again, "clearly echoes the progress of European Christian thought from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance" (see above); on the other hand, the Rustavelian reconsideration of Aristotle's conception differs perceptibly from that of Neoplatonic. The issue is, that Plato's "account of beauty that is expressed specifically in *The Symposium* [...]" expresses an aspiration toward beauty as perfect unity. [...] [*Symposium* 210a–211d]. Beauty here is conceived — perhaps explicitly in contrast to the classical aesthetics of integral parts and

coherent whole — as perfect unity, or indeed as the principle of unity itself. Plotinus [...] comes close to equating beauty with formedness per se: it is the source of unity among disparate things, and it is itself perfect unity. Plotinus specifically attacks what we have called the classical conception of beauty: [...] (Plotinus, 21 [Ennead 1.6]) [...] (Plotinus, 22 [Ennead 1.3]). For Plotinus as for Plato, all multiplicity must be immolated finally into unity, and all roads of inquiry and experience lead toward the Good/Beautiful/True/Divine” (Sartwell 2016: 2.2). As for the Rustavelian theory of poetry, the Aristotelian balance, or equilibrium, between integral parts and coherent whole is somewhat broken in favor of the former, rather than the latter, unlike in Plato’s and Plotinus’s conceptions. Such an approach, on the other hand, denotes undoubtedly that preference is given to an epic poem, rather than to the poetic work of a lesser size; unlike in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. The demonstration of the above argument still requires the further reinterpretation of some additional key terms, found within the stanzas 13-17 and hence the reconsideration of remaining summarizing statements from the theory under question.

The first such statement, found in line 13.3, remains to the present day the most vague passage of Rustaveli’s entire poetic theory (Bolkvadze 1997: 94-98); namely, according to Rustaveli, an experienced “poet composes [lit.: says] long verses [lit.: words / lex-ta] and tears [or cuts] [them] off [ხევა / kheva]”. Since the meaning of this words was completely unclear, the majority of scholars made numerous efforts to define the passage under question taking into consideration mainly that meaning of the word – “kheva”, which established in modern Georgian language relatively recently (c. 18-19 cc); that is, “moving back”, or “to retreat”.

In my opinion, however, the “saying long words [lex-ta] and [their] cutting off” (13.3b) might be understood as “depicting in details, but, still, without over lengthening”. Thus, the meaning of the whole passage under question (stanzas 13-14) should be interpreted as following: in certain cases – “when necessary”, that is, when “utterance grows hard” for a poet (13.4a and 14.2a, cf. 20.2; hence, at this point, Rustaveli clearly implies the key *parts* of an epic poem, which are difficult for depiction and not the *whole* composition); in such cases “the subject of a talk” (სა-უბარი / sa-ubari - 13.4a) must be depicted at length (“saying long words” - 13.3b), though, still, without over lengthening (“cutting off” – 13.3b), i.e., on the whole, all the same, in accordance with the principle of “briefly telling” (cf. above 12.4a), or that of compositional unity. This architectonic peculiarity is unquestionably characteristic of the *MPS*: some *parts*, or episodes and scenes, of the poem being actually digressions, but still important for the development of *MPS*’s main plot line; they are depicted in detail and hence at length: however, *not to the end* (see details below). Thus, the main compositional principle of the poem, as it turns out, is reflected in its theoretical-discursive form in the Prologue. On the other hand, due to this exact circumstance, or “composing long words [*parts*, that is, episodes and scenes / *lex-ta* – in plural]”, “a long word [i.e. the whole plot / *sitkva* – in singular]” “is not shortened” (14.3a) and thus, “is not reduced” (14.3b) to a less size, in comparison to the epic composition.

The above revealed alternative understanding of 13.3b principle, in my view, may well contribute to a further clarification and, finally, a revision of the traditional scholarly interpretation of another two unclear statements found within the poetic theory under question. In particular, Rustaveli considers some authors as “minor [and] secondary poets” (16.1), since “they cannot *make whole* [სროლ-ქმნა / srool-kmna] the heart-piercing words [i.e., heart-piercing stories]” (16.2); and again, according to the author of *MPS*, “he cannot be called a poet, who is unable to say *anything* [ვერას / veras] at length” (17.4).

Taking into account the current Georgian meaning of the word “to make whole” (srool-kmna), or “to complete” (16.2a), the generally accepted interpretation of the word in Rustaveli studies is “to make perfect”. However, this definition makes the statement under question (16.1-2) unclear: what type of perfection Rustaveli is referring to? On the other hand, in old Georgian this word had quite different meaning; namely, “to finish”, or “to end”. But how might it be explained the Rustavelian statement - “they cannot *finish* heart-

piercing words [სოცყგ-თს - stories; in plural]”? (Obviously, it might not mean “they are not *able* to bring to an end the *whole* compositions”)!) Taking into account the above-provided interpretation of the 13.3b half-line (that the experienced poet is able “to say long words and cut them off“, or “to depict the constituent *parts* in details, but, still, *without over lengthening*”), the verb - “finish”, at this point (16.2a), might mean - “to finish” [saying] “heart-piercing (16.2b) stories” [or the constituent *parts* of a composition, “*in a timely manner*”]; actually, “to interrupt them” and not “to bring [the stories, which are heart-piercing but, still, digressions] to the very end”. Thus, as it turns out, “a minor [and] secondary poets” (16.1) criticized within the 16<sup>th</sup> stanza, may be understood as inexperienced or ungifted *epic* poets and thus – contrary to the opinion of N. Marr (Marr 1910: 9, 40), unanimously adopted in Rustaveli studies – they might not be considered again (cf. stanzas 15 and 17) as lyric poets; accordingly, the inexperienced or ungifted *epic* poets, in the understanding of Rustaveli, are unable “to tell a long word [i.e., the whole story] briefly [lit.: shortly]” on the whole (cf. 12.4a, above). The reason, which causes this artistic flaw, is the lack of skill to cut off, or to finish in a timely manner, the constituent *parts* of a poem. This causes a violation of the unity of a *whole* epic composition. Unlike, in the *MPS* “[...] The compositional unity is achieved through interlinked short stories, each of which is compositionally *complete*, [...] In similar fashion to the *Renaissance* literary style, all movements in the poem’s plot are strictly motivated and subordinated to the author’s concept. *Each episode enters the composition only in the size that is necessary for the development of the main story. Not a single secondary episode is renewed and continued in other sections of the plot. These secondary episodic stories with their possible interesting continuations are closed in the poem without sequels.* Rustaveli narrates only what is indispensable for the movement of the principal link of the subject. [...]” (Khintibidze 2011: 17-18).

The above discussed compositional peculiarity of *MPS*, in my view, once more clearly reveals the renaissance nature of Rustavelian aesthetics: “[t]he art historian Heinrich Wölfflin gives a fundamental description of the classical conception of beauty, as embodied in Italian Renaissance painting and architecture: The central idea of the Italian Renaissance is that of perfect proportion. [...] Every form developed to self-existent being, the whole freely co-ordinated: nothing but independently living parts.... In the system of a classic composition, the single parts, however firmly they may be rooted in the whole, maintain a certain independence. It is not the anarchy of primitive art: the part is conditioned by the whole, and yet does not cease to have its own life. For the spectator, that presupposes an articulation, a progress from part to part, which is a very different operation from perception as a whole. (Wölfflin 1932, 9–10, 15) [...]” (Sartwell 2016: 2.1).

The *Renaissance* character of Rustaveli’s aesthetic thought, as it seems to me, is fully revealed through a novel interpretation of the final words of the entire poetic theory under question: “anything at length” (17.4b). According to the traditional scholarly interpretation, still current in Rustaveli studies, these words should be understood as “not even one epic poem”; thus, the statement, which summarizes the whole theory of poetry, is, *actually*, interpreted as following: Rustaveli condemns the lyric poetry without any reason and, again, without providing any argument, he prefers epic to lyric poetry: “He cannot be called a poet, who is unable to say *anything at length* [i.e., even one epic poem]” (17.4). In my view, however, in the line under question (17.4) Rustaveli, apparently, indicates the reason for which he prefers epic poetry rather than lyric poems. This reason, as it seems to me, becomes clear if the words – “he [...] who is unable to say *anything* at length” (17.4b) are understood as “he [...] who is unable to say *any part* [or any place of a poem] at length”. Thus, as it turns out, Rustaveli criticizes the lyric poems due to small size of their *parts*.

And indeed, it is evident, that due to the small size generally characteristic of lyric poems it is impossible even theoretically for their individual constituent *parts* to be “told at length”. This circumstance, on the other hand, causes the specificity of the lyric themes, their lack of depth, in particular; unlike in epic poetry. This is exactly why it happens that though the “good” lyric poems (17.1a) are “told clearly, briefly” and thus, “pleasantly” (17.3-4) – as it is in the case of the truly worthy poetry, as well (cf. 12.4, above) – by means of

the lyric poetry in general and through good lyric poems in particular, only “one or two [thoughts]”, in fact, are “told clearly, briefly” and “pleasantly” (15.1b and 15.3a; 17.4b); and not “a long word” (12.4a). Although these “one or two” thoughts “are told” in the “good lyric poems” clearly and pleasantly and not “dissonantly and inconsistently” (as in the poems of unprofessional lyric poets; cf. 15.1-3), according to Rustaveli, their authors, nevertheless, also “cannot be regarded as poets” (15.1 and 17.4). Thus, in Rustaveli’s view, the small size of constituent *parts* reduces to an unacceptably small size the *whole* composition itself. Such an innovative approach to the issue differs noticeably from its methodological source, that is, Aristotle’s *Poetics* [cf. esp. 1451a9-11, 1455b15-16, 1462a18-1462b7, and thus, 1462b7-10: “In saying that epic has less unity I mean an epic made up of several separate actions. The Iliad has many such parts and so has the Odyssey, and each by itself has a certain magnitude”; 14-15: “then obviously, since it [i.e., tragedy] attains its object better than the epic, the better of the two is tragedy” (Aristotle 1932)]; since, in Rustaveli’s view, the clearness of an artistic design cannot be considered as the only, that is, universal criterion for the definition of the proper size for a good poetic composition: “We derive pleasure from theirs [their poetry], as well, what they say only clearly; / [However,] he cannot be called a poet, who is unable to say anything at length” (17.3-4). Thus, in Rustaveli’s view, a poetic work, which is of less size in comparison to epic poem, is not anymore useful and Good and if such poetic work still remains pleasant and beautiful, it happens only due to its clearness caused through its small size and not due to its constituent *parts* having been told at length, but still clearly; hence such poetry is “good” just for entertainment (17.1-2). As for a true poet, he is able to “say” clearly the constituent parts of the poem in both cases: while composing them “briefly” or “at length”.

Thus, as it turns out, according to Rustaveli, the perfection of a *whole* composition, the unity of its form is directly linked with its content, that is, with the depth, or importance, of poetic themes depicted within the *epic* composition through its constituent *parts*, told both clearly and in details; as it is according to the Classical Western conception of beauty, as well. This circumstance demonstrates distinctly the Renaissance or European nature of the Rustavelian aesthetics: “*a long word* [that is, the whole composition, as well as its individual constituent parts, which are large in size] *is told briefly* [that is, clearly, or in orderly arranged form], *poetry is, therefore, good* [that is, both beauty and goodness] ...”

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