

Philology

Reflection of War Trauma in Postmodernist Radio Plays (on the example of Zurab Kandelaki's *Unfinished Play* and *Kaleidoscope*)

Nino Mindašvili*, Nana Kutsia**, Nia Sadaghashvili*

* Faculty of Social and Humanities Sciences, Caucasus International University, Tbilisi, Georgia

** Faculty of Humanities, Sokhumi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia

(Presented by Academy Member Elizbar Javelidze)

This paper deals with radio play as a relatively new trend in dramaturgy, which is shaped in the common literary process by the dynamics of the literary canon. The goal of our research is, on the one hand, to present the theoretical aspects of radio play as an original genre of dramaturgy and on the other hand, to show the concepts of collective trauma on the example of Zurab Kandelaki's postmodernist radio plays. When working on the research issue, a complex literary approach was used, namely, the methods of observation and comparative analysis of the text, inductive and deductive research methods, which allowed us to understand the issue as a whole and to present relevant conclusions. © 2023 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

drama, radio play, postmodernism, trauma, exile, self-reflection

Along with lyrics and epos, drama is a conceptual field of literature and dramaturgy – a distinguished direction of world literature.

According to the definition of the Georgian Encyclopedia, “unlike the lyrics, drama embodies not the inner feelings of a writer, but actual reality that sharply deviates from it and, unlike the epos, drama shows the reality and a plot develops not through the narration, but through the actions of characters (according to the Aristotelian concept of “Poetics”). Author is seen only in remarks.

Drama is based on a tense life conflict around which the whole action is concentrated. As a

literary genre, drama has given the world literature a number of notable figures, such as Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides, Aristophanes and many others. In Georgian literary space one should mention G. Avalishvili, G. Eristavi, Z. Antonov, A. Tsagareli, I. Chavchavadze, A. Tsereteli, Al. Kazbegi, Vazha-Phshavela (in the encyclopedia it is indicated that “in the 19th century, apart from Vazha's *The Outcast*, no original Georgian tragedy has been created”), D. Kldiashvili, K. Gamsakhurdia, Gr. Robakidze, Sh. Dadiani, P. Kakabadze, G. Rcheulishvili, O. Ioseliani, T. Chiladze,

O. Chkheidze, T. Badzaghua, L. Tabukashvili, Sh. Shamanadze... [1].

There are fundamental studies dedicated to the history of Georgian dramaturgy (A. Gachechiladze's essays on the History of Georgian Dramaturgy and Theater of the Nineteenth Century, M. Duduchava's Genres of Literary Works, K. Rukhadze's Old Georgian Theater and Dramaturgy, G. Tsitsishvili's Letters on Theater and Dramaturgy). Among the researches conducted in recent years, we would mention Nino Todua's PhD thesis entitled "Georgian Postmodernist Dramaturgy" and from the works of modern authors the plays of Zurab Kandelaki, Mikho Mosulishvili, Rostom Chkheidze, Lasha Bughadze, Maia Sarishvili deserve attention.

Dramaturgical play (French: la pièce, piece "part") is "any work of a dramaturgical kind of literature, a synonym for the concept of "drama". The term "play", which originally meant a small piece of music, was also applied to lyrical poems in the 19th century. Dramas began to be called "plays" only in the 20th century. This word is often used in the meaning of a genre" [2]. The radio play is a relatively new trend in dramaturgy (according to Rostom Chkheidze, it is still underappreciated and even almost marginal in Georgia), which has been outlined in the unified literary process by the dynamics of the internal laws of literature.

Methods and Discussion

In this research, the methods of comparative analysis have been used. Georgian scholar Irma Ratiani, in her conceptual work "Modern Georgian Literary Process" emphasizes that "literature has patiently begun the search for alternative ways of representation... elements of neorealism, mythology, magical realism, fantastic imagology alternate with each other, the amplitude of the narrative ranges from realistic discourse, dramatic narrative, grotesque and often the absurd" [3], which, of course, is determined and reasoned by the tragic-grotesque-absurd background of the era. The

radio play is also "an alternative way of representation".

Radio play, as a genre is less studied in scientific discourse, although researchers agree that the specificity and originality of the genre is attractive to the user and for an author it is a way to be heard. The radio play (radio theater) has had a significant impact on the process of formation of national literature both in the USA and the Soviet Union since the 20s of the 20th century. The author of the first radio play – *Sue 'Em*, is considered to be Nancy Brosius; the play was published in 1925, and the text of which was mainly of an entertaining nature. Eventually, the attitude towards the radio play changed, as the public expressed serious dissatisfaction with the content of the radio shows. The leading American poets and dramatists got interested in the new genre. One of the first authors was Archibald McLeish, with his radio play *The Fall of the City*, which is considered the best example of American radio drama. The radio play combines three fields of art: literature, theater and radio. Each of them developing within the framework of national literary schools, which creates specific features of the radio play, however, it is also worth mentioning that "the cultural factor has a special influence on the formation of the radio play" [4].

One of the outstanding postmodernist authors Zurab Kandelaki is the foremost master of the Georgian radio play. As R.Chkheidze puts it, time would bring the necessity of creating a radio play. Attempts in this direction would be completed with the dramaturgical writings of Zurab Kandelaki, the director who would not only gain international resonance for his Georgian radio play, but also effortlessly reach the rank of "making it to the European radius, actually", by creating full-fledged radio plays [5].

Some of the plays staged in Slovenia, Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Serbia, Iceland, Hungary, Estonia, Belarus, Russia are included in the top 10 ratings of radio plays; some were awarded the Prix

Europe – a special prize of the jury and The Rehearsal – the Grand Prix at the International Festival of Radio Plays.

First of all, Zurab Kandelaki's plays represent “tragicomic phantasmagoria” with the predominance of the tragic.

In 2010, the director and writer and playwright's collection of radio plays entitled *Give me just a minute, Executioner* was published;

We will focus on the representation of the most difficult historical events of the last decades in the playwright's radio plays.

World and specifically Georgian literary studies actively research the tragic results and experiences of wars. From this point of view, the famous American sociologist, Geoffrey Alexander's theory about collective trauma is interesting, which develops the opinion that the wars of the 20th century made it necessary to understand memories containing trauma and to fight against them [6].

The tragedy of war in Abkhazia is reflected in two (third and fourth) texts of the collection – *The Unfinished Play* (radio staged in 2000) and *Kaleidoscope or Before the Exam* (2008).

There are two other texts in the collection – *Give me just a minute, Executioner* and *There's a lot going on, Horatio...*

Despite the constant disconnection of time, the skillful playing with time in *With Pearls in Rio*, it is necessary to ascertain the time reflected in the last two texts – “After the proverbial reflection of the thirties and eighties (in the first two plays), Zurab Kandelaki chooses the 1990s-2000s as the time of action; and as the location – the radio studio. The action also includes the format of one radio broadcast – adherence to the conceptual law of the unity of time, place and action gives the plays a special expression, dynamism” [7].

Pre-war or post-war Sukhumi and its real or phantasmagoric-ephemeral existence are brought to life in the plays with the most painful moments.

The writer and playwright has a special spiritual bond with Sukhumi – “The director's career began

in Sukhumi. The first independent play he staged together with Anzor Kutateladze was Otar Chkheidze's *Old Romances*”, writes literary critic Marine Turava in her letter dedicated to Zurab Kandelaki's radio plays – *The Piece of Colored Glass* [8].

Zurab Kandelaki's (radio) plays are remarkable examples of postcolonial literature, which literary scholars consider as “literary resistance against historical amnesia, in which the past is recalled and re-evaluated... Historical memory is always accompanied by terrifying elements – still remembered and forgotten, returned and not understood. History, past and subjective memory are the essential paradigms through which the characters define their identity” [9].

The theme of the elder, internally displaced (refugee) actors is dominant in *The Unfinished Play*. The action is directed by a conductor, an unnamed “author” before whose eyes the play within the play unfolds; different stories – in present days, in the radio studio in Tbilisi or the drama once played out in the theater or on the beach in Sukhumi, time – real and imaginary – is mixed together.

Zurab Kandelaki, in his expositional remark of the play, outlines the terrible logic in the long chain of events named as “illogical”, not with the categorical intonation of the omniscient, but with a tragic intonation characterizing thinkers (he makes the character to say): “Who knows, maybe everything started THEN; THEN, and this nightmare was a continuation of something that had already started, premeditated and carefully planned?!”

This question is also rhetorical. The tragedy created during the rise of Bolshevism (in the twenties and forties of the 20th century) “will bear fruits” at the end of the century, at the beginning of the 1990s...

From the very first lines of the quote, it becomes clear that the writer-playwright considers the Abkhazia war as the last accord of the agony of the

totalitarian (counting its last days, as if modernized) regime – a fragment of the Russia-Georgia war.

The ghost of the mysterious instigator of the war will also show itself at a moment. In one of the remarks, the “desired borders” of the empire will also be “sculptured”: “What is our Russian Empire? Our Russian Empire is a geographical unity, which means part of a known planet. And the Russian Empire includes: Great, Little, White and Red Russia and the Georgian, Polish, Kazan kingdom and so on and so and so on” [10].

A fragment of another memory redirects us from the subtropical, seaside space to Chuberi's Golgotha Road (obviously, in accordance with the laws of the genre, without direct indication): “An untracked road covered with snow and slush, which did not end; the road – endless... the road crowded with hungry, exhausted people, scattered with frozen corpses... half-dug graves... dead children hugged by parents...” [10].

Fragments of the above quote from *The Unfinished Play* are repeated word for word in the *Kaleidoscope*.

The cascade of naming sentences is not chosen accidentally in order to intensify the energy of the passage. Such a lapidary-laconic manner of narration is not only due to the adherence to the canon of the genre. The writer-playwright is aware that the tragedy is not reflected by “words... words... words...”, but – much better – “by the telegram style of the soul” [10].

Another paradigm is also terrifying (better to say – a fact that has become a paradigm): “Never again will the sea be so clear, never again – there are corpses floating there... unattended corpses...” [11].

When understanding the above-mentioned fragments, the quotations from past speeches by “Georgia-friendly” Gensher and Adenauer sound quite cynical (it is interesting that Adenauer's text is overshadowed by that of Yeltsin's):

“All the other United Nations member states recognize the territorial integrity of Georgia”,

advertisement breaks, as well as the English-language (“Georgian translations”) insert of another play – *Kaleidoscope* (impersonal voice): “In Sukhumi – on the Tbilisi highway, Chanba Street, Tsereteli Avenue, in Rustaveli Avenue – on both sides of the street for a long time there were tall, big earthworks. Those were graves of our soldiers. Then the soil was slowly lowered and the earthworks were driven over by tractors. Then they made us to plant palm trees over them [the almost totem tree of subtropical area is almost changing its role – N.K., N. M.], the bones thrown out by the caterpillars of the tractor were gathered and buried again in Chanba Street. It was almost a whole week's work. For us, the needy, it was enough to just buy bread.” [11].

These are the fragments from the newest history of Georgia, which should never be forgotten...

In the final lines of *The Unfinished Play*, in the play within the play, the actor reads the character's words, tragically agreeing and echoing his own tragic thoughts: “Is it true that we will never return?!”

The character of another play – *Kaleidoscope* manages to return – but in a different time-space model – in his imagination, as he strangely resembles the protagonist of Mikheil Javakhishvili's *The Rabbit* or of Cortazar's *Final Examination* – hidden in the house-shell of his imagination, he avoids the horror of reality and tries to survive looking again at Cortazar's Doctor Menta's “institution”, which has transformed into a long, endless, roofless corridor.

Literary scholar Marine Turava observes that Anna – a character “in existential crisis” “lives simultaneously in two worlds – real and imaginary. Her past is connected with Sukhumi, her soul is intertwined with this city with the most tender threads of her soul, her subconscious seems to be stuck in the past” [8].

The short-story included in the play, reflecting the exile of the Sukhumi Greeks to Central Asia, is an absolutely self-sufficient artistic text, showing

the absurdity of total violence and full of wisdom – if you commit violence once, it will be repeated a thousand times – until the perpetrator is called the perpetrator and the victim – is called the victim. “How closely related are the emigration of the Greek family to Kazakhstan and the emigration of the Georgians from their historical homeland [home region – N.K., N.M.] is difficult to say, but nothing happens by accident in literature, not even in life” [8].

Anna's “craziness” is a response to the absolute indifference and ignorance of the era, when no one worries about and even do not remembers the cut down bamboo fences and rose bushes, Electra's father, an elderly Greek, used to the rose scent and never used to the Asian pilaf, who died from hunger; and not even just recently floating corpses in the sea and beautiful Sukhumi, burned by the fire of war.

“The chain of Sokhumi actors' associations is similar to Anna's associations, although the artists are spiritually and mentally healthy, unlike Anna” [8].

Only a “crazy one” would be forgiven for the constant recalling of “the Death Pass”; only by craziness they can explain the heartbreaking inner monologue: if they would explain the heartbreaking inner monologue as madness: “The sea... calm... clear as crystal... pure as untrodden snow... big, enormous, umbrella-like jellyfish... God, what colors were there, what colors... Was it really clean, really transparent? Tell me, was it really? Was it?... God, why do I keep constantly hearing the sound of the sea?! Why was the sea so clear then?! What has happened?! Did something really happen?! Has the clear, the innocent sea, pure as an untouched snow disappeared forever?! Is this how the fairytale should end?!” [10].

But fairytales, usually have happy endings – a fairytale is a tale of goodness, of a dream, of a dried tree revived by the word of true justice...

Even the bamboo, the roses that were cut down will once be revived, the bowels of the sea will be

purified – maybe even the human soul – with regret, repentance, forgiveness.

Maybe the vanished white ship will once float by the shore again.

Perhaps, the executioner will never dare to cynically order the human: “Don't enter the fairytale!”

According to Rostom Chkheidze's most accurate observation, “radio plays, which are completely different in terms of form [a play in a play – in *The Unfinished Play*, a novella in a play – in *Kaleidoscope* – N.K., N.M.] are spiritually related to the ancient Greek drama and once again convince us of the eternity of pains intertwined with common human aspirations” [11].

Every passage and detail in Zurab Kandelaki's radio plays is dictated only by necessity. Iliia wrote – “Each scene, each act should reveal the heart of the drama.”

In *The Unfinished Play*, the character – DJ to some extent explains the genre essence of the play to the reader-listener: “The expressive means of the radio play give the author complete freedom – he is no longer limited by time and space, he can use all literary techniques – be it a stream of consciousness or an associative line of material organization” [10].

It is stated in the Literary Encyclopedia that the 20th century drama was characterized with “the use of narrative fragments and active editing of stage episodes, which often gives the work of playwrights a flavor of documentary; and song-lyrical fragments intrude into the action” [2].

We believe that the words that Maia Jaliashvili writes about Tamaz Badzaghua can be repeated to describe Zurab Kandelaki's plays as well: “The artistic and expressive structure of the plays echoes, on the one hand, Chekhov's romantic-realist tradition, on the other hand – the aesthetics of the absurd drama of the 20th century” [12].

But, absurd can vary too. As Rostom Chkheidze notes in the monograph *Brief Review of Georgian Literature*, “here, the stylistics of the absurd did not need the help of the writer's artistic imagination – it

was quite enough to select the images and characters from the environment [furthermore – from the war – N.K., N.M.] and transfer them into the narrative without color. ... what would be understood by Western readers as exaggerations, the expansion of artistic imagination, the breaking of realistic frameworks, actually is realism, moreover, even naturalism [5].

It is the reflection-reception of the universality of pain that determines the constant success of Zurab Kandelaki's plays at international radio play festivals.

Conclusion

Based on the material studied with a complex literary criticism approach and comparative analysis method, we can conclude that Zurab Kandelaki's radio plays are the texts of epochal importance, giving the literary representation of the events developed in Georgia.

The issues raised by the writer in his radio plays allow to be discussed in the general human context,

there are literary interpretations of the theory of collective trauma, victory trauma and post-colonialism, which gives the radio plays a special touch. The paradigm of war established in the text is analyzed in a global context and is perceived as the most destructive event of humanity, which forces people to endure tragic events that cause them to change mentally.

Zurab Kandelaki undoubtedly is the author with a distinctive voice and intonation, who, on the one hand, establishes genre innovations in the Georgian literary space and, on the other hand, is a literary representation of the epochal discourse.

We also consider Zurab Kandelaki's merit in the popularization of the radio play as European literary genre, because the polyphonic-syncretic essence of the radio play most accurately presents the syncretic nature of the era – as the writer-director himself would say, “tragicomic phantasmagoria”; we again repeat – with the predominance of the tragic.

ფილოლოგია

ომის ტრავმის ანარეკლი პოსტმოდერნისტულ რადიოპიესაში (ზურაბ კანდელაკის „დაუმთავრებელი პიესისა“ და „კალეიდოსკოპი“-ს მაგალითზე)

ნ. მინდიაშვილი **, ნ. კუცია *, ნ. სადაღაშვილი *

* კავკასიის საერთაშორისო უნივერსიტეტი, სოციალურ და ჰუმანიტარულ მეცნიერებათა ფაკულტეტი, თბილისი, საქართველო

** სოხუმის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, ჰუმანიტარულ მეცნიერებათა ფაკულტეტი, თბილისი, საქართველო

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის ე. ჯაველიძის მიერ)

ნაშრომში წარმოდგენილია რადიოპიესა, როგორც დრამატურგიის შედარებით ახალი სივრცე, რომელიც ლიტერატურის შინაგან კანონთა დინამიკამ გამოკვეთა ერთიან ლიტერატურულ პროცესში. ჩვენი კვლევის მიზანია, ერთი მხრივ, რადიოპიესის, როგორც დრამატურგიის ორიგინალური ჟანრის, თეორიული ასპექტების წარმოჩენა, ხოლო, მეორე მხრივ, ზურაბ კანდელაკის პოსტმოდერნისტული რადიოპიესების მაგალითზე, კოლექტიური ტრავმის კონცეპტების ჩვენება. საკვლევ საკითხზე მუშაობისას გათვალისწინებულია კომპლექსური ლიტერატურათმცოდნეობითი მიდგომა, გამოყენებულია ტექსტზე დაკვირვებისა თუ შედარებითი ანალიზის, ინდუქციურ-დედუქციური კვლევის მეთოდები, რამაც საშუალება მოგვცა მთლიანობაში გაგვეაზრებინა საკითხი და რელევანტური დასკვნები წარმოგვეჩინა.

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