



Shakespeare's Portrait in Georgian Modernist Narrative (Based on the example of Konstantine Gamsakhurdia's essays)

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Submitted: 30-Jan, 2026

Accepted: 17-Feb, 2026

Published: 26-Feb, 2026

Vol. 3, No. 1, 2026. Sociometrics.us

Journal of Community, Law and
Diplomacy Sciences

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Abstract

This article examines the image and interpretation of William Shakespeare in Georgian modernist narrative, based on the essayistic heritage of Konstantine Gamsakhurdia. Drawing on the writer's essays published in his multi-volume collected works, the study analyzes how Shakespeare functions as a key cultural and philosophical reference point in Gamsakhurdia's worldview. Particular attention is paid to Gamsakhurdia's understanding of Shakespeare as a universal embodiment of human nature, his conception of the synthesis of the tragic and the comic, and his rejection of typological characterization in favor of unique, irreducible individuality. The article highlights parallels drawn by Gamsakhurdia between Shakespeare and other canonical figures such as Rustaveli, Dante, Goethe, Balzac, and Tolstoy, as well as the special role of Hamlet in Georgian intellectual and national self-reflection. By situating Shakespeare within broader discussions of myth, history, language reformism, and modernity, the study demonstrates how Georgian modernism engaged in an active dialogue with European literary tradition. The analysis reveals that Gamsakhurdia's Shakespearean portraits are not merely interpretative reflections but integral components of his modernist aesthetics and cultural mission.

Key words: Konstantine Gamsakhurdia; William Shakespeare; Georgian modernism; essayistic narrative; literary portrait; Hamlet; European cultural tradition; individuality and character; historical transformation; intertextuality

Introduction

Konstantine Gamsakhurdia's work, an extremely versatile, multi-layered legacy, is important in various aspects - political, psychological, philosophical, historical, economic, ethnographic, mythological....

The writer's novels, novellas, short stories, journalistic-essayistic, and lyrical narratives are distinguished by their depth and sophistication.

Many important scholars have studied the works of Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, but a special

contribution has been made by literary critic Soso Sigua, whose monograph, published in two volumes in the 1990s - "Martvili and Alamdar" - remains a reference book for researchers and readers interested in the writer's work. A few years earlier, a voluminous passage from the aforementioned monograph "The Structure of Konstantine Gamsakhurdia's Prose" was published, in which due attention is paid to the essayistic heritage of the modernist, specifically, the writer's perception of European civilization [Sigua S., 1989].

Akaki Bakradze analyzed specific aspects of the writer's legacy with characteristic depth in his writings "Meditation on the Abduction of the Moon" (1967), "The Myth of the Abduction of the Moon" (1967), and "The Suicide of Dionysus" (1968);

Revaz Tvaradze called the writer the speaker of all of Georgia and used this phrase-construction as the title of his essay (1969).

In 1983, Guram Kankava analyzed the mythological structure of Konstantine Gamsakhurdia's "The Smile of Dionysus," and in the same year, Elguja Maghradze's brochure "True from the Heart" was published.

Christian aspects are explored in Zviad Gamsakhurdia's essay "Konstantin Gamsakhurdia and Christianity", which was published in a collection of essays published in 1991.

The first volume of Konstantine Gamsakhurdia's twenty-volume collection, published in 1992, is preceded by Teimuraz Doiashvili's letter "Through Matter - Towards the Spirit." The author of the foreword to the ten-volume collection, published in 1973, is Besarion Zhgentia.

In 1996, Davit Tevzadze's study "Konstantin Gamsakhurdia and Modernity" was published.

Highly sincere opinions have been expressed in many different letters and monographs about the writer's work. The writer's legacy has been and is being studied by G. Natroshvili, T. Kvanchilashvili, S. Chilaia, T. Kikacheishvili, T. Chkhenkeli, A. Gomarteli, A. Nikoleishvili, A. Gatsereia, G. Gverdsiteli, K. Bregadze, T. Vasadze, I. Milorava, M. Tamazashvili, Z. Saria, S. Tsaishvili, L. Sordia, V. Tsiskaridze, Z. Gogia, M. Jaliashvili, R. Mishveladze, J. Ghvinjilia, E. Shushania,...

The writer's life and work are perceived and presented from a special perspective in the novel "Portrait of Odysseus' Youth" (2016), published in recent years by Rostom Chkheidze.

Researcher Tatia Gigani (2010) dedicated an extremely interesting qualification paper to Konstantine Gamsakhurdia's journalistic and literary-critical writings and essays, and in 2021, Vika Kardava defended her dissertation at Sokhumi State University on the topic "English Reminiscences in the Works of Konstantine Gamsakhurdia", which analyzed English allusions in the writer's fiction-essay narrative, novels "The Abduction of the Moon" and "The Smile of Dionysus".

Unlike the aforementioned voluminous research, in this chapter of our qualification thesis we will only touch on a specific aspect of Konstantine Gamsakhurdia's essays, namely, we will highlight the portraits of British artists.

Konstantine Gamsakhurdia's essayistic narrative is presented in the seventh and tenth volumes of the writer's ten-volume collection published in 1973-1985.

Mtserali discusses the essay genre itself in an interesting way in his letter "Afterword" [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 553], noting that the term essay itself (Konstantin Gamsakhurdia, like Grigol Robakidze, writes this word with two syllables - N.S.) is interpreted as a trial/attempt. The founder of the genre is Montaigne, the traditions continued in the English space as well, where Bacon is considered its founder, Konstantin Gamsakhurdia also names other English essayists (Carlisle, Temple, Stanhope... Among the Americans - Ralph Waldo Emerson)

The great Georgian writer was also a cultural carrier, and his efforts to introduce iconic figures of world culture to readers of the country that remained behind the Iron Wall are commendable.

Great Britain is one of the most powerful and authoritative spaces in the free world, and it is absolutely natural for a writer with a brilliant European education to have a distinct interest in English

culture (although Konstantine Gamsakhurdia is, of course, primarily a Germanophile).

In the essay "Tamar", the writer-essayist noted that he mastered the English language at the University of Berlin [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 123], which, according to the quote from "Landesbein Lacitz", led to his interest in Shakespeare, Pope, Browning, Stevenson [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 33]. In the essay "From a Word Spoken at the Microphone", the writer-essayist concluded that he traveled to many European countries as a student, emphasizing the deep impressions from his travels in England and Scotland [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 487].

Konstantine Gamsakhurdia considers the English to be the most uneducated nation in contemporary (modernist era - N.S.) Europe [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 410]. This consideration is especially important given Gamsakhurdia's Germanophilia.

In the writer's essayistic narrative, special attention from English artists is, of course, paid to the personality of William Shakespeare .

We share the opinion of researcher Vika Kardava that Shakespeare is on any of Gamsakhurdia's shortlists as a special manifestation of human genius [Kardava V., 2021: 55].

The writer-essayist William Shakespeare refers to him as the epitome of human nature [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 293], and in "Goethe's Romance of Life" - as a flicker of light [Gamsakhurdia K., 1980: 107], or more precisely, Goethe says about Shakespeare, "Shakespeare's flicker of light hurt my eyes."

Shakespeare's tragedies, according to Gamsakhurdia, have nourished and enriched European culture for centuries ("Thomas Mann") [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 162].

Gamsakhurdia names Shakespeare among his primary inspirers: among Georgians - Rustaveli, Ilia Chavchavadze, Vazha-Pshavela, and among foreigners - Dante, Goethe, Tolstoy, Chateaubriand, and Balzac. Along with many other reasons, he also mentions the primary reason for inspiration - language reformism, mentioning Rustaveli, Dante, and Shakespeare as the primary reformers ("Newness and Reasonable Search") [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 581].

In the essay "Honoré de Balzac," Gamsakhurdia confirms Hippolyte Taine's point of view - Shakespeare is a treasury of human feelings with a poetic rank, with colossal force (we think the last word means force - N. S.) [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 206].

Gamsakhurdia considers Shakespeare's primary stylistic characteristic to be the ideal synthesis of the tragic and the comic, without which the reader would not be able to endure the stunning drama of his great plays. It is interesting that Gamsakhurdia refers to Shakespeare's characters by the metaphorical name - masks [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 268].

The same point of view is stated laconically in other essays many times. The writer-essayist points out that wise thoughts are not expressed in the form of reasoning, but in the form of lapidary sentences-aphorisms, just as Rustaveli begins his poem with a hunting scene, while Shakespeare does not need a troupe of clowns to express bitter, hardest truths ("Hendrik Ibsen") [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 402]. In the essay dedicated to Balzac, it is also stated that, according to Gamsakhurdia, "a role model for artists of all times," Shakespeare, through the mouth of court jesters, brings lightness and frivolous mood even to the most difficult dramatic situations [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 224], but in the work of an artist of Shakespeare's rank Analysis requires a special critic, for example, in the style of Kuno Fischer, because Kuno Fischer is the critic who, according to Gamsakhurdia's definition, is able to reveal the irrational in literature [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 431].

Schiller and Goethe tried to continue Shakespeare's themes, writes Gamsakhurdia, and he considers Balzac's Gobseck to be a thematic competitor to Shakespeare [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 240], who worships Mammon just as much as Shylock from "The Merchant of Venice."

The writer-essayist notes that Shakespeare connected the history of Britain to mythical roots (in Gamsakhurdia's words, Gaamitha) , just as Homer did to Greece. Gamsakhurdia also introduces

Vazha-Pshavela into the same space, who, like Homer and Shakespeare, turned the gaze of Georgians towards prehistoric spaces [Gamsakhurdia K., 191985: 419].

In the textbook essay "Impressionism and Expressionism," Gamsakhurdia repeatedly draws parallels between Homer, Rustaveli, Dante, and Shakespeare, believes that Dante is the teacher of Shakespeare and Goethe, and cites the words of a witty lord (he does not specify - N.S.), "Apart from Shakespeare (Shakespeare's works - N.S.), I have not read the history of England [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 429].

Despite his special admiration for Shakespeare, Gamsakhurdia believes that Dante is closer to the Georgian worldview than Shakespeare in terms of enthusiasm (transliteration Gamsakhurdiaseli - N.S.) and temperament.

In an essay dedicated to Lado Gudiashvili, the writer again names Rustaveli and Shakespeare as inspirations and adds the names of Homer and Pushkin [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 536],

In frequently mentioning Rustaveli and Shakespeare in parallel, in addition to the above-mentioned characteristic - language reformism, the writer also notes the fact that both artists elevate a person of a specific nationality to a universal, general height (this nuance was especially emphasized by Ilia Chavchavadze in his chrestomathic essay "Two Words"), and masterfully describe the nature of the Indian, Arab, Danish, British, and Roman [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 483].

Of course, when talking about Shakespeare's characters, Gamsakhurdia draws special attention to Hamlet - the main character of the British author, about whom he offers the Georgian reader a point of view that is widespread and accepted in world literary criticism, saying that Shakespeare was inspired by the chronicles of Saxo Grammaticus (the writer uses this version of the name and surname - N.S.), where the story of Hamlet is told, but, of course, this is not a word-for-word retelling of the story - this is a transformation, when historical truth is replaced by dramatic truth, just like, for example, in the artistic description of the history of Julius Caesar, only this time the chronicles of Plutarch are used as a source, and in the description of the histories of Richard III and "all" Henrys - the chronicles of Holinshed [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 419].

Another essay notes that the chronicles of Holinshed and the Saxo Grammarian were used by many other English authors, in addition to Shakespeare [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 60]. Although Gamsakhurdia does not continue his argument, the conclusion is clear - only Shakespeare was able to transform the aforementioned chronicles into "Hamlet".

We think that the perspective is worthy of special mention - Gamsakhurdia writes that the chronicles (the aforementioned Plutarch, Saxo Grammarian, Holinshed) concern the past and remain in the past, while the Shakespearean interpretation of the chronicles - tragedies, dramas "transfer" the past to the present (Gamsakhurdia uses this very verb). Along with Shakespeare, Gamsakhurdia mentions Flaubert, Balzac, and Tolstoy as authors of this type (transferring the past to the present), specifying that historical material is inevitably transformed by the efforts of a great artist, otherwise, it would remain in memory not as an artist, but as a simple copyist/copyist of the authors of historical annals, a simple copyist of a copy.

The same idea is expressed elsewhere, and it is especially emphasized that the foremost figures of European art (this time Gamsakhurdia names Dante, da Vinci, Raphael, Goethe, and, along with them, Shakespeare) were inspired by the ancient space, on the one hand, and by biblical themes, on the other - and they needed these spaces of the past in order to depict contemporaneity in parabolic language [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 419], although we feel as if the events of Julius Caesar (Caesar - N.S.), Coriolanus, and Hamlet happened yesterday.

We think that Konstantine Gamsakhurdia's point of view that not only Hamlet is Shakespeare's bone of bones (i.e. - the expression of the essence - N.S.), but also Shylock, which he specifically repeats in the quote - yes, Shylock, the merchant of human flesh, in order to make the reader feel the depth of insight into the character's character and the uniqueness of the perspective [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 447], is

conceptually loaded. It is interesting that Gamsakhurdia expresses this emphasized point of view when talking about one of his favorite authors - Knut Hamsun.

It is interesting to mention Hamlet in a seemingly unexpected context - speaking about the special importance of Ilia Chavchavadze's personality in the history of the Georgians, comparing Ilia to the prophet Moses, Gamsakhurdia notes that the Georgian nation utters Ilia's words with Hamlet-like hesitation - "Let us be like ourselves" (Gamsakhurdia refers to these words as the stars of heaven, which, unlike the poppies of the field, never wither or grow old) [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 391].

In another essay, Gamsakhurdia notes that Hamletian pathos is evident in Ilia's personality [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 286] (we agree with researcher Vika Kardava's point of view that the issue creates a dissertation space).

Another special perspective of perception should be emphasized - Gamsakhurdia asks a rhetorical question - who is superior to whom - the author of the tragedy to the hero of the tragedy or vice versa - the hero of the tragedy - the author of the tragedy, and, along with other author-characters, he cites the names of Shakespeare and Hamlet [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 395].

In the essay "Hamlet or Don Quixote", while analyzing the character of Hamlet, Gamsakhurdia christens Shakespeare's character as a tribune of truth and justice, and pairs him with Socrates - he suffers from doubts, his thoughts reach future generations, but he does not fight, he speaks with daggers [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 285] - as always, Gamsakhurdia's perspective of perception is original and unexpected.

The names of Shakespeare and Goethe are interestingly paralleled in the essay "Stephan Georg", in which Gamsakhurdia further deepens the point of view highlighted above and notes that, despite the obvious signs of Weimar Parnassism, Goethe's texts (Gamsakhurdia names "Wilhelm Meister" and "Faust" - N.S.) clearly bear the literary characteristics of the Rococo style. The writer-essayist especially emphasizes the point of view that contemporaries demanded from Shakespeare and Goethe to present an accurate reflection of contemporary social life [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 378].

Gamsakhurdia's point of view is important, namely that Shakespeare's text offers us not a type, but an individual, a person, a personality - unique and unrepeatable. In the writer-essayist's absolutely correct opinion, the type is neither Hamlet, nor Othello, nor King Lear, nor any Henry.

Gamsakhurdia also mentions Dante in this context and notes that, like Shakespeare's characters, the literary hero(es) depicted by Dante cannot be reduced to type(s) - they represent immanently given ready-made schemes of historical persons [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 405]. It is also important that Gamsakhurdia expresses the above-mentioned point of view in his essay "For the Modern Novel", thereby, in fact, indicating to the reader that his characters can also be understood as immanently given ready-made schemes of historical persons.

Gamsakhurdia delves into the same topic in his essay on the novel "The Moon's Stealing", where he argues (the writer-essayist uses this very categorical verb - N.S.) that Shakespeare did not create a type. In general, he considers type to be a term taken from a textbook on literary theory and believes that a singular story serves only to highlight character, not type [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 1983: 337].

Ready-made schemes are equally suitable for any era and landscape, from Gamsakhurdia's point of view, which was especially clearly manifested in the works of Shakespeare and Tolstoy, Stendhal and Kipling - the named authors broke through their own space, went beyond their native landscape and made exotic themes (in Shakespeare's case - Italian-Scandinavian - N.S.) an organic part of their native literature [Gamsakhurdia K. 1985: 289].

The writer-essayist names Shakespeare and Tolstoy together in the paraphrased excerpt presented above, although in another passage he does not forget to mention that the Russian genius unjustly attacked Shakespeare, Dante, Beethoven, Wagner [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 282], which Gamsakhurdia explains away with the stinginess of a genius and does not delve into the topic further. Elsewhere, it is

emphasized that Tolstoy is one of those who supported the Russian novel against the English one [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 279].

In his analysis of the characters of Shakespeare, Balzac, and Gogol, Gamsakhurdia presents with characteristic depth literary heroes who are completely different from the cunning characters, noting that Gogol's merchant of dead souls is as unbelievably strange as Shakespeare's Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice* or Balzac's Gobseck from the novel of the same title [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 268].

In general, parallels between Shakespeare and Balzac's characters are frequent in Gamsakhurdia's essays. We have examined several passages, and we have even found one - from Gamsakhurdia's point of view, the problematics of Shakespeare's "King Lear" are understood in a new way in "Father Goriot" [Gamsakhurdia K., 1985: 227] (we agree with the point of view of researcher Vika Kardava that the pathos of "The Merchant of Venice" is also [Kardava V., 2021: 84] - N.S.).

According to Gamsakhurdia, Balzac looks as deeply into the abysses of the human soul as Shakespeare, which the Georgian writer-essayist explains by saying that Shakespeare, along with Moliere, Rabelais, Hoffmann, and Walter Scott, made a special contribution to the formation of the French novelist's talent.

In terms of style, compared to Shakespeare, Gamsakhurdia considers Dostoevsky to be a bland genius, although he speaks with admiration of his foresight and clairvoyance, which, in Gamsakhurdia's opinion, allows him to draw a parallel with the foremost prophet of modernity, Nietzsche [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 388].

In an essay dedicated to Machabeli's translation of "Hamlet" (which we briefly discussed in the passage dedicated to Georgian translations of Shakespeare in the qualification paper), Konstantine Gamsakhurdia noted that after translating Dante and Goethe, it seemed as if I had already paid my debt in terms of translation work, but my special love for "Hamlet" made me change my mind. In an interview given to an elite Moscow newspaper (Gamsakhurdia does not name the newspaper, presumably referring to "Pravda" - N.S.) in 1936, he noted that he intended to translate Shakespeare's most brilliant tragedy, and wanted to see the text he had translated performed by Akaki Khorava and Ushangi Chkheidze, who had been fascinated by the performances of Conrad Ait and other great European actors [Gamsakhurdia K., 1983: 232].

The analysis presented in the letter of the English reminiscences (specifically, the understanding of Shakespeare's characters) reflected in Konstantine Gamsakhurdia's essays reveals how great an interest Georgian modernism showed in the personality of this outstanding thinker of humanity.

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