

TRANSFORMATIONS OF TBILISI, REFLECTED IN POETIC SAMPLES

Shota Iatashvili

Ancient poets strove for eternal themes: love, death, friendship, loyalty, sacrifice, heroic deeds... They also loved to describe nature, as they often associated it with human qualities, using it as a figurative metaphor. The city was not an important poetic theme for them. Although the city is depicted in one way or another in the ancient poetic work, Homer's Iliad, the author is still more interested in the battle for Troy, its heroism and intrigue, than in the life of the city itself, its dynamics. It is limited to a superficial and not very detailed description of Troy. The first city in Georgian poetry, the image of which has reached us, is Gulansharo from "The Knight in the Panther's Skin."

"A journey of ten months divides this kingdom from the world,
And there lies Gulansharo, a great and wondrous city;
Hither from many distant seas come ships with treasures rare.
Melik Surkhavi rules there, blessed with wealth and power."

(Venera Urushadze's Translation, 1968)

Gulansharo is a city decorated with flowers ("They saw a city surrounded by thickets of gardens, / Where grew rare flowers of many and varied colors"), where trade flourishes and these skills are valued above chivalric values: "They buy and sell, they win and lose."

As for Tbilisi, it appears in poetic texts later, from the 18th-19th centuries. And since the archaic and organic form of poetry of that time was ashug poetry, it would perhaps be natural to first turn to the ashugs of Tbilisi. The most famous ones are from different eras - Sayatnova (18th century) and Ietim Gurji (at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries). And among them there are several more: Shamchi-Melko, Stepane Pershangishvili, Giorgi Skandarnova, David Givishvili and others. However, we cannot say that in any of their poems Tbilisi appears as a city - its streets, buildings or markets, or the people who roam this city. No, that's not true. They are "minstrels," singing the praises of their feelings to their beloved with ornate epithets, following the rules and laws of Eastern poetry and yet, in some places, these poems include the city gardens where these scenes take place and vows are made to them. And you can see the entourage - musical instruments, jewelry, or tableware - that is characteristic of their period, but obviously, this is not what can create the feeling that you are seeing a city, or if it does, it will only be because historically and terminologically all of this is already ingrained in us and leads us associatively to a specific era. In a word, the city is in no way an object of observation or inspiration for them. Perhaps, after twelve years away from the city, Ietim Gurji will greet it upon his return, say: "Hello, my city of Tbilisi, / I have come as your lost son," and dedicate a poem to it, or he may confirm the significance of his presence in this space with the words: "I am the people's poet, / of Tbilisi, the city of Georgia!", but then he will switch back to composing romantic lines and completely immerse himself in that world.

In the first half of the 19th century, Grigol Orbeliani wrote Mukhambazi poems, "Kinto's Song," and in his poems he mentions bathhouses and districts of Tbilisi:

"With my hat pulled down and a scarf wrapped around my neck,
I will set off for Ortachala with a swaggering gait!
By the river's edge, at the watermills, in total bliss,
Merry souls await me at the feast;
Let them see me there, who I was created and who I am,
What a treasure-mine of fortune I have found!"

("The Sorrows of Dimitri Onikashvili", here and below is the literal translation of the poems.)

But all of this is still part of ashug poetry with its aesthetics. Therefore, the first poet with whom Tbilisi appears differently - not as a melancholic and romantic space, but as a place of inner intimacy - is Nikoloz Baratashvili. "Thoughts on the Banks of the Mtkvari River", "Twilight on Mtatsminda", "Chinar", and "Night on the Kabakh" are poems where the author expresses his feelings and thoughts with the help of the environment in which he is directly present. He needs solitude for feelings and thoughts, the silence of the night, the murmur of the river, the poplar tree (the same as the chinar tree), which, together with the hum of the Mtkvari and the breeze, creates that mystery that should bring him closer to eternity, to that existentialism that should become the defining sign of his poetry.

After that, many poets will come who will describe the bustling, vibrant Tbilisi, and there will also be those who will be apologists for the coziness and phantasmagoria of the night city. At the beginning of the twentieth century, both of these approaches were fully realized in two poets - Ioseb Grishashvili and Galaktion Tabidze. And if Galaktion is in all respects a continuation of Baratashvili's line ("Baratashvili loved to walk here as an orphan alone" or "Me, Baratashvili, look down from above upon my native land..."), Grishashvili is trying to revive the image of the ashug poet and load him with a new function. Of course, if he wants to be an ashug, he must sing about love, and he is indeed busy with this, but he also has a passion for describing the living city, which Sayatnova and other ashugs were unable to do. And here is one moment, very important, and one might even say decisive: the city in which the old ashugs lived, including Grigol Orbeliani and Baratashvili, was as it was, existed in the present, and was self-sufficient. But with Grishashvili, time is speeding up, technical progress is coming and Tbilisi is changing, the feudal environment that defined the appearance of the city is gradually beginning to degenerate and disappear. Therefore, there is a desire in him to save, to conserve what already seems to be clearly transitory. Therefore, with him, Tbilisi already becomes a memory - a city of caravanserais, innkeepers, karachogeli, kintos, balconies and narrow streets. If for ashugs and Baratashvili the city is the present, then with Grishashvili it is already the past. It is here that one of the most influential Georgian myths, that of Tbilisi as a lost paradise, manifests itself.

"You may have deciphered many a riddle,
The odd and even numbers of the old chronicles, -
But you do not know what kind of pictures
Our city used to embroider in the past.

If you have ever walked down towards Sirachkhana,
And observed these streets carefully -
You would be amazed by the thickness of the wine skins,
And the Charga melody played on the Chianuri.
If a feeling or respect for antiquity
Glows even slightly within you -
You will understand why, like a magnet,
I stand guard at the gates of Tbilisi”.

(“Farewell to Old Tbilisi, or the Wind No Longer Brings the
Duduk’s Saari”)

This “feeling for, respect for, antiquity” is gradually becoming a cult theme among Georgian poets and, to some extent, even blinding them. It’s as if they can no longer see the city that exists in reality and are only imagining this old Tbilisi. This has its consequences: if for Grishashvili and some poets of his generation, as well as for those who shared his concept (for example, Giorgi Leonidze), such poems are distinguished by a richness of language, ornamentation, figurativeness and visibility, then gradually these artistic qualities are either lost or become false and unnatural, while the pathos, in turn, increases, and in many poems of the Soviet period, which the authors dedicate to Tbilisi, we see neither the modern nor the old city (such attempts are merely ersatz repetitions of what Grishashvili has already accomplished at a high level) and we only learn that the poet loves his beautiful city to the point of madness and is even capable of sacrificing himself for its sake.

This is roughly what we are talking about, and some poems are often written much worse:

“Speak to the Mtkvari River on my behalf,
Which flows to you from afar,
That it cannot love your land and palaces
More than I do.”

Tell April, in the old days they knew
In our country, a blanket made of the same fabric,
And it cannot compare to my love for you,
No matter how much it gives you lilacs.

(Irakli Abashidze, “To Tbilisi”)

In the worst cases, the poet’s love for Tbilisi merges with admiration for communist deeds, and we get a mutation of lyricism and propaganda.

Of course, I won’t bore you with quoting such examples, and I will try to focus on those authors who were able to bypass this bad mainstream of the Soviet era.

However, let’s not deviate from the chronology and return to the two lines that have been outlined so far: Grishashvili’s and Baratashvili-Tabidze’s. What we can consider a development of this line with Galaktion is that he gives Baratashvili’s mystery and coziness more phantasmagoricity, transforming it into a place surrounded by ghosts and adding even more unreality, despite the fact that he was daily interested in the real, modern Tbilisi, and he constantly walked around the city and wrote down on paper streets, bridges, gardens, entrances, museums... even traffic... During the same period, Grishashvili was busy recording and describing the city of the past (the result of which is the invaluable literary studies “Sayatnova” and “Tbilisi Literary Bohemia”), while Galaktion was busy with the city of the present... But as soon as he began to write poetry, the documentary character of this tangible world, captured in notebooks, disappeared, and everything became shrouded in phantasms. To varying degrees, a similar approach is observed in the group of symbolist poets “Blue Horns”, which is quite natural, since such poetics is a common feature of symbolism.

The fundamentally different aesthetic position that the Futurists and Dadaists had was also expressed in the description of the city, and it can be said that this is already the third line where a deconstructive, ironic, and épatage attitude appears. Moreover, it was at this moment in Tbilisi’s poetic history that the city first became a linguistic experiment. Generally, the industrial city

is the subject of description for futurists, and in some cases, Georgian futurists generally write about such a city. This is the case, for example, with Jango Ghoghoberidze or Alio Mirtskhulava, when he published poems under the pseudonym Boomerang in his youth. If futurists specifically refer to Tbilisi, they express sarcasm and aggression, based on the fact that it is still old-fashioned and has not become industrialized enough. This is also an unacceptable attitude towards how Tbilisi was perceived by the Symbolists and Grishashvili’s followers. Here, for example, let’s look at fragments from Bidzina Abuladze’s poem “On the Tiflis Sun”:

“Summer is far away –

We swear before the Tbilisi sun

And we have dipped our hot feet in the waves of the Mtkvari River.

[...]

Sadness descends upon us from all sides, like a burka.

We will gather our thoughts on distant Mount Mtatsminda.

We say: “The wind blows, and we are happy if we disperse into the air like soap bubbles.”

[...]

There, at the foot of the Mtkvari River,

Songs drown out the sounds of the barrel organ,

there, the caustic bayat of history continues.

[...]

- Let’s turn away from the monstrous noise of history! –

The sky of firebrand from Avchala

Roars like a beast.”

If there’s another poet of that period who deserves special mention, it’s Terenti Graneli. The heavy mood and sadness that permeate his poems and give them their uniqueness also make the city itself so. It’s always clear that he loves Tbilisi very much, when he’s elsewhere, he misses it, boards a train and yearns for it (or emerges from prison), but he knows not to expect a positive mood from Tbilisi.

He wanders around Tbilisi, enters gardens, climbs cemeteries, and everywhere this city is imbued with a melancholy that is neither Baratashvili-like immersion in thoughts nor Galaktion-like phantasmagoria. In the work of Terenti Graneli, Tbilisi lacks concreteness, but leaves a concrete mood; with him it first appears as a pessimistic and lifeless city.

“These mountains still stand as kings
(I wasn’t there and it rained last night).
The city has become so silent
as if the city is on the verge of destruction.”

(Untitled)

My tenderness passes,
like the morning mist.
And before Tbilisi
I burn like a candle.

(“Distant Flowers”)

And so on... In many places in his poems, Tbilisi appears precisely like this. Or, more accurately, Terenti is always like this, and Tbilisi always takes on a corresponding appearance in his work.

The next poet, who interprets the city in the twentieth century quite differently from his predecessors, is Shota Chantladze. This is a period when socialist realism predominates in literature, the symbolists and the avant-garde no longer exist, Terenti dies, Galaktion also dies, and a void seems to emerge where a

new poetic language should have been born. Shota Chantladze is the first figure who was to bring about many innovations in Georgian poetry. His poetry was an attempt at openness from beginning to end. His writing style was no longer mannered. He does not turn the city into a mirage, does not make it overtly pessimistic, does not shroud it in images of the past, and does not give it a distorted appearance. He's interested in the true face of Tbilisi. In our context, it's important that he's undoubtedly a poet of the city, so to speak, an urban poet who wanders the city, observing it with admiration, and much of his work is created precisely in this manner. We had a similar wandering poet before, Terenti Graneli (i.e. one whose work was also created while wandering), but the difference between them is that Terenti Graneli's gaze is turned inward, he is in his spiritual feelings, and the outside world only appears fragmentarily in his poems, when he sees something that matches his emotional mood, or maybe it's not like that at all, but heavy thoughts change the appearance of this environment and give it a negative tone. Unlike Terenti Graneli, Shota Chantladze's mood is created while wandering the streets, and not the other way around.

Just like the poet of the city, Malkhaz Kharbedia has a brilliant and extensive article titled "Garden and Wandering". Here is what he writes somewhere: "He, like the old flâneurs, lives outside, on the street. Here he feels at home. Better than home. The street has become his home, and the garden and park his interior. He hides in the crowd of this street and only accepts the chosen ones. At first glance, he seems asocial, but he is always surrounded by young people".

Shota Chantladze has a poem, "My Desk Book," which can be seen as a complete, symbolic document that gives the entire writing process taking place in the city its form - it formalizes it into a book. And if we remember that he did not publish a collection of poems during his lifetime, then this text takes on even greater symbolic significance - that is, it remained in the city as the only printed text, and that was enough for him.

"The city is a book for me -
thick, epochal and boring.
This book is printed on high-quality asphalt;
The avenue is one part of this book, -
This book consists of three parts.
The street is a chapter of this book, -
This book consists of many chapters,
The alley is a subchapter of this book, -
This book consists of many subchapters.
The dead end is an epigraph of this book, -
This book consists of many epigraphs.
The squares are the empty spaces of this book,
The gardens are the paintings of the chapters of this book,
The earth and the sky are the covers of this book."

He concludes the poem with these words:

"God commanded me to read this book every day.
This book is my desk book."

In this symbolic "desk book", Shota Chantladze takes notes, mostly while walking around the city. Often these are one- or two-line phrases that capture a moment. Perhaps he needed these notes to record impressions so that poems could grow from them later, or they simply served the function of a diary. Be that as it may, these recordings ultimately remained in their original form, and they are now referred to as miniatures.

The tram is often featured in his poems and notes, and it is particularly notable that Shota Chantladze has an extensive poem titled "The Tram," subtitled Requiem. In this poem, he perceives the tram as a living being, but one that is old, exhausted, and extremely limited by environmental conditions, and the entire text is an address to it, a description of its life, and a lamentation. And he describes how this tram moves along the street, encountering policemen, the gatekeeper, the watchman, and other regular residents of the city, devouring the citizens standing at the stops, "like a prehistoric, legendary, / gigantic cartilag-

inous animal." At the end of the day, it goes to the "tram depot," falls asleep on the tracks, and again dreams of images of the city's movement, but also of the time when it was first placed on the tracks.

"You, tired, want to get off the rails,
and lie down like a buffalo,
but you have to stand on your feet until dawn,
and doze until sunset."

This is the difficult fate of the weakened and exhausted Soviet tram, which Shota Chantladze describes so dramatically.

Shota Chantladze's closest friend was Mukhran Machavariani, and although his poetry ultimately went in a completely different direction and he became the most important figure in establishing patriotic poetic pathos of that period, it must be said that Tbilisi is quite clearly visible in Mukhran Machavariani's early poems, where short dialogues or simple scenes set in the streets or pubs became poetic material. Here is this type:

"- Vodka?
- Beer!
- One?
- One!
- Here you go!...
- Thank you! -
I'm sitting in the corner...
It's raining outside...
...
I miss you..."

Murman Lebanidze also uses dialogues in his poems, but of a different kind. While Mukhran likes to listen to ordinary people and is most interested in capturing their intonation when translating them into poetry, Murman listens to the conversations of writers and then artistically and ironically conveys the essence of their conversation. This is how he describes his meeting with Galaktion ("I asked my Galaktion once"), the writers' conversation at Galaktion's coffin during his burial ("To Galaktion"), the conversation about poetry in the garden of the Writers' House (then the Writers' Union) ("The writer of the verse is becoming more frequent..."), etc.

"Mukhran: "A sense of novelty!"
Grigol: "A sense of form!"
Alio: "Just an idea!"
(Kolau stood aside...)
Karlo said: "It depends
On the writing and the skill!"
Margiani said: "Salt is
The main thing in Svanetia!"
Noneshvili said: "Kvareli
And student applause!"
Sitting in the shade to herself,
Anna wouldn't say anything...
"- Talent, my dear, talent! -
Galaktion said".

In general, the generation of the 50s-60s already sees Tbilisi in different ways (I don't mean the above-mentioned, stenciled poems imbued with pathos and love). With Otar Chiladze, Besik Kharanauli, Mikheil Kvividze and others. Among them, I would still single out Lia Sturua's Tbilisi, which is surreal, mirage-like, and phantasmagoric, although its phantasmagoricity is not like Galaktion's or anyone else's.

During the period of stagnation, certain works about Tbilisi gained particular popularity. One such example is Ioseb Noneshvili's poem "Autumn in Tbilisi," which became a poetic hit, and for good reason. The Tbilisi festivals that began in 1979 made this relatively early text relevant, and it was constantly played on radio and television, as it perfectly suited the concept of Tbilisoba. After all, the poem charmingly described the produce brought to the city by peasants.

Gizo Nishnianidze's "Date at Vera's" is also somewhat relat-

ed to the phenomenon of Tbilisoba festival, which was initially published in the newspaper “Tbilisi” as excerpts, and then was staged as a literary-musical performance. The premiere took place on December 28, 1981 at the Philharmonic, and later its recording was often broadcast on television. The nostalgic myth of old Tbilisi, which was initiated by Grishashvili, was actively supported by Soviet cultural policy at that time, and in this sense, this work fit very precisely into the given context. The entire text, on the basis of which the performance was created, was published only later, in 1991, in “Merani”, when the Soviet regime was already on the verge of defeat.

The genre definition of the book is as follows: “A documentary poem of Tbilisi.” In the foreword, poet Moris Potskhishvili says: “Gizo Nishnianidze’s “Date at Vera” is a hymn to life and eternal youth, to cordiality and manliness, to the honest life of young people “poured” into kindness and love. This book is written about Tbilisi and Tbilisians, it is about the Tbilisiness of Tbilisians, the speech of a sincere and kind-hearted Tbilisian.”

It can be said that this text phenomenally summarized the mental state of the Georgian people, which was scattered in the life and social attitudes of that time - in the subcultures of district groups, in the culture of tablefuls, in the “street academy” and in its myths and anecdotes. The book is written in alternating prose and poetry and depicts the Vera district of the forties - with biographies of colorful people, stories, jokes... Gizo Nishnianidze introduces these people into the book in the form of toasts and makes them speak in the urban dialect and slang of that time. The text mixes passages from Tbilisi history, dry biographical information or documentary stories about the lives of famous people or colorful people of the district, and when the author begins to revive situations and emotionally charge them, or tries to give them more comicalness, he often switches to the form of a poem.

Every city has its own periods of transformation - when something fundamental changes radically in it, and this also changes artistic visions. As we followed and observed, it became apparent that the first such transformation occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, first brought about by technological progress and expanded to avant-garde experiments in literature, and then aesthetically curtailed again by the Soviet regime and the strict establishment of socialist realism. Periods of “thaw”, stagnation and transformation lead to further changes, revealing a new breath and a different Tbilisi in poetic texts, although retaining the inertia of the old, and this is followed by the 90s, a fundamentally new era of independence and fatal mistakes. Aside from the fact that the city was collapsing and falling into ruin at this time, and in parallel, it was also trying desperately to rebuild from the ashes, it was no less important that the buildings that survived the disaster were also changing their appearance and function, different people were starting to do new things there, and in general, people were starting to live in this city differently, with changed rules and perceptions... Poets probably feel and comprehend such metamorphoses most acutely and early, and it is time to recall the poems written during that period, those lines from which the dramatic face of a transformed Tbilisi flows. One can feel a lost soul - it remembers the old and does not give up, at the same time, its heart is drawn to the new and at the same time trying to understand the situation it has found itself in, and therefore, squinting, looks at these strange stills that seem to show her hometown so familiar, and at the same time, somehow, it no longer resembles it at all... The first thing that happens at this time is probably that the existing sacred attitude towards the places that define the city’s identity breaks down, becomes ironic, and a poem like this can be written:

“How good it is that Baratashvili is a bridge and Chavchavadze is a prospect.

How good it is that Rustaveli is a metro and Tsereteli is an avenue.

How good it is that Vazha-Pshavela is long and Nikoladze is short.

How good it is that Komsomol Alley is a street and Stalin is a embankment.

How good it is that Kazbegi is a cinema and Guramishvili is a statue.

How good it is that Melikishvili is a street and Nutsubidze is a plateau.

How good it is that Irakli is Charkviani and Kote - Kubaneishvili.”

(“How Good It Is!”)

This poem belongs to the poetic order “Reactive Club”, which was formed in the early 1990s by Irakli Charkviani and Kote Kubaneishvili. Poems in published collections did not have a separate authors. It was believed that they created these texts together (it was like the case of Lennon and McCartney). After the order was dissolved and especially after Charkviani died, specific poems began to be attributed to specific authors. In some cases, it is more stylistically clear which one is whose (and distinguishing this is not our priority now), although the poem above is probably the poetic example that should be considered a joint work.

The transformed image of Tbilisi appeared to these urban (Vera) poets from the very beginning. One phrase is enough to show this. While until now Soviet Georgian poets had dedicated hundreds of sublime poems to the monument to the Mother of Kartli, they said nothing more and nothing less: “The Mother of Kartli has breasts of zinc.” In the first years of post-Soviet freedom, the “Reactive Club” members wrote socially and politically relevant poems and tried to influence public opinion through various means, including épatage, and they succeeded. However, it gradually became clear that their writing style was very different from each other, which may have accelerated the separation process.

Charkviani’s poetry (rock poetry, if you will) remains socially and politically relevant, but it always contains “eternal themes”: life and death, loneliness, love and passion. The characteristic features of his texts are expressiveness, unusual rhythm and figurativeness. Kubaneishvili remains faithful to soc-art to this day, because for him poetry is primarily a means of communication, quick response, and protest. Therefore, his texts are often reduced to a couple of lines or even two rhyming words. The poetic slogans and monologues he coined become catchy phrases and resonate throughout Tbilisi - they are known by workers and police officers, as well as the elite. The language of “demos medium” is quite vulgar, containing a lot of slang and Russian barbarism, and puns are often found.

“We don’t have bread in the morning...

You want the sun to rise...

You hang on to the trolleybus’ ears with your frozen hands and roll...

They’re

Still selling gasoline by the pool.

The Lilliputians are holding

A meeting near the circus.

There are crowds

On the Chelyuskintsev Bridge,

The theater doors are closed,

And the concert has been postponed.

An acquaintance will meet you

On the way and greet you,

And you will have a hungry cat

Waiting for you at home.”

(Irakli Charkviani, “The Day”)

Among other things, it should be noted that the “Reactive Club” was one of the first to challenge the limited Soviet model of poetic declamation and presentation and going outside with its actions and performances. If nothing else, Irakli Charkviani and Kote Kubaneishvili would be worthy of an honorable place on our list of “city poets” just for this turning point. All those processes that outlined and shaped the face of Georgian alternative poetry in just a few years is a separate topic, and therefore I will not go into depth, I will simply highlight a few authors who were able to change the poetic image of Tbilisi.

“What remains for me in this life without Konka?

The bride and groom travel with lightning speed at dawn;

Today Shalva rose in Shiomghvime and will meet there this summer;
Today Karlo's skull was opened twice in his beloved and terrible Tbilisi of the 90s, in a poor quarter of factories and the waste of global industry."

This is how David Chikhladze's poem "Tbilisi" begins, written in 1994 and featuring the people with whom the young author lived in this bewildered city and tried to save himself... no, a little more - to realize himself... musician Shalva Pantsulaia, artist and poet Karlo Kacharava, just a friend Sandro Kobauri... and, I won't hide it from you, I'm also among them:

"Grmagele" is something very similar to the word "Sing,"
Even Shota's song about his and your sick city,
In which nothing remains - no country,
No dwelling for people, and almost none of those
Helpless dogs that left the train station square to the soapy night,
Or the same girls in the soapy mirrors
Of toilets-showers-bathrooms."
This poem is so difficult to break down and quote, because it's a deep emotional statement in its entirety, and I'm having a hard time doing this right now. But whatever it is, here's another fragment:

"Every man is
A lonely and helpless angel;
Tbilisi, from where nature, landscapes, sights
Of once precious treatments and relationships flee.
From where minutes, faces, and even the memory of these faces flee.
Where the minister is crazy, the same - a kiss, money,
Care, travel, and you are also crazy after that;
Where garbage exceeds garbage bins a billion times
And not a single bird can find shelter
In the blue skies."

The sadness or nostalgia, the beautiful pessimism that is in this poem, is not unusual for David Chikhladze's poetry. In general, as much as he is an avant-gardist and experimenter, he is also clearly a Tbilisi ashug, with a love of old aesthetics and original attempts to use it in a new way. The capital frequently appears in his poems, and Tbilisi's colorful inhabitants are often on the move. However, the mood in these poems shifts and sometimes becomes ironic or even sarcastic, as in the poem "Clarity of Everyday Life":

"O Lena O Elena O Marble O Champagne Bedroom
TV O Chabua's Movies on TV O
Modern

Georgia's Fashion and Wisdom O Untouchable Talent
Multiplied on 35 mm. Golden Films O Film Actors' Theater O
Tickets O
Tumanishvili O

Drinking tea with cognac O art O refinement O - O
Dead O strong O
Intelligentsia O Vake O Paris O Turkey –
(Sergo
Parajanov walks
With a donkey, the donkey eats green grass in the meadow)
– But O
Monumental Tsereteli O Sinewy Amashukeli O
Carving – (Gela Patiashvili

Spits in the Seine – I spit in the trash can
On Marjanishvili) – O

Jansug Charkviani O Liana Isakadze's Violin in a Mercedes
O
Advertising
Agency Mi-Mi-No B. Kikabidze Named – O 10th
Grader Blonde Sex – O

Beauty O Eldar Shengelaia on the set O

Giorgi

Shengelaia on the set O Ket'i Dolidze O Lana O
Heads bowed over the script O Burning O Muse O Russian and English O
Sour O Art O
Data

Tutashkhia O Georgian science fiction writer Guram Panjikidze
O
Tengiz

Abuladze's heroism O Pico O Mosaic O Feast O Television
O Orjonikidze Iza.

The second poet, with whom Tbilisi of the 90s is seen with new eyes, is Karlo Kacharava - one of the main characters in David Chikhladze's poems of that period. And it is noteworthy that sometimes the same people appear in Kacharava's poems as in Chikhladze's. For example, Shalva (Pantsulaia) in the poem "Love During the Curfew":

"Shalva wore a long cloak, he sang about two bottles of vodka,
Which he had to carry in the spring rain beyond the patrols,
About Georgian and Russian women and men. About ruined rock tours."

This is about the character, and the environment is described by Karlo Kacharava as follows:

"Patrolmen were stopping cars at the Medical Institute.
The night of curfew and faithful spouses was approaching.
A dog in the rain somewhere near a church and signs thrown aimlessly.
The arrhythmia of painted over political graffiti.
Nothing can put our lives in order."

But in Karlo Kacharava's poems from the 1990s, we encounter more than just real, contemporary Tbilisians of that period. He has his own methods for capturing the spirit of the city. The poet brings to the streets of Tbilisi those people of the old era, whose very existence makes the new rules of city life more contrasting and clear:

"The ghost of Egnate Ninoshvili fights the night of those standing in lines for bread..
All his evidence is poorly perceived and is cheaply sacrificed for something:
a machine gun or Turkish trousers."

Egnate Ninoshvili, who moves from poem to poem to help the impoverished native proletariat of the late 20th century, can also be considered a symbol of one of the defining landmarks of Kacharava's work. Here is a fragment from another poem, titled "When the Light Fades":

"When the light fades, it seems like evening is coming.
When asthmatics in the Republican Hospital smoke bad cigarettes
on the sixth floor near the staircase.
When frightened, unkempt, and poorly dressed girls run away somewhere - probably to the subway.
And the "outdoor lights" still don't turn on, or won't turn on at all.
The ghost of Egnate Ninoshvili walks quite quickly along the Medical Institute
and is followed by a dog, its fur disheveled by the wind."
What does Egnate Ninoshvili want here? What does he want in the ruined city of the 90s? Why did Karlo Kacharava summon him from the beginning of the 20th century as an expert on his era? Here, the poet's intention is best seen in these lines:

"Oh, Richter's turntable
Instead of a magic flute,
Maybe Ninoshvili will use this music to lure out the hidden silenced proletariat?
And take them from the infectious diseases hospital, from the

oncology hospital to the republican hospital –
And again to the infectious disease hospital, and to the blood
transfusion
institute, to be joined by the large, tired group of people
who have been waiting for hours at the mechanized bakery?”

Another poet who observes Tbilisi of that period with a keen eye is Andro Buachidze. For him, Tbilisi is not some general whole with common features. On the contrary, this is a phenomenon of specific places and neighborhoods, and these specific places bring a special sadness. First, this is Digomi, and a little later, the Nutsubidze Plateau. This is Sololaki, Varaziskhevi... These are the cemeteries of Saburtalo, Vera, or Vake, where he wanders with his heavy thoughts among the graves of his deceased friends... And most importantly, Andro Buachidze is always bursting with an unbearable desire to feel and absorb the aesthetics of the suburbs, and it is no coincidence that one of his collections, published in the 90s, is called “The Suburbs.” In his poems, people wander through dangerous, dark streets, or lie on sidewalks, or talk to streetlights (“If the streetlights were to go out / And if they were to leave this city, / Then you would understand nothing / From my fading speech”). This is visual, half-tone poetry, and the poet describes this world with equal skill both through free verse and through traditional verse.

Tbilisi is completely immersed in Andro Buachidze’s books. They deserve to be read over and over, immersing oneself from beginning to end in the city, which the poet conveys with his penetrating aesthetics.

The next author is Zaza Tvaradze. Just as there is something in common in the vision and aesthetics of David Chikhladze and Karlo Kacharava, parallels can also be drawn between the poetics of Andro Buachidze and Zaza Tvaradze. The rich, even archaic, language that both use in their poems - both in the vers libre and the conventional verse - already suggests a connection between their positions. Both have a passion for exhausting the resources of language, but in such a way as to create poetry that does not have an outdated aesthetic, but, on the contrary, has a completely modern sound. They manage to do this with equal success, although the moods of their poems are somewhat divided: what is completely immersed in sadness in Buachidze, takes on a grotesque appearance in Tvaradze, a tendency to ridicule and mock the emerging moods sometimes appears in him.

The atmosphere that often appeared in Zaza Tvaradze’s poems, that hooligan polarity - the mutation of drama and mockery, is also the leading aesthetic method when he depicts Tbilisi in the 1990s.

In Zaza Tvaradze’s first collection, “Tan-tzi in the Cold” (2003, Caucasian House), there is a poem called “Fragment.” Here, a woman who appears in his dream takes him up and down the streets of Tbilisi and talks about the city.

Tbilisi as a dream... Tbilisi in the 90s was really like a dream, but like a bad dream, like a nightmare... and good poets captured the images that emerged from it... At that time, there were quite a few poets who wrote about Tbilisi, and in a very unique way. Therefore, it is impossible to more or less fully show the poetry that described the capital of that time. However, I think I was able to make you feel the illumination that was evident in the poems written about Tbilisi from that period.

If we go a little further, I would recall that since the 2000s, Giorgi Mirzashvili’s poetic publications and subsequent collections have appeared: “N48” (2003, Tbilisi), “Delightful City” (2009, Siesta), “Prey” (2009, Siesta) and “Spring” (2013, Siesta). The main character of his poems is clearly the city of Tbilisi. Giorgi Mirzashvili is a painter, and this has even determined the aesthetics of his poems. Everything is visualized to the maximum with him. Whatever the eye follows and sees is organized into lines of texts - into broken phrases, one- or two-word sentences, where streets, sign inscriptions, people, some actions are listed as if dryly, without emotional assessments, you may not even find a verb in some poems. This may remind you of Noe

Zomleteli’s “Georgia”, which stands out for similar qualities in Georgian poetry:

“Bronze. Tile. Vine and ivy.
Black stone. Coal. Tar and kerosene.
Sledge. Cart. Axe and sledgehammer.
Boat and ferry. Raft and hook”.

And so it is continuously throughout 10 stanzas of the poem written in 1921. And with Giorgi Mirzashvili it is like this:

“Arsenal Mountain,
Kukia, Navtlughi,
Lilo, Africa,
Broadcloth and Worsted Fabric Factory,
Postman Shaliko,
The Neighbor’s Dog “Marsika”.

(They Muffle the Waves)

In other words, something similar happens with Giorgi Mirzashvili, but with the difference that with him this list is even more “dry”, sometimes without rhyme, rhythm, and similar refinements.

The title of his first book, “N48,” is symbolic – it is the number of the “minibus” in which the author travels and observes the city. In the book’s preface, poet Nino Darbaiseli writes: “Perhaps we should attribute these creations to neo-naturalism or neo-impressionism? What is more justified, to give a name to this turbid stream of the conscious-unconscious, or even to a torrent? In these imaginations, the apartment, the yard, the street, and the countryside are one, unbreakable space, given almost simultaneously in the feeling. There is no opposition here – home-away-from-home, but the horizon is blurred, and movement – up and down – cannot disrupt the unified social area. Everything boils under the dense dome of the sky.”

“Black entrance, black cypress,
A blue cloud over the “Zemeli” building.
A man in a suit at the corner of the arch.
The “Nali” tavern - at the crossroads.
Black glasses,
Black dome,
A heavy picture:
The riot at the government building,
Kashveti Church, heat, a blind panduri player.
“Accurate scales”, ice cream “Samgori”,
A white cloud over the opera.”

(“Prospero’s Books”)

In a word, Giorgi Mirzashvili, one could say, is another wandering poet of Tbilisi, who tries to capture with photographic accuracy what he sees around him.

One of the latest books, where the face of Tbilisi is clearly depicted, is Dato Kardava’s “Secondary Homer (Independent Entrepreneur and Other Poems)”, published in 2022 by “Ziari”. Dato Kardava is the pseudonym of Radio Liberty journalist Jimsher Rekhviashvili, which he uses only in the case of literary works. Until now, he published prose texts and stories, he began writing poems later, and this is his first and so far only collection.

As we have already seen, there are city poets who sing of the city with pathos, or describe its dynamics, who feel its pulse well, but perhaps they do not know its history at all. If you stop them and ask them, they cannot tell you what is where and why, and perhaps the majority of city poets are even like that, charming, careless and unobservant. But we know that there are those who study the city, searching deep into its every stone, tree, street, or building, its language, and its customs, and their poems are imbued with this knowledge. However, it is also a question of what sequence this happened in: did writing poems about the city push the poet to study the city in

depth, or, conversely, did expertise in the city lead him to poetry. In the case of Ioseb Grishashvili, first there was poetry and then the city, or at least in parallel, while Jimsher Rekhviashvili spent many years researching Tbilisi, writing letters and books, speaking about it at various events, and then finally it exploded - all this knowledge could no longer fit into this format and was transformed into poetry. But here knowledge is like a baking powder, with which one must knead and bind the dough for a poem, where new news unfolds in an environment filled with old codes, sometimes with sadness, sometimes with irony, sometimes with a painful sense of problems.

It is worth noting that the author himself is from Rustavi, and perhaps it was this certain distance (a moderate, half-hour drive) that gave him a special ability to objectively see the city, notice interesting details, and catch those insignificant but dangerous changes that a person constantly wandering around the city often fails to notice. This constant leaving the city and then returning is perhaps the very ritual that sparked and fueled his passion for observing Tbilisi, and eventually even led him to write poems about it.

“The Garden at the Bridge of Vera” –
Galaktion marks it as number 37 in his notebook.
He described a hundred such gardens in total –
Green capes in the ocean of city dust... “

This is how the poem “Expulsion from the Garden” begins, for example. Yes, we said it above, but did you think that Galaktion was such an active writer of city gardens? You will find many similar interesting nuances in Dato Kardava’s Tbilisi poems.

And it is probably time to finish our review. We have gone back to the old days and talked about many “Tbilisi poets”. Of course, we have missed many interesting authors in this regard, but it wouldn’t have happened without this. The main thing was to show this changing poetic image of the city, and I think we succeeded. The last question that may be asked should be addressed to today’s Tbilisi, a city in which people already live equipped with digital technologies, which is a global sign, and at the same time they have not been able to overcome feudal inequality, combining genetic artistry, high ideals, political disdain, and many other polar traits, seeking the right choice between selfless struggle and tactical inaction. It is very difficult to characterize today’s Tbilisi, and it will certainly not be easy to describe it in poetic words. And the last question: to what extent such a Tbilisi consisting of radical differences is visible in today’s poems is a separate topic and does not require a chronological narrative, but rather an unfolding of contemporary Georgian poetry on a single plane.