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Literature as an Alternative History

(Post-soviet conflicts in Georgian prose)

Politicians and historiographers describe the history of armed conflicts as a chronicle of military successes and defeats. And only a writer sees war as a manifestation of accumulated moral, social and mental problems with tragic outcome for both the losers and winners alike.

«Abkhaz theme» in modern Georgian literature is associated with the name of Guram Odisharia who said “Politicians, journalists and historians start a war and generals continue” and then did his best to save the last threads of human relations between yesterday’s friends and neighbours, not yet fully torn apart by those politicians and generals” (an autobiographical book “Return to Sukhumi” (1995), a wonderful short novel “The Cousin” - a true story of genuine humanity against incredible and boundless atrocities of an ongoing war).

This brutality is described in the scary short novel of another veteran of Georgian-Abkhaz conflict Gela Chkvanava “The Toreadors” (2006). Marina Elbakidze’s novel “The Exchange” (2012) is a certain continuation of Gela Chkvanava’s story, since it describes the exchange of the prisoners of war and combatants’ bodies. A soulful novel of Nugzar Shataidze with exotic title “Trip to Africa” (2014) describes a trip but not to Africa but to the Abkhaz town Tkvarcheli – a home town of boy who is orphan with alive parents. A literary debut of Tamta Melashvili “The Rhyme” (2015) tells a story of the three days of 13-year old Georgian girls from the village of Georgian-Ossetian conflict. The events unfolding on these territories according to the “Russian scenario” during a 2008 “August War” is depicted with documentary preciseness in the novel of Guram Megrelishvili and Tamaz Demetrashvili with intriguing title “iratta.ru” (2010). Zaza Burchuladze in his “modelled chronicle” under the title “Adibas” (2011) continued a “Russian scenario” in the wake of the events of August 2008, using a grotesque form: “Russian troops marched into Tbilisi! And despite a “golden youth” is enjoying sun on the fashionable swimming pool...”

The Georgian prose of the last decades, step by step “cleaning” a real historic retrospect, tacitly acquired a function of “alternative history” – hoping to create a moral alternative to the chaos of value-based opinions and assessments, being so peculiar to the post-Soviet societies torn between authoritarianism and democracy.