

Georgian-Ukrainian Literary Relations in the Post-Soviet Era

Sophio CHKHATARASHVILI

Nino NASKIDASHVILI

Abstract: *This article explores the fundamental trends in Georgian-Ukrainian literary relations during the post-Soviet period, analyzing the key factors and trajectories that have played a pivotal role in fostering inter-cultural dialogue between the two nations. While the historical connection between these two cultures was primarily shaped by shared history, religion, and heritage, their contemporary affinity has been largely sustained and reinforced by literature and literary translation.*

During the Soviet era, the doctrine of Socialist Realism dictated the priorities of Georgian-Ukrainian cultural exchange. Decades of literature and culture, along with jubilee celebrations and literary works translated specifically for these occasions, constituted perhaps the most active phase in introducing and integrating Georgian culture into Ukraine. Through these initiatives, Georgia – its natural landscape, history, culture, and people – became significantly more accessible and familiar to the Ukrainian readership.

Furthermore, this article posits that contemporary Georgian-Ukrainian cultural relations have been profoundly impacted by the pandemic and, subsequently, the ongoing war. The sharp surge in interest in Ukrainian literature, accompanied by new translations and publications, has marked a transformative new chapter in the cultural dialogue between Georgia and Ukraine.

Keywords: *Georgia, Ukraine, literary relations, intercultural dialogue, literary translation.*

The awareness of Georgia in the collective consciousness of the Ukrainian nation emerges in the distant past. Over the centuries, historical, political, and cultural events continuously interchanged and complemented one another. From the involuntary exile of David Guramishvili and the relocation of

members of the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius to the Caucasus, to the meeting of Taras Shevchenko and Akaki Tsereteli, alongside numerous other expected or unforeseen events, the perception of Georgian culture took shape under the influence of the distinct characteristics of each era.

In the nineteenth century, the Caucasus mentioned by Taras Shevchenko as “mountains beyond mountains” appears distant, grand, and mystical. By the end of the same century, translations of poems by Ilia Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli began to be published in Ukrainian journals and newspapers. Furthermore, the presence of Iakob Gogebashvili, Niko Lomouri, and other prominent Georgian figures in Ukraine served as a guaranteed catalyst for promoting Georgia and Georgian culture¹.

By the 1960s, Georgia was no longer an unfamiliar or remote country for the Ukrainian literary community. The translation of Georgian literature into Ukrainian continued to progress. Direct contacts between Georgian and Ukrainian writers became increasingly frequent during the 1950s. Alongside translated literature, dedicatory poems addressing Georgia and Georgian culture emerged, establishing an active epistolary exchange among writers. In the second half of the twentieth century, Ukrainian writers no longer limited their focus to Shota Rustaveli, Ilia, and Akaki; their interests expanded to include Nikoloz Baratashvili, Titsian Tabidze, Niko Pirosmiani, and others. To them, Georgia remained captivating and intriguing, yet simultaneously familiar and intimate². In the twenty-first century, the reception of Georgia in Ukrainian literature has become synthetic: a blending of traditional and innovative perceptions emerges

in a entirely new, distinct form, embedding itself in the memory of the Ukrainian reader. Nevertheless, translation was not the sole mechanism for cultural rapprochement; Georgian and Ukrainian *Sixtiers* (Sixties generation) engaged in personal correspondence, visits, and cultural exchanges, thereby lending a more enduring foundation to their dialogue. “Сучасні українсько-грузинські порівняльні студії трансформуються, вони, як і самі літературні взаємини, урізноманітнюються, збагачуються новим матеріалом. Критика не випадково відкреслює її кардинальне предметно-тематичне розширення”³.

In Ukrainian literature, an interest in Georgian letters – as an ancient, highly original, and distinctive creative tradition – has consistently manifested itself. Throughout the nineteenth century, both translations and scholarly studies grew in frequency; Ukrainian audiences read the poetry of Ilia Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli, while critical essays on *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* (*Vepkhistqaosani*) were published. In the twentieth century, the spectrum of translated themes and authors expanded significantly. Notably, toward the end of that century, attention turned to *Amirandarejaniani* – the heroic cycle praised by Mose Khoneli – which engaged the Ukrainian writer and translator Vasyl Mysyk.

Within Ukrainian literary scholarship, the prevailing view regarding the provenance of *Amirandarejaniani*

holds that it represents an authentic, original work of Georgian heroic epic literature rooted in folkloric traditions.

Ukrainian writers have long maintained a profound interest in Eastern literature and culture, actively striving not only to read and study Oriental works but also to render them into their native language. From the nineteenth century onward, scholarly inquiries into Oriental studies intensified, leading to its formal establishment as an academic discipline.

In 1990, the Dnipro publishing house in Kyiv published a collection of translations by Vasyl Mysyk titled *West and East (Zakhid i Skhid)*, which included his Ukrainian translation of *Amirandarejaniani*. The volume also featured translations of poetry by Omar Khayyam, Nizami Ganjavi, William Shakespeare, George Gordon Byron, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Given his broad engagement with both Western and Eastern canonical traditions, the Ukrainian writer naturally situated *Amirandarejaniani* within the Eastern section of the volume, according it pride of place as the lead text in that section.

To underline Vasyl Mysyk's stature and enduring impact as a translator, it is worth noting that in 1995, the National Writers' Union of Ukraine established the Vasyl Mysyk Literary Prize, awarded annually for original poetry collections and outstanding poetic translations.

Vasyl Mysyk rendered translations from English, German, French, Russian, Belarusian, Arabic, Azerbaijani, among other languages.

Within Ukrainian literary discourse, Georgian cultural realia are frequently associated with Eastern traditions. The epic poem *Amirandarejaniani* is rich in onomastic units, and Mysyk demonstrated meticulous effort in rendering both anthroponyms and toponyms into Ukrainian.

In Mysyk's translation, the eponymous protagonist, Amiran Darejanisdze, retains his original name, literary image, and characterization.

The methodology behind Mysyk's translation of the Georgian text remains an intriguing scholarly question. By 1945, a Russian translation of *Amiraniani* by Shalva Nutsubidze was already available; Mysyk was likely familiar with this version and may have utilized it as a source text. Concurrently, it is noteworthy that during the 1930s, the prominent Georgian translator Giorgi Namoradze resided and worked in Kharkiv, while Mysyk was a student at Kharkiv University. Both figures published their work in the renowned journal *Chervonyi Shliakh* (1929). Furthermore, Mysyk would have been aware of the critical essays on *Amirandarejaniani* authored by A. Gren and A. Khakhanashvili.

Vasyl Mysyk provided the Ukrainian readership with the opportunity to engage with and appreciate the narrative architecture of the work, the complex characterizations

of its figures, and the unmistakable reflection of the chivalric era. Ultimately, *Amirandarejaniani* – both as a folkloric text and as a challenging work to translate – proved to be an undeniable success in Vasyl Mysyk's translation. It offers Ukrainian readers a vivid and nuanced understanding of the imagery and central motifs of the Georgian folk epic.

**Georgia in the Creative Work
of the Ukrainian *Sixties*
(*Sheshtydesyatyky*):
Imagological Aspects**

Ukrainian writers have maintained an interest in Georgian themes for centuries. Every era introduces its own markers and trends, with perceptions shaped by the prevailing cultural context of the time. Georgian culture, national character, landscape, and people have been interpreted differently across periods. Following the emergence of the *Sixties* (*Sheshtydesyatyky*) in Ukrainian literature, a fresh perspective and novel interpretations of the Georgian world came to life.

It must be noted that the artistic image of Georgia in the work of the *Sixties* yields a multifaceted portrait from both chronological and thematic standpoints. Dmytro Pavlychko was among the first within this generation to focus on Georgian themes and reflect them in his poetry. Georgian realia and Georgian friends occupy a central place in his verse. Ivan Drach – an author, essayist, and public figure renowned for his innovative spirit

– manifests a deep engagement with Georgian culture across numerous poems and critical essays. The perception of Georgia and Georgian motifs in Drach's literary output can be divided into two distinct phases: the early period and the mature period of his career. He composed poems dedicated to Georgia, translated Georgian authors, published essays, and traveled frequently to the land of Rustaveli. Lina Kostenko, conversely, offers a markedly different vision. In the oeuvre of the Ukrainian poetess, the Georgian theme is feminized, embodied in the figure of a strong, dominant woman at whose feet the entire world unfolds.

An examination of the matter reveals that by the 1960s, Georgia was no longer an alien or distant country to the Ukrainian literary community. Direct contacts between Georgian and Ukrainian writers intensified during the 1950s. Alongside translated literature, dedicatory poems addressing Georgia and Georgian culture emerged, initiating active epistolary exchanges among writers.

In the 1960s, Ukrainian writers no longer restricted their focus to well-known figures such as Shota Rustaveli, Ilia Chavchavadze, and Akaki Tsereteli. Within the literary discourse of that period, invoking names such as Nikoloz Baratashvili, Titsian Tabidze, and Niko Pirosmiani sounded innovative. To them, Georgia remained captivating and intriguing, yet simultaneously intimate and familiar. Consequently, the reception of Georgia's cultural image

as the "other" within 1960s Ukrainian narrative constructs a dual paradigm: on the one hand, it continues the traditional narrative, while on the other, it modifies existing stereotypes within that very narrative—a development driven by the individuality of the *Sixties* (*Sheshtydesyatnyky*) and their synthesis of tradition and innovation. “Ukraine’s determined resistance in the face of Russia’s full-scale invasion after February 24, 2022, came as a surprise for many. Quite a few intellectuals who considered themselves socially conscious and well informed had to admit that they knew little about Ukraine⁴”.

Separately, it is worth mentioning the bilingual collections published by the Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University Ukrainian Studies Center (which was founded in 1991, the as the Institute of Ukrainian studies, and whose master’s programs were led by Prof. Petro Kononenko together with Prof. Otar Bakanidze), whose role is very important in the dialogue of Georgian-Ukrainian cultures. The history of the publication really begins in the Soviet period, but the post-Soviet space offers us an interesting example. Both new authors (writers of the 1960s) were published, and selected works of classics were re-prepared with their new translations (e.g. Taras Shevchenko’s “Kobzar”, Akaki Tsereteli’s “Changuri”, Ivan Franko’s “Autumn Thoughts”, etc.

Also worthy of special attention is Lesia Ukrainka and her work. „It should be noted that the memory of

Lesya Ukrainka is materially immortalized in several cities of Georgia. we note that translations of Lesya Ukrainka’s works into Georgian by different generations of writers at different times testify to the relevance of the Ukrainian poetess’s work in the Georgian literary space. Translation as a form of intercultural dialogue is very important in the context of cultural and literary ties between friendly countries – Georgia and Ukraine”⁵.

Contemporary Ukrainian Literature in Georgian Translations

Literary translation serves as one of the most effective vehicles for intercultural dialogue. As global interconnectedness deepens, fostering respect for and acceptance of diverse environments becomes increasingly vital. Translated literature introduces readers to the distinct characteristics of different countries, cities, social milieus, individuals, and cultural customs. In the contemporary era, paramount importance is attached to translating literary works directly from the original source text in order to preserve, to the greatest extent possible, the author’s idiosyncratic style and manner.

The interdisciplinary theoretical framework of Translation Studies, alongside its practical implementation, demonstrates that translation is not exclusively a linguistic phenomenon; rather, it is a complex cognitive process. This process necessitates the

integration of diverse extralinguistic knowledge, which entails conceptualizing the physical world, social structures, and cultural contexts encoded within the text. Furthermore, the stages of textual reception (comprehension) and synthesis (reproduction) constitute fundamentally distinct cognitive operations.

In the twentieth century, the phenomenon of poetic translation emerged as an object of systematic scientific inquiry. Within poetic discourse – characterized by a specific rhythmic-intonational architectonics – phonetic instrumentation and the semantic precision of each lexical unit assume a primary functional load. Furthermore, realizing the contentful dominants of the original's poetic form fundamentally requires accounting for the source text's rhythmic-metric organization and the structural-formal factors that frequently play a determinant role in ensuring translational adequacy.

An objective analysis of the specifics of poetic translation is achievable only through a comprehensive investigation of the translation's internal configuration, a nuanced understanding of the national versification systems of both the source and target languages, and a profound grasp of the author's artistic intent.

The novel in short stories *My Grandfather Danced Better Than Anyone Else* (*Miy babusya tantsyuvav krashche za vsikh*) by the Ukrainian author Kateryna Babkina was translated precisely in accordance with the aforementioned princi-

ples. Kateryna Babkina is the laureate of numerous literary awards, and her works have been translated into Hebrew, Polish, German, English, Czech, Spanish, Romanian, Serbian, and Chinese. Furthermore, theatrical plays based on her texts have been repeatedly staged in Kyiv, Vienna, and Geneva.

Babkina's short stories convey the anxieties, reflections, and shames of the older generation, capturing their behavior and illustrating how these inherited experiences reshaped the lives of their children and grandchildren. Phrases, images, places, and memories permanently etched in consciousness enable Babkina to vividly resurrect them within her characters, their lived experiences, and their emotional spectrums.

It is particularly noteworthy that, alongside Ukrainian element, the short stories incorporate Jewish and German hetero-images. In addition to these cultural markers, rendering national realia, phraseological units, jargon, and colloquial vocabulary presents a considerable challenge for the translator; in such instances, conveying mere denotative meaning is insufficient – the target reader must experience the corresponding emotional resonance upon reading the Georgian translation.

In light of these considerations, mediating between the source text and the target reader carries immense responsibility, as the reader's capacity to perceive the authentic cultural atmosphere – in this case, the distinct

Ukrainian identity – depends directly upon the quality of this mediation.

From a translational perspective, the 2020s can arguably be considered the most dynamic period of the twenty-first century. The heightened interest in contemporary Ukrainian literature was directly catalyzed by ongoing events in Ukraine. Notably, translated works exhibit remarkable genre diversity. For instance, in 2022, Bakur Sulakauri Publishing translated and released *36 and 6 Cats* by the renowned Ukrainian children's author Halyna Vdovychenko – a cheerful, adventure-filled tale centered on themes of friendship and teamwork.

In 2023, Bakur Sulakauri Publishing translated and issued another piece of children's prose, *Polinka* by Vitaliy Zapeka, which stands as one of the most heartwarming, humorous, and emotionally resonant works in contemporary Ukrainian children's literature. The author penned the book for his granddaughter, Polinka, while stationed on the front lines. Rather than being merely a collection of amusing stories, *Polinka* embodies immense love and care – a literary gift sent from afar. That same year, Elfi Publishing published the translation of *My Forced Holidays* by Ukrainian writer and psychologist Kateryna Yehorushkyna. This poignant yet educational children's book reflects the immediate aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Narrated through the eyes of a seven-year-old girl named Luchiiia whose schooling is

abruptly halted, *My Forced Holidays* details days spent in basements and bomb shelters, air raid sirens, and the struggle against uncertainty and fear. While addressing complex and traumatic themes, the book employs a hopeful voice accessible to young readers.

Subsequently, in 2024, Siesta Publishing issued the Georgian translation of *Absolute Zero (Point Zero)* by contemporary Ukrainian author and military veteran Artem Chekh. A compilation of documentary prose and essays, the volume draws upon the author's personal experiences serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the Donbas region between 2015 and 2016. In military parlance, "Zero" refers to the front line – the direct line of contact. Chekh captures not only combat operations but also the liminal state in which individuals reevaluate their identity and core values. Stripped of superficial pathos and heroic idealization, Chekh masterfully conveys the daily existence, fear, tedium, brotherhood, and inherent absurdity of war with sincerity and subtle irony. *Absolute Zero* remains one of the seminal texts of contemporary Ukrainian war literature. "Contemporary Ukrainian poetry is war poetry, and its inception predates Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It began much earlier and, according to literary scholars and historians, was liberated following the dissolution of the Soviet Union from historical pressures that extend beyond mere

past chronology. Literature – particularly poetry – has most effectively delineated human tragedies, trauma, and the comprehension of reality⁶”.

The theme of war in literature is neither alien nor unprecedented in the experience of virtually any nation, and Ukraine is no exception. According to Ukrainian researcher Mykhailo Naenko, “if we talk about literature as a phenomenon of aesthetics, the form of manifestation of this aesthetics in works of art, which is found in motifs, plots, conflicts, is very diverse⁷ Countless poems, epics, short stories, and novels were written about the First and Second World Wars; yet few could have anticipated that war would once again assume a central position in contemporary Ukrainian literature. As historically observed, poetry has immediately mirrored ongoing painful realities, articulating a world perceived through the distinct lenses and emotional responses of various poets. Following the events of 2014, and most acutely after the full-scale Russian invasion of 2022, literary relations acquired a profound moral and existential dimension of solidarity: Vasyl Makhno, a Ukrainian writer and essayist residing in New York, dedicated nearly twenty poems to this theme, compiling them into the cycle *Poems About War*.

Vasyl Makhno’s poems about war capture the reader’s attention starting with their titles: “War”, “About War”, “To the Fatherland”, “Exit”, “Shevchenko”, “From Mariupol”, “Psalm of Sorrow”, “Psalm of

Bucha”, and “The Cooing of Doves in the Morning” – all composed in response to the catastrophe unfolding in his homeland. The poems display a rich tapestry of historical, cultural, and religious motifs, each distinguished by a abundance of artistic devices and an intense emotional charge.

The author depicts the battle on the approaches to Mariupol, the desperation of the populace, and the ruined homes. Concurrently, he invokes Taras Shevchenko, animating his monument – which stands proudly on its pedestal in front of the university in Kyiv as a beacon of hope for Ukrainian men - and portraying him as a rank-and-file soldier ready to shield his homeland with his chest and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with his people in times of struggle and hardship. Makhno designates Bucha as a city of pain and fear, posing fundamental questions: When will this end? What lies ahead in the coming months? Will cities be engulfed in flames once again? Where can solace be found?

“A literary text is, after all, a struggle with language – the liberation of language from redundant words, the assembly of language’s own periodic table. This system becomes complete only when all elements are discovered. Yet, certain elements remain to be uncovered, generating a simultaneous sense of completeness and deficiency”, remarks Vasyl Makhno. Notably, despite this struggle, Makhno’s poetry strives toward an aestheticization of

war, thereby assuming a significant position in the history of Ukrainian literature. This is a poetry concerned with life and death, good and evil, and their inevitable intersections – reaffirming that the more harrowing the reality and the more agonizing the ongoing events, the clearer the infinite potential of literature becomes.

“Have You Been to the Basement of the Mariupol Theater, God?” – this line stands as one of the most poignant and emotionally charged verses from Kateryna Yehorushkyna’s renowned poem. Echoing the tragedy of the siege of Mariupol following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, it articulates a profound question regarding suffering in an infernal reality where people struggled to survive for weeks under continuous bombardment, deprived of water and electricity. Far from being blasphemous, this line represents a deeply desperate dialogue with the Creator, probing the boundaries of divine compassion and presence in the face of immense human suffering.

The tragic events in Mariupol served as the direct catalyst for translating and publishing the bilingual poetry collection titled *Have You Been to the Basement of the Mariupol Theater, God!* The anthology compiles poems written in 2022 by contemporary Ukrainian authors – including Kateryna Yehorushkyna, Natalka Marynychak, Ihor Astapenko, Serhiy Zhadan, among others – during the full-scale Russian invasion and the siege of Mariupol. The works were rendered into Georgian by

prominent Georgian poets and translators.

In the post-Soviet era, Georgian-Ukrainian literary relations assumed a qualitatively new character, liberated from Soviet ideological constraints. While earlier exchanges were frequently constrained by formal directives and the contrived rhetoric of the “friendship of peoples”, post-1991 interactions evolved into a genuine, direct, and dynamic dialogue.

The paramount achievement of this period has been the elimination of Russian as an intermediary language. Georgian and Ukrainian translators began rendering texts directly from the original source, thereby preserving the individual style and artistic nuances of the authors. Alongside the classical literary heritage (Taras Shevchenko, Lesya Ukrainka, and others), the interpretation of contemporary authors has taken center stage. Works by Otar Chiladze, Dato Turashvili, and Aka Morchiladze have been translated into Ukrainian, while writings by Serhiy Zhadan, Yuri Andrukhovych, Oksana Zabuzhko, Artem Chekh, Kateryna Yehorushkyna, and others have been rendered into Georgian.

In conclusion, post-Soviet Georgian-Ukrainian literary relations represent a paradigm shift from ideological oversight toward an authentic, direct, and multi-faceted cultural dialogue. The historical evolution – transitioning from medieval religious and socio-cultural ties to Soviet-era formal exchanges, and ultimately to

sovereign, direct literary engagement – underscores the resilience and adaptability of intercultural reciprocity between the two nations.

The elimination of Russian as a translational intermediary stands out as a pivotal achievement of this period, allowing translators to preserve the stylistic nuances, aesthetic integrity, and authentic cultural realia of both languages. Furthermore, while classic figures continue to provide a foundational bridge, the rapid expansion of contemporary prose and poetry translations – encompassing children's literature, documentary prose, and existential war poetry – demonstrates a mutual commitment to addressing shared historical traumas and contemporary geopolitical challenges.

Ultimately, the reception of Georgian literature in Ukraine and

Ukrainian literature in Georgia has acquired a profound ethical and imagological dimension. In times of crisis, marked by the pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine, literary translation has transcended its traditional role as a mere aesthetic medium, evolving into a crucial arena for existential solidarity, mutual understanding, and shared historical literary legacy.

It should also be noted that in both Georgian and Ukrainian literature, the peculiarities of the perception of each other's cultural heritage are changing, new hetero-images are emerging, and historical and cultural events are being reassessed, but one thing remains unchanged: close cultural/literary ties and the deepening of these ties through various processes.

Notes

- ¹ O. Bakanidze, *Georgian-Ukrainian Literary and Theatrical Relations*, Publishing House "Ganatleba", Tbilisi, 1982. p. 558.
- ² S. Chkhatarashvili, *Ukrainian Sixties and Georgia*, Doctoral Dissertation, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 157.
- ³ Л. Грицик, *Українсько-грузинські літературні взаємини: домінанти сучасного порівняльного вивчення*, Шевченковознавчі студії, Випуск 1, (27), частина 1, pp. 112-113.
- ⁴ V. Chernetsky, On discovering ukrainian literature, <https://www.researchgate.net/publica->

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- ⁵ І. Мchedладзе, Н. Наскідашвілі, С. Чхатарашвілі, *Переклади творів Лесі Українки грузинською мовою. Леся Українка у світі перекладу (Вибрані переклади європейськими та східними мовами)*, Кондор, Київ, 2021, pp. 263-268.
- ⁶ N. Naskidashvili, *The poetry of the "Free People" or poems about War*. Scientific proceedings dedicted to prof. Geogre Ekizashvili, Tbilisi, 2024, p. 99-111.
- ⁷ М. Наєнко, *Художня література України, від міфів до модерної реальності*, видавничий центр «Просвіта», Київ, 2008, 1088 p.

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