

# Trauma of War in Georgian Postmodern Miniatures

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**Abstract.** The paper explores a genre that is little studied in Georgian analytical discourse: the postmodern miniature. As a research matter, we are examining how the trauma of war is reflected in the literary texts of well-known Georgian authors: Revaz Inanishvili („Mouth of the Bzip”), Rezo Tabukashvili („Refusing to Escape”), and Zaal Samadashvili („Having been on the March”) is explored. We use trauma theory and postmodern aesthetics as our theoretical basis, and comparative, hermeneutic, and textual analyses are used as our research methods. The theoretical basis and methodological approaches allowed drawing appropriate conclusions. Postmodern miniatures not only reflect the trauma of war, but also offer new ways to comprehend it, avoiding traditional narratives and emphasizing subjective experience, fragmentary memory, and cultural reflection what is especially important for the Georgian reality, since the trauma of local wars is still alive in the collective memory, while a miniature, as a form, generally allows expressing pain not in a long narrative, but with concentrated, intense strokes. © 2025 Bull. Natl. Acad. Sci. Georg.

**Keywords:** war, trauma, genre, miniature, Georgian

## Introduction

War as a source of collective and individual trauma, is one of the main topics of literature for centuries, although in the postmodern era this topic took on new forms of expression. The postmodern miniature, as a concise and solid genre of writing, is particularly interesting in that it allows trauma to be presented in a concentrated but multifaceted way.

The 1990s were marked by epochal cataclysms. The collapse of the Soviet Union created a new reality in Georgia: on the one hand, the country gained independence, but on the other, the complex socio-political background gave rise to variegated sentiments in society. The outbreak of hostilities in

the country (Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Regions) dealt a heavy blow to the newly formed Georgian state, having a major impact on the formation of cultural paradigms as well.

The long-awaited freedom was perceived differently in Georgian society and the situation in the country created fertile ground for pessimism and nihilism. These processes led to the formation of completely new concepts in Georgian literature, among which the theme of *war* (further referred to as *military literature*) takes a special place. It is noteworthy that the theme of war in Georgian literature has representative features and embraces almost all genres: novels, short stories, plays, and

miniatures. The focus of the paper is a genre that is little studied in Georgian analytical discourse: the *postmodern miniature*. As analytical material, the texts by Georgian authors: Revaz Inanishvili (*"Mouth of the Bzip"*), Rezo Tabukashvili (*"Refusing to Escape"*), and Zaal Samadashvili (*"Having been on the March"*) will be examined.

Georgian postmodernist miniatures are not sufficiently studied in scientific sources; there are only few articles (by Irma Ratiani, Mariam Miresashvili, Bela Tsipuria, Rostom Chkheidze, Nana Kutsia, Natalia Gventsadze and others). Thus, the material studied is relevant and important, on the one hand, for assessing contemporary Georgian literary processes and, on the other hand, for researchers interested in military literature, in order to create a complete picture. In developing the *theoretical frame* of the study, the "theory of trauma" (Alexander, 2003) was relied upon, which most accurately defines the specifics of collective memory formed against the backdrop of political and social processes taking place in Georgia, as well as genre and thematic interpretations of literature.

Important and turning points in Georgia's history began (in the 1980s) when society united for the great goal of gaining state independence. The most difficult path required sacrifices (April 9, 1989), which became a universal traumatic paradigm in the consciousness of the nation. However, as a benefit, the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union led to the restoration of state independence. Victory was achieved, and Georgian statehood was no longer threatened. However, the subsequent processes – conflicts in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali regions, instigated by Russia, and in reality, an undeclared war between Russia and Georgia, destruction, social hardship, tens of thousands of refugees, lost territories, young people sacrificed to the war, and political instability – turned the hard-won victory into a trauma in the nation's consciousness, which was vividly reflected in Georgian literary narrative. Thus, Jeffrey

Alexander's *theory of trauma* most accurately represents the political and cultural processes taking place in Georgia.

**Postmodern aesthetics analysis** allows understanding the specifics and characteristics of the texts and determine the extent to which the material being analyzed corresponds to the general conceptual approaches of postmodernism. **The main characteristics of postmodern miniatures are:** fragmentation; irony and distancing, intertextuality, metareflection;

## Methods

To achieve the set goal, the **research methods** that will allow systematizing the analyzed material, identifying the problems, and classifying the results obtained were identified. The work is based on: **comparative method, hermeneutic method; method of textual analysis.** A **comparative study** of the research question allowed identifying similarities and differences in the analyzed texts and draw complete or partial parallels. When identifying similarities, it was important to form a unique concept that was organically linked to existing knowledge and relevant for further study of war literature. The **hermeneutic method** helped to comprehensively understand the research question, to present, on the one hand, the concepts of collective memory and, on the other hand, those semiotic paradigms that are particularly noteworthy in the texts studied. Focusing on **textual analysis**, the way the authors use postmodern techniques (fragmentation, irony, symbolism) to express the trauma of war is discussed.

## Discussion

The undeclared war between Russia and Georgia, known as the "Georgian-Abkhaz conflict," is predicted in **Revaz Inanishvili's miniature "Mouth of the Bzip,"** written in the late 1980s and published in a collection of short stories, essays, and miniatures entitled "The Little Boy on Golgotha." The

collection, published in 1989, predicts the tragedy that will unfold at the *confluence of the Bzip River* just three years later (Kutsia, 2009).

The exposition mentions that the writer is vacationing in Bichvinta. One day, the sea “turned upside down” and the rough weather viciously “swept” the shore. After the weather improved, the author-hero followed the coast toward the Bzip estuary. In our view, the movement toward the point of confluence is allegorically the initiation, self-reflection. Since the ancient times a road has been thought in terms of an archetypal model. The archetype takes on special significance in Christian exegesis. “In medieval art, every road is symbolic; physically traveling any road necessarily implies a certain spiritual plan” (Siradze, 1987).

It is during the writer’s journey (both as author and protagonist) that he experiences a vision similar to the paintings of Salvador Dali, which at the same time evokes another archetype – the journey of the Argonauts and its outcome. This movement is not simply a displacement in geographical space, but, above all, a “displacement” in a spiritual context. Following textual minimalism, every detail, a chronotope, has a special meaning, color (“Gauguin’s intensity”), sound, and even one of the most important categories of postmodernism – the limit, the boundary, which Mikhail Bakhtin specifically notes in his analysis of chronotope – Bakhtin argued that “space abandons its existential coordinates and extends toward the limit; the projection of space is equivalent to ethical and moral values” (Ratiani, 2008,) – the Bzip River/ Bichvinta is a border, a boundary not only in geographical terms (the border between Russia and Georgia), but also in the categories of literary theory outlined above. After this vision, the author can never be the same again. Like Sibyl, he saw the coming tragedy, although, of course, unlike Sibyl, it is impossible for him to comprehend the hidden meaning of the vision. It is no coincidence that this vision was of a writer, a thinker, the chief carer of the nation. Opposite to the impersonality of the elements, the

writer brings personal responsibility to the fore, which manifests itself as anticipation on particular. The impersonal sea, the impersonal river, the impersonal puddles (each with a specific color – the sea is “water-insoluble vitriol blue “ the river is “light greenish,” and the puddles are “whitish”) create a wonderful landscape, a scenery. The azure palette here, in contrast to the blue of Baratashvili’s classic poem “Twilight over Mtatsminda” (“And when I gaze upon your blue...”), evokes not a feeling of peace, loftiness, harmony, or the divine, but, on the contrary, anxiety, and restlessness. It is not surprising that in the text, the main mystery becomes the **mountain** – a paradigm of the divine – and in the postmodern miniature, it is the **sea** – a paradigm of the world, transience, and instability. Let us not dwell on the biblical semantic and semiotic meanings of the sea; rather, let us recall just one text. The translator (from Greek) is Gregory of Khandzta according to the tradition: “The sea of the world is agitated by sinful turmoil, / and will drown me, ... Save me from turmoil, all-merciful Virgin Mother” (Kartuli Mtseroba (Georgian Writings), 1, 1987) (As in the hymnographic text, in Inanishvili’s miniature, the *sea* is an enigma of the transient and hopeless, but the writer does not go deep into the image, but leaves it with function of a landscape. The meaning of the enigma in the miniature is conveyed by the weeping black trees and the high-tip black boat of the foreigners). “The plastic image of weeping trees comes to life” (Kutsia, 1998). The *high-tip black boat* refers a reader, on the one hand, to the classical paradigm of the “black fleet” (the fleet of the Hellenes sailing to Troy, *The Iliad*), and on the other hand, to Otar Chiladze’s reinterpretation of Homer’s enigma (*The Black Fleet of Minos* – “The Man Walked Along the Road”). The enigma is multi-layered, and will not be analyzed in detail, but it will only be noted that the essence of expansion is pedaled by the blackness of the fleet (the black-tip boat in Inanishvili’s work) – the black intention of the foreigner, the black fleet, penetrates the azure space of the natives.

When describing Abkhazia (the area of the confluence of the Bzip River), the emphasis on Colchis is not only a statement of historical fact, but also, at the same time, a completely correct political emphasis – it is *Kolcheti* (while *Abkhazia* is one of the names of this area, like *Imereti* and *Egrisi*). As already mentioned, the image captured in the miniature embraces the energy of Salvador Dali's paintings as well – majestic and terrifying at the same time (the word “terrifying” is present in the text as well – this is exactly what the protagonist character feels when he first sees “Drowned Trees”). The word “refugee,” which appears in the artistic fabric of the text, is also anticipatory – Revaz Inanishvili died at the end of 1991, not surviving the tragedy of 1992-1993, but the miniature – a tragic premonition of inevitable destruction – the Russian-Georgian war of 1992–1993 turned hundreds of thousands of Georgian (and non-Georgian) residents of Abkhazia into refugees. If Revaz Inanishvili's (a writer of the older generation) the “Bzip confluence” is a miniature anticipation/foreshadowing, and the author *foretells* what should happen, then the **text – the miniature** “Refusing to Escape” by the representative of younger generation of Georgian postmodernism – **Rezo Tabukashvili Jr.** – is *a statement of fact*. Like Inanishvili, Rezo Tabukashvili also specifies and narrows down the location. In Inanishvili's work, it is the *Bzip confluence*, and in Tabukashvili's, it is *Sokhumi*. It is the city, which will be conquered by the enemy in no time. It should also be noted that Inanishvili does not specify the year, only the month (“it is mid-September”). Surely, one can assume that the 1980s are concerned, but this is only an assumption and will remain so. In Tabukashvili's text, although the time is not specified, there is a direct hint that it is the end of September 1993, September 27.

The character, the warrior has a few more minutes (perhaps even an hour) to escape from hell and avoid certain death. In accordance with the genre conventions of the miniature, Rezo Tabukashvili, the

narrator, tells the story concisely, without verbosity. Similar to Inanishvili's text, the enigma of the black ship appears in Tabukashvili's miniature as well, but this time it is not a paradigm of expansion, but of survival – Ukrainian ships rescued the doomed Georgian population from Abkhazia, which had turned into hell after Russian expansion.

The minimalist space of the text is, in essence, completely occupied by the self-reflection of the protagonist – it's all over – the city has fallen, most of his comrades died, enemy machine guns are already rattling nearby... The instinct for self-survival should have forced the hero to board the rescuing ship, but... Who can condemn a person for his instinct for self-survival (especially since Sokhumi is not even the hero's hometown)? The laconic space is capable of containing depth – Lado is Georgian, and so Sokhumi is his city; “brothers” became ghosts (perished)... There is nothing ahead – the war is lost, the homeland is fallen on its knees, the Georgian city is fallen/is betrayed... A person focused on personal interests would calmly continue to live in his native village, joking with a crowd of idlers, drinking with the crowd or alone (especially since “Leila is already married”), but there are people whose life can be expressed with a lofty word – “Refusing to Escape.” The writer chooses this lofty word for a concise, profound text that emphasizes one of its most characteristic enigmas – “the sea scent filling his soul.” In this space (in this text), the sea/the sea scent is a paradigm of freedom (The finale, where the hero stands silently under a pine tree, was a remainder of another character – conceptual novel “Hope” by John Galsworthy: “He stood like a statue of great, inexplicable human kindness, the most encouraging and inspiring thing that exists on earth – courage without hope!” (Galsworthy, 1981) (The ending is open and the reader decides whether the enemy spares the soul imbued with the scent of the sea, and if so, what awaits him in the expanses without a sea!)).

Perhaps it will be possible to understand the narrative of the third miniature text presented for

study (like the two previous ones – laconic and profound at the same time). The miniature **“Having been on the March”** by Zaal Samadashvili, a representative of the middle generation of postmodernists, unlike the texts by Revaz Inanishvili and Rezo Tabukashvili Jr., is not an anticipation or a statement of fact, but rather a reflection and reception, a contemplation of the most severe consequences of the war trauma. Let us repeat the principle of the genre canon: Zaal Samadashvili cannot be too verbose, each phrase is lapidary, each accent (as Davit Tserediani calls the figurative sword – “the main blow”) is sharp and accurate. On the one hand, the action in the text seems to be reduced to a minimum, but the minimalist space reflects the tragedy of a generation – the fate of a talented artist having fought in war. It is hinted that the suicider is an outstanding thinker (winning a prestigious exhibition cannot be a coincidence), but in an objective catastrophe – war, even if defensive – there is no place for subjective talent. The fact is that the war is lost, the homeland is ruined, even the “knight of the crusade” (the character’s alter ego) returned home “along the rainy road,” but what appears as rain on the canvas turns into endless tears in the soul of the main character. One day, trauma and stigmatization will take their toll – the coffins standing side by side, the bodies of the suicider and the murdered (the spouses), and the frivolous dialogue of friends (war cannot be discussed seriously; war is madness) are depicted with minimalist, dry brushstrokes (Somewhere, in some corner of the text, the main victim of all wars (including this one) will find the sympathetic gaze and heart of the reader – the boy who witnessed the suicide of a soldier “having been on march”, the defeated soldier of a lost war and an artist.

## Conclusion

The theoretical framework and methodological approaches chosen allowed studying the interpretation of war trauma in postmodern miniatures. Analysis of the texts shows that the miniature as a

narrative form not only reflects the external and internal manifestations of trauma, but also creates space for its deeper understanding. On the one hand, the genre canon puts limits for the author of the miniature – makes him to convey what he wants to say in a minimalist space – but, on the other hand, it is minimalism that determines the powerful impact of the miniature as a genre. The study showed that the texts examined should be understood in the context of the **general theoretical concept of postmodern miniatures**: Revaz Inanishvili’s miniature reflects the horror and sense of loss of war. The **fragmented narrative** and **symbolic passages** emphasize, on the one hand, the unconscious impact of trauma, and on the other, given the postmodern specificity and trends, the author expresses the unconscious aspects of trauma. In Rezo Tabukashvili’s miniature, the trauma of war is revealed through **irony and distancing**; the concise but clear type of narrative shows how the hero tries to escape from the recent past, to which he will constantly return. Zaal Samadashvili uses metaphorical language, **minimalist structure, and fragmentation** in an effort to convey as accurately as possible the internal conflicts acquired as a result of the most difficult experiences of war and the burden of collective memory. Along with other literary genres (novels, short stories, plays...), the miniature also made its own contribution (perhaps a special and unique one, thanks to its minimalism, stylistic frugality, restraint, and lack of pathos) to the depiction of the trauma of war and the horror of stigmatization, became an anticipation, a reflection and reception, an interpretation of tragedy. Postmodern miniatures not only reflect the trauma of war, but also offer a new ways of understanding it, avoiding traditional narratives and emphasizing subjective experience, fragmentary memory, and cultural reflection, which is especially important for Georgian reality, since the trauma of local wars is still alive in the collective memory, and the form of the miniature allows pain to be expressed not in a lengthy narra-

tive, but in concentrated, intense strokes. Thus, the theoretical framework chosen not only combines trauma theory, postmodern aesthetics, and polyphony, but also explains how the experience of war is aestheticized and the literary form of the miniature is psychologically processed, which is minimalist on the one hand and multi-layered on the other.

Accordingly, this not only helps understanding the texts of our selected authors: Revaz Inanishvili (“Mouth of the Bzip”), Rezo Tabukashvili (“Refusing to Escape”), and Zaal Samadashvili (“Having been on the March”), but also helps assessing the potential of Georgian postmodernist miniatures as a powerful means of expressing the trauma of war.

*ფილოლოგია*

## ომის ტრავმა ქართულ პოსტმოდერნისტულ მინიატურაში

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(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის ე. ჯაველიძის მიერ)

ნაშრომი ეხება ქართულ ანალიტიკურ დისკურსში ნაკლებად შესწავლილ ჟანრს – პოსტმოდერნისტულ მინიატურას. საკვლევ საკითხად განვიხილავთ, თუ როგორ აისახა ომის ტრავმა ცნობილი ქართველი ავტორების მხატვრულ ტექსტებში – რევაზ ინანიშვილის „ზიფის შესართავი“, რეზო თაბუკაშვილის „არგაკცევა“, ზაალ სამადაშვილის „ლაშქრობაში ნამყოფი“. თეორიულ ჩარჩოდ ვიყენებთ ტრავმის თეორიასა და პოსტმოდერნისტულ ესთეტიკას, ხოლო კვლევისთვის შერჩეულია შედარებითი, ჰერმენევტიკული და ტექსტუალური ანალიზის მეთოდები. სწორად შერჩეულმა თეორიულმა ჩარჩომ თუ მეთოდოლოგიურმა მიდგომებმა რელევანტური დასკვნების გამოტანის საშუალება მოგვცა. პოსტმოდერნისტული მინიატურა ასახავს არა მხოლოდ ომის ტრავმას, არამედ გვთავაზობს მისი გააზრების ახალ გზებს, ხაზს უსვამს სუბიექტურ გამოცდილებას, ფრაგმენტულ მეხსიერებასა და კულტურულ რეფლექსიას, რაც განსაკუთრებით მნიშვნელოვანია ქართული რეალობისთვის იმდენად, რამდენადაც ლოკალური ომების ტრავმა ჯერ კიდევ ცოცხალია კოლექტიურ მეხსიერებაში, ხოლო მინიატურის ფორმა საშუალებას იძლევა ტკივილი გამოიხატოს არა ვრცელი ნარატივით, არამედ – კონცენტრირებული, მძაფრი შტრიხებით.

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