

# “Sound Poetry” in the Context of New Syncretism

*(Zurab Rtveliashvili)*

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## Abstract

The article aims to study the most characteristic feature of modern literary art – new syncretism on the example of Zurab Rtveliashvili, Sound Poetry and his art in general. The essence of new syncretism is to be found in the removal of the established genre borders by their hybridization.

**Keywords:** *New syncretism, Sound Poetry, merging the traditional and non-traditional arts, Zurab Rtveliashvili.*

Art has experienced many changes throughout the centuries of its development. In the beginning it was born as a syncretic field that means the inseparable unity of different arts such as dance, poetry and singing. Syncretism was characteristic generally for the early society and revealed in cultural and religious beliefs as well as in different areas of economy (such as hunting, agriculture etc...).

The society's intellect, beliefs were changing and refining side by side with social development. Society was forming new and higher spiritual and material needs and it reflected on the peculiarity of the artistic-aesthetic perception of the world. The process of separation between the fields of art and establishment of so called homogenous<sup>1</sup> arts began.

The fact that the vector of the forms of artistic creativity moved from syncretism towards differentiation was also caused by the fact that it somehow limited the development of the arts involved as well as the artist, obstructed the skills of his/her artistic expression.<sup>2</sup> Thus literary art shaped as a homogenous art, which applies artistic-aesthetic world to the language through the use of a word.

However, one should note that it is impossible to separate the arts from each other completely and syncretism still remains in art to a certain degree in a certain dose as its significant marker. This applies to the old as well as relatively new arts such as Theatre,

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<sup>1</sup> By the term homogenous art we mean those arts that rely on one material medium (for example: literature – written word, music – sound, etc...)

<sup>2</sup> It should also be mentioned that one part of artists and thinkers (such as Novalis, Wagner ... ) were for syncretic art and believed that art would fulfill its mission better that way.

opera, cinema etc... The same should be repeated about oral art. Eloquent writing creates a original synthesis with music, theatre or cinematography. It can be said with confidence that each epoch has its own syncretism. I think, in the 21<sup>st</sup> c., in the postmodern epoch, the era of the new syncretism has started. The art of the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> cc will respond to its own customers' (reader, listener, observer) requirements and reacts to them. Globalization in general and cultural globalization in particular

The new historical-social and cultural-aesthetic epoch encouraged a search for new forms, genres, and directions. Literature, like the other arts responds and reflects in one way or the other the peculiarities of the society's development. The moment arrives when this or the other arts cannot remain within the frames of classical characteristics and seeks novelty, which may be presented in the image of new syncretism. This becomes implemented by the aid of hybridization and means the abolishment of the established boundaries for different arts, merging the traditional and non-traditional arts, joining the arts with certain domestic activities or enterprises etc. This, on one hand, is an original form of self-expression and on the other hand, it is also a response to the peculiarities of the society's development. It also offers new aesthetic values to the society, the taste and aesthetic requirements of which are more or less standardized.

Nicholas Berdyaev wrote: The old ideal of the classically beautiful art has become ultimately tarnished, and there is a feeling for a return to its images. Art has convulsively striven to go beyond its limits. The borderlines have shattered, such as distinguish one art from another and indeed art in general from that, what yet already is not art, from what is higher or lower than it. There has never yet been so acutely put the problem of the relation of art to life, of creativity and existence, never yet has there been such a thirst to pass over from the creativity of producing art to a creativity of life itself, new life (Berdyaev, 1918:3, Russian edition). If we did not know that the author said these words at his public lecture exactly a hundred years ago in 1917, we could easily apply it to our present day for its being so relevant to the modern reality. Only the accent is different. Those words were considered in the context of the crisis of art at the time. However, we can reconsider them today in the context of modernization of art. Yes, the ideal of classical art is altered today. Art is desperately trying to expand its boundaries and meet the standards of modernity.

Syncretism is particularly important in new reality when the multicultural world and the

issues related to it gain more and more urgency. Writer finds the “new language” even here, through which he/she manages to express himself/herself in the concrete socio-cultural world, grant aesthetic pleasure to the reader as well and convey his/her own message.

Zurab Rtveliashvili’s art is also immensely important in this respect. Georgian literary critics wrote about him: “we see a high level of abstraction in Zurab Rtveliashvili’s poetry – there is a mythology of riot. This abstraction of rebellion is the axis of Rtveliashvili’s poetry. His poetics bears a reference to the aristocratic nature of rebellion. Every such experiment can be considered as social and political criticism and not as a personal and subjective complaint... Zurab Rtveliashvili ... remains as a lingual poet even when he explores the space outside the boundaries of poetry, such as blackmail and politics. It is especially complex and twice as challenging when lingual poetry manages to retain lyrics and radical criticism in itself at the same time.

The vector of content spreads in different directions; breaks unexpectedly, ends in ambiguity or in a perplexing transcription, with an exclamation mark. It can be said that the poetics of Zurab Rtveliashvili continues the line of the great Georgian and Russian poet, Vladimir Maiakovski, it is a postmodern extension of his civil and futuristic lyrics. It is not easy to find an analogy to it in today’s environment precisely due to the shyness caused by decentralized liberalism and toleration characteristic to Postmodernism: “Every radical criticism leaves a fine trace of Modernism” (Chikhladze, Electronic Source).

Zurab Rtveliashvili has been living in Sweden for several years. He is creatively active in Scandinavia as well as in other European countries. In one of his interviews, the poet describes his diverse artistic activities: “I appear in art and literary spaces with my poetic performances and lectures, I played the main characters in two of the movies by quite famous German film director Julian Radlmaier’s at his own request. The rating for the first movie *A Spectre is Haunting Europe* was fairly high; it was named as the best movie in alternative cinema nomination in 2013. The work on the second movie will be finished shortly and I hope that the Georgian audience will also be able to see it soon. In Sweden I have a publisher, a great Swedish poet Christian Karlsson, who published my first collection of poems “poetry dictatorship,” in 2015 in Swedish. My works are included in many famous anthologies, now as a performance artist and author I actively cooperate with one of the cult avant-garde theatres in Stockholm. In 2014-2015 the theatre called “Guillotine” hosted my first play at the experimental stage, which had a positive response from theater critics; I still continue to work on individual performances...” (Rtveliashvili, Electronic Source).

The art of Z. Rtveliashvili is more or less novel and contains many novelties for contemporary Georgian literature. At the first glance, it appears exotic, yet, it is the result of much more serious aesthetic explorations. Such artistic-aesthetic novelties cannot emerge on an empty place. The poet masters creatively rather splendid Georgian, European and Russian experience in this respect. Every novelty has its own reason. The peculiarities of Zurab Rtveliashvili's poetry are also conditioned by many factors. One of them should be pointed out to be the long for self-realization in the foreign literary-aesthetic environment, the desire for overcoming the language barrier etc.

The author created the samples of "Sound Poetry"<sup>3</sup>, which he linked organically to the other arts and to the daily routines taken up to the level of arts. By doing so he came up with the new type of artistic-aesthetic hybrid based on the principle of syncretism. The essence of this hybrid reveals in transformation of the experimentally applied lingual tissue into a poetic text and presenting it to the listener in a form of theatrical-dramatic declamation. This was supported by the poetic talent of the poet in terms of virtuosic mastering skill of form and sound as well as a performing skill by which he made up a certain performance mixture of different arts. Poet turned towards the method of Para-verbal communication, which, as he claims, allows him to reach contact with the audience/listener on a different energy level. He is reading his "sound poetry" rather emotionally:

„sad aba sad asad,  
terror, terror, ror,  
barak obam, bam, bam,  
mubaraq,  
erorrrr, therorr, rorr,  
mirorrr,

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<sup>3</sup> Sound Poetry (Lautgedichte, soundpoem, звукостихи) is not a discovery of only one epoch or one poet. The art of poetry goes back to this type of experiment from time to time. Maybe not every epoch, but many of them has its own sound poetry, in which the phonetic aspect of the text gains a certain independence and often becomes the end in itself for the author. Yet, the sound poetries of every type and every epoch have different contents and concepts.

The roots and prehistory of sound poetry should be sought in the early past. For example: different types of folk texts, invocations, children's rhymes, refrains, imitative texts. In general, the history of sound poetry is closely related to folk traditions. Sound poetry existed long before Z. Rtveliashvili in Georgian literary tradition. Particularly fertile appeared to him the artistic-aesthetic tendencies of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. in the poetic experiments of Dada and Futurism, Zaum etc. „Sound Poetry' as normally defined makes a first appearance in the early 20th century as an outsider of the great army of Modernism. (Of course there were sounds long before that but they needed clothes that convinced listeners that they were really something else)" (Jas. H. Duke, Internet Source).

barak oba am bam bam

mubaraq muubaraq“ ....

This poem by Zurab Rtveliashvili is based on the traditions of Dadaism-Futurism and Zaum traditions. As it is commonly known, the essence of Dadaist-Futuristic and Zaum poetry is the rejection of natural language or its particulars and replacing them by the elements similar to the natural language. Yet, we ought to mention, that, as it is referred in academic writing Zaum does not involve the complete rejection of an idea: „People come to Zaum language ... when they do not want to name the thing, but only imply to it“(Kruchenikh, 1923:45 [Russian]). The same can be replicated in relation to Dadaist and Futuristic poetry by adding that “Futurists (as well as Dadaist and Zaum authors [N.G]) established the cult of form, which they discussed without the connection to the content. They attempted to reflect the new life by employing new artistic methods. The most important in this was the fact that they experimented with a word, tried to refresh the poetic language and used endless experiments for this. The most radical expression of this experiments was so called Zaum, Zaum language (comes from Russian “Za”-for and “Um”-mind/sense), in which words were made up of such sounds, the unity of which did not make sense. It is not possible to grasp and understand logically the meaning in Zaum texts, because Zaum is a language that does not acknowledge the traditional communication functions. Zaum text allows any kind of experiment: repetition of meaningless sounds and syllables, division of words, their deliberate deformation, joining two separate morphemes together etc.” (Gaprindashvili, 2014:251).

In this work of Z. Rtveliashvili everything has its own name and we cannot say that the emotional-intuitive outweighs the rational. We think there is a certain balance well preserved between the two considering those impulses that are given in the text. The reader is provided with an energetic impulse for a vivid and diverse interpretations.

Zurab Rtveliashvili manages rather skillfully to manipulate with words and sounds relying on energetic and spontaneous improvisation. The combination of words and sounds presented by him creates an aesthetic phenomenon, the basis of verbal communication for the new intermediary art. The author often employs the method of declamation, recitative, (a declamatory melody, which is close to normal speech), different kinds of noise, tune, musical instruments etc. All this contributes to widening the boundaries of the expression in his work. Emotional and intuitional essentials are significantly involved in the perception of his art and especially in the texts with vaguely expressed lingual meaning. The most important thing is that the experimental poetry of Zurab Rtveliashvili is created through the organic synthesis of two semantics – poetic and extra-poetic.

I think it is not a coincidence that the Georgian poet chose Sweden as the arena for his experimental

art. This country has serious tradition of sound poetry, textual-sound composition, radiophone poetry and generally, in terms of development of intermediary novelty in art. Swedes are recognized in the whole world as the pioneers of Sound Poetry.

The poet emphasizes in one of his interviews that the language barrier that he experienced in a foreign country was and still remains his serious problem. Yet, he says elsewhere, that “language does not matter for a poet, language does not have a defining power, it depends on what type the poet is. In this case, when you not only employ verbal forms of communication in your art, but mix with other artistic forms of performance, it makes your communication with the audience, authors, writers, publishers much easier, because they start thinking of you differently and also think about the project that they can involve you in... whether it is a DVD version of an ordinary printed copy of a book” (Kevanishvili, Online resource).

Zurab Rtveliashvili, as it is accepted in Sound Poetry, uses those “words”, which have no meaning except the purely phonetic. As academic literature states “Sound Poetry deviated from the Semantic main line and it no longer depends on the system of the universally accepted rules and concepts. Here irrationalism steps in, the conceptual ambiguity ... At some point one might follow Derrida and speak of the acoustic deconstruction of linguistic objects” (Hultberg, Online Resource).

It has already been noted that in the case of Zurab Rtveliashvili’s ‘performing’ the author’s original declamation is the most important aspect. Declamation of a poem is a normal phenomenon, yet, in this case this is the author’s own presentation, which is an important guide in terms of thought-creation and interpretation. Apart from declamation-articulation, Zurab Rtveliashvili’s experimental art borrows the extra-verbal factors of performance from other experimental arts: Body art, performance elements ... the unity of which allows the author to adopt a certain role and creates a playground for exercising more power over the listener.

Zurab Rtveliashvili’s performances are interesting and diverse. For example one of his performances *Borsch for Europe* was performed at the Gilgotin Theatre in Stockholm where the poet brings in a domestic context by cutting vegetables with noise accompanied by the sounds of drums and contrabass. He turns the noise of cutting cabbages, carrots and other vegetables into unique components of his performance.

The art of Z. Rtveliashvili is immensely energetic. He also calls others to being active when he says: “from the existential point of view yes, we are less able, we ought to set ourselves free from the culture of death and ghosts and turn our vector of development towards the constant rebirth and the culture of quantum consciousness” (Rtveliashvili, Online Source).

Therefore, Zurab Rtveliashvili’s phenomenon is created with a free combination of organically

combining different arts and on the other had through the comparison of artistic and domestic activities. is created with a free combination. I think, his strive towards the self-realization in a foreign literary-aesthetic environment, his desire for overcoming the language barrier and to offer new aesthetic values to the society that is used to standardized taste and aesthetic expectations are those impulses that moved Zurab Rtveliashvili to plan new strategies in his works and make new type of performance, create so called “sound poems”, which will be understandable without a translation to the listeners of any nationality. The form of conveying the poetic text allows the author to express the depths of the idea. Therefore, Zurab Rtveliashvili managed to pass the lingual boundary by his poetic experiment and turn it into a part of the new and alien culture.

This new type of synthetic art opened new opportunities of artistic expression to the artist and granted him a chance of creating essentially new artistic values.

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