# TEACHING CLASSICAL TEXTS AND ITS POSTMODERNIST MODIFICATIONS IN GEORGIAN UNIVERSITIES

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**Abstract** - Postmodernism, considered as a marker of only Euro-American culture, has been precisely adapted to the psychology of the crisis-ridden society of post-Soviet Georgia since the 1990s. In the conditions of postmodern intertextuality the so-called "remote repetition" of classical texts became possible as one of the main techniques for constructing a modern novel.The paper examinesthis process using one of the most significant classical texts of the Medieval Georgian literature - "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" (1189-1207) by Shota Rustaveli and its postmodernist interpretation - "The Book" by Aka Morchiladze, a famous Georgian writer and literary historian. When teaching these texts, the comparative method should be used, that emphasizes the explicit edges of postmodernist narration focused on the reconstruction of this classical text, in particularly:eclecticism, intertextuality, mystification, allusion, etcetera.

**Keywords** - Intertextuality, Postmodernism, "The Book", "The Knight in the Panther's Skin".

The political events, developed in the 1980s (the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the "liberation" of Eastern Europe from communist pressure, etc.) found their reflection in the global literary process. From this view point inter textuality became predominant, which implies inner relations of the text, not directed outside towards the reality of life, but towards the national and international cultural area. Georgian literature was no exception. Postmodernism, which in the 1970s and 1980s was a marker of only the Euro-American culture, has been precisely adapted to the psychology of the crisis society of post-Soviet Georgia since the 1990s (Ratiani 2018: 127-128). In the conditions of postmodern intertextuality in texts written at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuriesthe so-called "remote repetition" of classical texts became possible as one of the main techniques for constructing a modern literary work.

We will try to examine this process using one of the most significant texts of the Medieval Georgian literature - "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" of Rustaveli (12th-13th centuries) and its postmodernist interpretation - "The Book" by Aka Morchiladze,Georgian writer and literary historian, author of a number of best-sellers, winner of a number of literaryawards and one of the most translated modern Georgian writers[1].

*The Knight in the Panther's Skin* (1189-1207) is Georgianchivalry romance, which organically unites the cultural traditions of the Christian West and Muslim East. The main character of this text is Tariel, the chief admiral of India and the beloved of the Indian king's, Parsadan's daughter Nestan-Darejan. The tragedy of this invincible and noble knight started after Parsadan decided to marry his only daughter to the son of the king of Khwarezm and cede the throne of India to his son-in-law. Nestan-Darejan and Tariel opposed the king's intention. Princess advised Tariel to kill the Khwarezmian prince, who had arrived to marry her, which Tariel did and found shelter in a fortress together with his friends. The admiral hoped that the king would no longer be able to resist and would agree to his and Nestan-Darejan's marriage, but events took a different turn. Parsadan's sister Davar, who was infuriated by Nestan's behaviour, ordered some of her magician servants to take her disobedient niece in an ark to a far-away place. Nestan's servant Asmat informed Tariel about what had happened and expressed readiness to accompany him in his search for Nestan-Darejan. Tariel travelled seas and lands in search of Nestan, but in vain. The only person, who had seen Nestan alive in the ark, was the king of Mulghazanzar, Pridon, who failed to help Tariel although he was bound by an oath with him. Sailors Pridon sent to find Nestan returned with nothing. Tariel, who lost hope and no longer wanted to live, found shelter in a cave of demons together with Asmat, who remained loyal to him. The only thing Tariel did was to aspire to die in order to meet his beloved at least in the other world.

The chief admiral of Arabia, Avtandil empathised with Tariel, who became his sworn brother, and went to search for his beloved. In the Kingdom of Seas, he heard the sequel of the story of Nestan-Darejan from Patman, the wife of the chief merchant, and learned that she was kept in the inaccessible Kajeti fortress. Tariel, Avtandil, and Pridon went to the Kajeti fortress to free Nestan-Darejan.The Romance ends with the marriage of two couples - Tariel and Nestan-Darejan, Avtandil and his beloved, the Arabian queen Tinatin.

Even the adapted theme of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* makes it clear that the human ideal described in the work written on the turn of the 12th

and 13th centuries is the ideal of a knight. Sense of dignity, courage, fearlessness, helping people in trouble, and charity were part of standards of morality and ethics of the knightly culture. These were linked to other knightly virtues: refraining from killing a defeated enemy, refusal to become involved in an uneven battle, and so forth. On the other hand, the heroic ideals of Rustaveli's noble knights were combined with subtle romantic relations. Correspondingly, as the role of women as characters increased and emphasis was laid on fleshly love, heroism was no longer able to play the role of the central crisis of a piece of literature (and specifically Romance). The ethic of love became its main moral and aesthetic code. According to Rustaveli Love is a gift bestowed by God and it can even cross the boundary between life and death; love is a destiny of perfect and adorned people.Solove and chivalric ethics are intertwined in this Romance, whose main characters sacrifice their lives for love. Avtandil and Pridon forget their personal problems and help Tariel search for his beloved woman and rescue her from captivity. Fulfilling this mission is their main human duty.Correspondingly, the most essential element of the personal perfection of a personality is moral perfection.

The transformation of this idea into a postmodernist narrative of Aka Morchiladze's "The Book" is grounded upon the using of one of the basic post-modernist techniques: interpretation of classical, familiar plot and characters via the effect of allusion. Comparative study outlines the explicit edges of postmodernist narration focused on the reconstruction of classical texts, in particularly:

- *Eclecticism*- In postmodernism,

genre mixing is subordinated to the principle of artistic play – such a text, on the one hand, is intended for intellectual entertainment, and on the other, it parodies the sharp differentiation of literary genres, styles and narratives that existed before postmodernism.Aka Morchiladze, who constantly moves between reality and pseudo-reality, mystification and phantasmagoria, allusion and detective story, successfully uses different genres of the novel (historical, chivalric, etc.), arranges and parodies the familiar theme, creates collages, appliqué, gathers and brings together knowledge within one text, "entertains" the reader with a game. In case of "remaking" the plot of "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" his postmodernist game also touches one of the main issues of a classic Georgian text – the dialogue of Western and Eastern universes. For instance,in "The Book", NuradinPridon is a noble knight who possesses all the qualities characteristic of European knights, although his court has a more Eastern appearance than that of a European nobleman. His valiant exploits are narrated in a book of 16 stories called "Pridon-name", which reminds the reader of Persian epic poems; the same can be said about another book, which tells the reader about the previously unknown chivalry deeds of Pridon - "Hindurel-name",translated from the language of the pagans by Seif ad-Daws, gained popularity from Shirvan to Kirman and, finally, was rewritten by order of Pridon'sfoster-child Shirvanshah Said Mumin.

- *Intertextuality*- The use of passages from classical texts and allusions to them in

postmodernist narrative is motivated solely by the construction of the text structure and the desire for artistic play (Metzler…2007: 357-358).The second function of intertextuality is the leveling and deconstruction of the meaning of the classical text, since the postmodernist author quotes the classical text not to support his own worldview, but to parody it (Bregadze 2023: 311-312). Intertextuality in the "Book" is manifested in the naming of quotations in "The Knight in the Panther's Skin", paraphrasing a number of passages, leveling and deconstructing their meaning.

For example, in medieval romances, to use Michail Bakhtin's term, the action takes place in an "adventurous time" that does not allow the knight to grow old. The hero himself is as beautiful as this world: his origin is beautiful, his physical nature is beautiful, etc. (Bakhtin 2000: 83).Hence, agelessness is one of the main features of the artistic image of a knight. Rustaveli, like other medieval authors, does not specify the age of his heroes, including Pridon. The term "mokme", which he uses to refer to his knights, in old Georgian also refers to a young man as well as a knight (see: Serebriakov 1973).Moreover, Rustaveli does not describe Pridon's portrait at all, as he avoids overloading the reader with unnecessary information from his biography (we only know that he inherited the kingdom of Mulghazanzar from his grandfather and has a territorial dispute with his cousins). Instead, his knightly qualities are emphasized. As his vassals say about him:

"NuradinP'hridon is king of this our land,
a knight brave, generous, mighty, on horseback a swift racer;
none has power to harm so fair a sun, he is our lord,
he like the beams spread forth from heaven" (Rustaveli 1966: 217).

In Aka Morchiladze'snovel the secondary character Pridon appears in the role of the protagonist. He is a seaside ruler who is so old that he no longer remembers his age. NuradinPridon's white beard already reached his waist. For more than twenty years he did not pay attention to the women who were given to him from all over the world, but lay on a bed of palm branches and dozed (Morchiladze 2003: 36).Thus, the main character Pridon in the story by Aka Morchiladze - his age, appearance, lifestyle -

completely contradicts the king of Mulghazanzar described by Rustaveli.

➢ The poetics of the postmodernist novel is generally based on the main postulate ofpostmodernist philosophy about the absence of deep reality. Consequently, postmodernist discourse no longer develops the desire for some higher ideal or the need to develop a solid worldview position in relation to the universal humanistic postulate.Accordingly, this novel does not reflect the existential drama of the subject and does not affirm his aspiration for the highest ideal and ethical perfection. The essence depicted in the text of the novel is the essence of the novel itself - this is a new textual reality(Bregadze 2023: 304-306).

How is this idea reflected in the texts we are discussing?

The sense of dignitythatis most important among knightly virtues (it was regarded as the main social virtue in feudal society) was absorbed by the ideal characters of The Knight in the Panther's Skin first and foremost due to their social standing. They are of aristocratic origin and enjoy privileged positions in society, which makes the characters socially responsible. The responsibility is manifested in their ethic perfection and uncompromising morality, which first and foremost implies that they should realise their human obligations, treat friends with love and serve them selflessly, and be just. Pridon, who according to the functional categories of characters (see:Propp 1984: 39, Maddox 1991: 17) has the function of*agent* (helper) helps Tariel, who arrived in Mulgazanzar, in his search for Nestan-Darejan – he sent his sailors wherever there were harbors, where there were ships to sailand when this search ends in vain, Pridon brings and gives him wonderful black horse and sheds the tears of blood. There severing is like that of brothers. When Avtandil, setting off in search of Tariel's beloved, arrives in Mulgazanzar to begin his search for Nestan-Darejan from there(Pridon was the last person to see her alive), Pridon will provide him with all possible assistance before the difficult journey: he gives Avtandil men to attend him, armor, a mule, sixty pounds of red gold, and a peerless stallion with complete harness. Before the capture of the Kajeti fortress, Avtandil and Tariel visit Pridon. "It seemed as if two suns and the moon united there (Rustaveli 1966: 302) The friends brought Pridon thearmor they'd foundin Devi's cave. In return for this, Pridon showed his friends incredible hospitality: he took them to bathe, gave them clothes, dressed them in beautiful clothes, gave them rare jewels and pearls on a golden plate.He leads his sworn brothers with three hundred warriors to fight like a lion with thousands of Kadjisoldiers.

Now let's see how Aka Morchiladze sees this character in the prism of postmodern discourse. His Pridon completely denies his participation in the capture of the Kadjeti fortress, swearing that he has never even been there. Nevertheless, his 16 exploits described in the "Pridon-Name" are almost forgotten by anyone, but poets compose songs about his exploits precisely in the Kadjeti fortress. Denying these rumors Pridon recalls how two men once came to his kingdom – "on tired horses, having made their way through the desert. They both knew what the sea was. According to the storytellers, Pridon recognized knights from afar" (with these words he emphasizes that he himself is not a knight).Therefore, he did not wait and went to the seashore himself. Those who came, did not want dinner, or rest, or even small gifts (cf. the behavior of the host and guests in "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" - their rest in the bathhouse, a sumptuous feast and precious gifts presented by Pridon). The guests were going tofight with the Moors and with great respect asked MulghazanzarKing to help them.One of them,a good-natured young man, was from Misreti (old Georgian name for Egypt and all Arab countries), the other, hunched and silent, his hands moving through the sand, was Indian. "He is the heir to the throne," - said the Egyptian to the host, - "and I am the commander-in-chief of the troops."They wanted to receive Pridon's army of two hundred men and promised that all the honor of the victory and all the treasures taken in the war would remain with him.They also revealed the purpose of this expedition: The Moors locked the bride of a silent Indian knight in an impregnable fortress and they were going to kidnap her. Pridon's answer reveals the most important principle characteristic of postmodernism: *freedom of interpretation.*Aka Morchiladze emphasizes the simplicity and illusory nature of the ideological discourse of the classical text (the hero's search for lost happiness and thus the achievement of the ideal, loyalty to a friend and self-sacrifice for him, ) and thus indicates to the reader that in this era there is no understanding of absolute truth, a universal idea or a single system, and therefore there is no need to adhere to them(Tsipuria 2008:285).

In Aka Morchiladze's postmodernist novel, in particular inPridon's views we can see a complete devaluation of the basic principles of chivalric ethics, on which the moral-ethical system of "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" is based. These are:

➢ Knightly solidarity and loyalty – self-sacrifice for a friend: "Who seeks not a friend is his own foe" (Rustaveli 1966: 193); /Pridon categorically denies any involvement in the capture of the Kadjeti fortress. When he refused to follow two knights who came to ask for help, the Egyptian laid his head on his shoulder and cried, and the Indian grabbed the reins of his horse and rushed it to the

seashore.They were outraged by Pridon's refusal and his words that to possess a woman one needs not a sword, but money.

- Love and the cult of women:“Dying for her I pray; never shell I entreat (her)with my tongue” (Rustaveli 1966:198); / “Icannot go on a campaign with them because I cannot see my soldiers being killed because of a woman... A knight cannot sacrifice many lives for a woman”,- says Pridon in “The Book”.

Although Phridon refuses to take credit for heroism that he did not commit and did not intend to commit, since he did not consider it heroic, after his death only one story remained in people's memory of his glorious deeds:How Pridon and two other young men rescued a Beauty from Moorish captivity.

With this finale, Aka Morchiladze indicates to the reader that interpretation as a creative process is no longer subject to one fundamental task, one main goal or idea;thus it is a game, as every human activity is a game in an era when the desire for a unifying, universal, absolute idea is no longer revived (Tsipuria 2008: 285).

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