

Irma Ratiani

**Professor of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University
Director of TSU Shota Rustaveli Institute of Georgian Literature**

Post-Soviet Georgian Literature and Modern Literary Trends

Brief Introduction.

In the 1990s, after crashing the Soviet empire, Georgia found itself involved in the civil war, and the war with Abkhazia, which brought about bloodshed, death, and loss of territories. Economic crisis, corruption and political chaos reigned in the country; culture, art, literature also shifted into the phase of creative crisis.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin Wall, once monolithic and currently divided territories in the central Europe were the signs of cardinal changes. From the viewpoint of literary processes, **Intertextuality** becomes predominant, which implies inner relations of the text, directed towards the national and international cultural area. The process becomes especially comprehensive in the conditions of open boundaries and gradually moves to the world scale. Intertextuality and concepts related to it - such as: text, context, subtext, meta-text, etc. - are widely introduced. Literary product becomes far more eclectic, resembling a collage, based on associations and allusions. The fall of the political authorities is followed by the total devaluation of authorities, the method of irony and self-irony is used increasingly, high ideals are replaced by pseudo-ideals; deconstruction of the intellectual world begins.

Post-modernism is fitting precisely the psychology of the society in a crisis: human being fails to resist the pressure of the world and becomes a post-human being, **Post-modernism worldwide suits the source of searching and discovery of new national and cultural identities.** Georgian literature of the post-Soviet period accepts this challenge: post-modernism appears as an excellent means not only for reconstruction of the cultural consciousness being in a phase of crisis, but also for overcoming the Soviet canon.

However, Post-modernism is not the only literary trend developing in post-Soviet Georgia. Some other topics and stylistic models also come to the foreground, a number of traditional discourses are reconstructed, and new approaches assume the shape. Traditional themes and methods re-appear, which brings the modern literary process close to the experience formed at the beginning of the second half of the 20th c. and later.

Though my presentation will be divided onto two parts: Post-modernism and other currents and trends in post-Soviet Georgian literature.

Basics of Post-modernism in Georgian literature.

Therefore, in the 1990s a great part of post-Soviet Georgian literature has moved to the area of post-modernist sensitivity, however, the process started a bit earlier, on the edge of 1980s-1990s, during the period of radical political, economic and cultural **transition.** "Generation of Georgian writers, who work during this transition period can be compared to the Generation X; the generation for whom personal freedom and human rights were the most important. They decided to change the injustice of the world. Poet and musician **Irakli Charkviani** (1961-2006) called this generation "a Gagarin Generation" (Gaga Lomidze). Exactly this generation stood at the origins of Georgian post-modernism. In late 1980s

Irakli Charkviani, along with poet Kote Kubaneishvili, founded the poetic Order *Reactive Club*¹. The bottom line of Reactive Club “was *quiet swimming or swimming against the flow*” (Lomidze 2016: 12-13). Charkviani became the leader of this new trend. “Irakli Charkviani’s poetry, and songs had a revolutionary significance, with its simplicity, experimentalist mood, and appeal to the prevailing reality of the Western values; his narrative is full of tragic elements and cynicism (*Goelro*)” (Lomidze 2016: 14). However, his poetry echoes not only the pains, but also the hopes of his generation. Post-modern Georgian culture and literature was assigned a mission to express those pains and hopes.

Development of Georgian Post-modernism.

Georgian critics are tending to look for the marks of post-modernism writing in 1980s, and it is correct from the standpoint of a cultural threshold, however, The earliest pure post-modernist texts - *Love of Martyrs* - was written by **Dato Barbakadze** in the beginning of 1990s. By means of post-modernist re-arrangement and combination, traditional Georgian literary texts, particularly, Georgian hagiography and Georgian classic writer’s - Vasil Barnovi’s novel with the same title, are offered on a specific conceptual axis.

Following a new trend, various directions of post-modern art were developed in the late 1990s, such as pop-art, hyper-realism, happening, social art. Georgian post-modernist literature has accepted all important artistic methods in this trend: simulacrum, double coding, irony, disguise, paranoia, liberalization of artistic language, excessive use of jargon, and etc. Thanks to these artistic methods, Georgian authors successfully coped with such post-modernist issues as crisis, distrust, simulation, re[de]construction of classical texts with the effect of parody, and so forth. Post-modernism became a substantial and dimensional trend in Georgia, which generated various stylistic models: narrative, anti-narrative, ironical, parodist, fragmented, etc.

A typical manifestation of **Georgian narrative Post-modernist discourse** are texts by **Aka Morchiladze**, distinguished by coherent artistic narration, performed in the basic post-modernist manner: parody and interpretation of classical, familiar plots and characters, use of the effect of allusions, unification of the contexts of the author, characters and readers by means of irony. Aka Morchiladze’s fiction is diverse from the genre viewpoint as well. The writer constantly moves between reality and pseudo-reality, mystification and phantasmagoria, allusion and detective story. He successfully arranges and parodies the familiar themes, creates collages, appliqué, gathers and brings together knowledge, “entertains” the reader with a game. His novels - *Dogs of Paliashvili Street* (1995), *Flight over Madatov Island and Back* (1998), *Playing Patience in August* (2001), *Your Adventure* (2003), *Santa Esperanza* (2004), *Maid in Tiflis* (2007), and others, as well as individual stories and documentary notes fit the taste of the contemporary Georgian (and not only Georgian) readers. It should be noted that the writer, following the best traditions of post-modernism, often resorts to the interpretation of the individual periods of Georgian cultural and social life. In his texts, beyond contrasting collages and arrangements, one identifies the Georgian reality, often historical. And, whether or not the author has a claim on the in-depth analysis of a historic event or fact, to he still manages to convey the main essence of the issue due to the powerful artistic and expressive energy and the right intuition. It is noteworthy that Aka Morchiladze is one of the first Georgian authors to respond to the aggravated political situation in the Caucasus region. A clear example is his novel *Journey to Karabakh* (1992), written in the Post-modernist manner. In this highly dramatic text the writer touches upon the painful issue for the Armenian and the Azerbaijani peoples - the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh and “interprets” it from the viewpoint of ordinary Georgian boys... Later, in 2005, Levan Tutberidze made a film on the basis of this work (with the slightly altered title - *Trip to Karabakh*). Aka Morchiladze is one of the most translated modern Georgian writers. He is a 6- time winner of Saba literary prize, and 2024 nominee for Nobel Prize.

¹Later Irakli Charkviani was performing under the pseudonym – *the King*.

Examples of **Anti-narrative Post-modernist discourse** are texts by **Zaza Burchuladze** -*Mineral Jazz* (2003), *Soluble Kafka* (2005), *Tourist's Breakfast* (2015) etc. Similar to some Western post-modernist texts, his novels are anti-narrative. The writer points to the impossibility to narrate as everything has already been written! However, along with the Post-modernist tasks, the texts of this undoubtedly talented author are also reflection of the surrounding reality, conceptual prose, where scandalous behavior is a specific form to respond to the reality. The effort to shock the reader, as one of the most significant markers of Post-modernism, is observed in Burchuladze's prose with all its standards – the process of reading is shocking until readers puts up with such practice of reading and develops strategy of “an ironic game”: he is awaiting new surprises and from the “register” of emotional “attack” moves to the “peripeteia of the plot”.

A follower of anti-narrative style is late **Zurab Karumidze** too. Karumidze established himself not only as a writer, but also as a postmodernist literary critic. A manifestation of this methodical synthesis is one of his recent texts – *Life of Jazz* (2009), which represents a qualified merging of documentary prose with the post-modernist manner of narration.

The prose by **Lasha Bughadze** offers modifications of post-modernist irony and parody. His stories, novels and plays are distinguished by extraordinary reception of the reality, as well as stylistic diversity. The writer effectively uses artistic means characteristic of post-modernism, not infrequently includes them into traditional literary models. *The Murder of the Century* (2000) and *The First Russian* (2001) represent examples of **Historiographic Meta-prose**, written with the post-modernist technique. However, due to the irrational approach to the reality and subjective de-historization of the reality, typical of post-modernism, a number of issues are an object of controversy. Bughadze is working intensively in the field of dramaturgy as well. Of his plays, oriented on the social environment and full of ironic-parodic and satirical effects, especially noteworthy are: *Otar* (1998), *Nugzar and Mephistopheles* (2003), *Soldier, Love, Bodyguard and the President* (2006).

Post-modernism, with its philosophy of “negation of negation” and perception of the world as total falsehood, proved to be an excellent refuge for post-Soviet Georgian writers facing destruction, corruption, wars and frustrations. It reflected the nihilism and suspicion that Georgian literature showed the outside world!

Among the authors who created the Georgian Post-modern mainstream should be named talented authors: **Kote Jandieri**, who moved to the post-modernist sensibility from the intellectual realism of 1980s; **Zaal Samadashvili**, who's attention is drawn to the intellectual play of the contexts of the author and the reader; **Irakli Lomouri**, who invented the mystification and detective genre in the modern Georgian prose; **Archil Kikodze**, who is loyal to Georgian classical narrative, also, social and political journalism, and ethnography.

Post-modernist discourse became very popular in modern Georgian **poetry**, presenting various concepts and technics: philosophic investigation, crisis of spiritual values, ironic perception of reality, sense of absurdity, alienation, search for archetypes, and mythological images. This is a poetry “without borders and frames”, as Rati Amaglobeli stated. Georgian poets attract special attention to stylistic and versification diversity. The following authors are noteworthy: Rati Amaglobeli, Zviad Ratiani, Gaga Nakhutsrishvili, Dato Barbakadze, Shota Iatashvili, Maia Sarishvili, Giorgi Lobzhanidze and others. Along with them, the poets of the 1980s –Gigi Sulakauri, Dato Chikhladze, Dato Maghradze, Nino Darbaiseli, Zura Rtveliashvili (late). Their poetry is distinguished by extremely interesting diversity of traditional and alternative forms. Modern Georgian poets are translated and published in prestigious foreign publishing houses.

Special place should be provided to Besik Kharanauli's work. His poem *Amba Besarion's Book* (2003) was received with great interest by the readers, and was translated and published in French as well. *Epigraphs for Forgotten Dreams* (2005) shows the combinations of the post-modernist manner with the neo-realist reception, whereas *Sixty Knights Riding Mules, or A Book of Hyperboles and Metaphors* (2010) is a certain sub-genre narrative, with numerous different layers and narrative forms.

Women writers have established an exceptional group in post-modern Georgian writing: Naira Gelashvili, who's literary talent flourished in 1970-80s, however, she was able to allocate her writing to

the post-modern style as well; Ana Kordzaia-Samadashvili who became famous with her collections *Berikaoba, I, Margarita*, and novel - *Shushanik's Children*; also, Nene Kvinikadze, Maka Mikeladze, Tamri Phkakadze, and etc. Women authors of 1990-s and 2000-s replaced the topics introduced by the Georgian women writers of the 1970-80s with bold experiments and stylistic innovations. Their literature is closer to the general concept of feminist discourse, and is less bound by conceptual and moral clichés. Modern Georgian feminist prose displays not only closeness to the international standard, but also - pronounced individuality, based on Georgian cultural markers.

Should be mentioned **Dato Turashvili's** stories and plays: one of the leaders of the rebellious Georgian students and young generation of the turn of the 1980s-90s, Turashvili moves to the literary space mostly with the same topics. One of Dato Turashvili's most well-known stories – *Jeans Generation* (2008). The writer focuses on topics ranging from tragic reception of the society devoid of any values to the problem of the national identity.

The issue of the national identity and national values, which becomes significant from the mid-1990s, increases in the Georgian literature of the beginning of 21st century, the more so that it faces new difficulties of political transformation and shifting.

Difficulties of Political Transformation and Shifting.

In November 2003, a group of young politicians prepared and carried out a peaceful revolution in Georgia that became known as the **Rose Revolution**. Unlike the Bolshevik revolution, it was a peaceful demonstration that aimed at helping the country to emerge from the psychological remissions of the Soviet past and taking it along the path of decisive economic, social, and political reforms. Georgia found itself facing significant changes, which naturally, had a major impact on arts and literature. The **Rose Revolution** proved that the influence of revolutions on culture can be diverse. It is defined by the means and objectives of the revolution, as well as forms of reaction to it. One of the most positive results of the **Rose Revolution** was the enlarging of cultural process. The Rose Revolution boded open borders - end to cultural isolation, and the start of free creative work. Whereas as negative tendencies can be regarded the undercurrents, which apparently are characteristic of post-revolutionary periods in general– doubtful correspondence of the declared democracy with the real decisions, granting undeserved privileges, clan system, etc.

Despite the successful start of the reformatory government, In August of 2008 Georgia faced a new political trouble. As a result of the military actions of Russia on the territory of historical province Samachablo - the so-called “South Ossetia”, the part of the territory of Georgia was isolated unlawfully from the country. The throbbing problem of Samachablo, alongside with the problem of Abkhazia, logically moved towards the Georgian post-modernist fiction, which fully reflected the problem of necessity to protect the national identity and national values, combined with thinking about the lost territories of Georgia and attempts to find a solution. Hence, *War discourse* became one of the most significant discourses of Georgian post-soviet writing.

Priority currents and trends in post-Soviet Georgian literature.

War discourse.

War discourse became one of the most significant discourses of Georgian post-soviet writing. Occupied territories, refugees and the disrupted historical integrity became a significant part of a Georgian post-soviet literature. This topic is found in the works of writers who physically suffered the hardships of the war, and those who were spiritually linked with this process. In this regard, mention should be made on texts by refugee writers from Abkhazia – Guram Odisharia and Gela Chkvanava. Guram Odisharia's *Return to Sokhumi* (1995), *Rain is broadcasted in Sokhumi* (1997), other stories

describe the worst experience of Georgian people in the post-Soviet period – the war in Abkhazia. On the other hand, the tragic events of the August war in Samachablo, as a non-witnessed tragedy, are reflected in the play by Tamar Bartaia *A Cellar in Gori* and Zaza Burchuladze's novel – *Adibasi* (2009), Basa Janikashvili's – *Shoot'em Up* (2010). In a young female writer 's *Tamta Melashvili's* story – *Counting Out* (2011), the war is to a greater extent a background than the line of the subject in Melashvili's story, but it is significantly perceived in the common compositional pattern. Tamta Melashvili's work won the German National Literary Prize for young authors in 2013.

Some of these writers are still using post-modern style, however, some of them are moving out from the post-modernist sensibility and are returning to the naturalist style of writing.

Anyway, concerning the problem of the occupied territories, Georgia supports the idea of “united and peaceful Caucasus”; It is time that the aggression and occupation policy reigning in the region be replaced by peaceful co-habitation and development. In the Georgian literary world quite effective steps were taken in this direction: on the initiative of writer Guram Odisharia and his Abkhazian colleague Batal Kobakhia journal *South Caucasia* was founded and published under their editorship. The members of the editorial board are writers from the regions in conflicts, and this fact, undoubtedly, can be considered as a desire for beginning of a qualified literary dialogue.

One of the best examples of this desire is a joint publication of Georgian writer's Guram Odisharia's novel – *The President's Cat*, and Abkhaz writer – Daur Nachkebia's novel – *The Shore of Night*. The first joint edition was published in Tbilisi, in 2022, afterwards – in Germany, Italy, in USA. The novels of Guram Odisharia (*The President's Cat*) and Daur Nachkebia (*The Shore of Night*) deal with the theme of Abkhazia, however, the writers approach the issue from different perspectives: if the Georgian writer's novel describes Sukhumi in the 1970s and 80s and the realities of peaceful coexistence of the Georgian and Abkhazian people, the Abkhaz author's book is certainly about the war in Abkhazia – it traces the tragic split between the Georgian and Abkhazian people.

The manner of narration gives a corresponding difference: Guram Odisharia's narrative is diluted with a kind and nostalgic-romantic palette, while the Abkhazian writer leaves us with the bitter taste of the tragic events of the war. The bottom line is that after reading these books, the reader is exposed to the mistakes made by both sides; at the same time, novels are also a search for roads to each other.

Considerable

In the 1990s *Existential discourse*, so well presented in Georgian literature of 1970-80s by Otar Chiladze, Chabua Amirejibi, Otar Chkeidze, Guram DochanaShvili, Guram Gegeshidze, Jemal Karchkhadze and others, with an in-depth effect of the *Stream of consciousness* becomes again active; a successful novel published in this genre is *Boulder on Which Once there was a Church* by Guram Dochanashvili. *Artistic-documentary discourse* was also reconstructed, examples of which are: *Artistic Revolution* and *White Bear* by Georgian classic Otar Chkheidze. In those novels the complex political, economic and spiritual problems are discussed in the realistic manner, where historical narrative, in the individual style characteristic for this author, is combined with sincerity typical of documentary narrative. *Autobiographical discourse and historic and publicist narrative* also take shape – here *Future Past* by Givi Alkhazishvili, *The Tomb of Kartlos* by Jansugh Ghvinjilia, *Magic Star* by Rezo Cheishvili should be named. *Philosophical discourse* is presented by Jansugh Kordzaia's poetry. These models of discourse are successfully used by writers and poets of the previous as well as the new generations. Special mention should be made of revival of *Biographical narrative* characteristic of the classical literary tradition. Here should be mentioned dynamic texts by Rostom Ckheidze about Georgian writers and public figures as an attempt of artistic reconstructing of the history of Georgia: Aleksander Orbeliani, Aleksander Qazbegi, Iakob Gogebashvili, Kakutsa Choloqashvili, Mikhako Tsereteli, Archil Jorjadze and others. Mikho Mosulishvili's artistic-documentary novel *Vazha-Pshavela* also too draws attention, where the details of life and creative work of Vazha-Pshavela are viewed from the talented young writer's perspective. In the recent periods, Rostom Ckheidze, pursuing the same creative purposes, presents some interesting plays

and joins the present-day generation of Georgian playwrights: Guram Kartvelishvili, Basa Janikashvili, Tamar Bartaia, Manana Doiashvili. If Doiashvili's dramaturgy is oriented to a greater extent on the Western style, Tamar Bartaia and Guram Kartvelishvili return to traditional Georgian subjects. Bartaia's plays, picturing the contemporary life of Georgia, are permeated with lots of pain and exactly for this reason are interesting for foreign theatres. In his renowned play *Kakutsa Choloqashvili*² Kartvelishvili expressively revives a major historical period and heroes of the Georgian people. He is also the author of plays *Chronicle* and *Church Revolt* as well as quite interesting collection of stories *My Windmills*.

There is a very interesting trend of "**Returning**" the texts of those women-authors of the Soviet period, who's best works were unjustly forgotten because of the anti-Soviet narrative. I will recall Zaira Arsenishvili (1933-2015), writer and play-writer, who is an author of significant texts exploring the of Soviet totalitarianism and the miserable life of intellectuals in that period. Her novels – "Woe is Life" and the "Requiem" are already set to be translated in English.

Leila Beroshvili also should be mentioned here. Her collection of short stories - *The Moon Floated in the Sky* - made a great impression on the modern Georgian reading public.

On the end, it can be noted with confidence that Georgian post-Sodern literature with its topics and stylistic models, discourse layers and objectives – diverse, multifaceted, and at the same time highly oriented on its own values - is a full-fledged member to the global literary world.

²Significant person in the modern history of Georgia.