

REVIEW

Review: Georgian Poetry and Prose for the World

Reviewed Work: *Modern Georgia: Poetry & Prose*

Review by: Edward R. Raupp

In a world of eight billion people and seven thousand languages, it is easy to overlook the exquisite poetry and profound prose written in a language of only a few million speakers. Such is the case in the tiny South Caucasus nation of Georgia, a land of such beauty as defies description, a place of more than eight thousand years of culture, one so geographically situated as to attract invaders intent on dominating the land and its people, a people determined to remain free. It is the combination of the land, its history, and its people that has yielded the brilliant literature of Georgia.

If anyone outside the country knows anything about Georgian writers and their work, it's likely to be limited to Shota Rustaveli's epic poem, *Knight in the Panther's Skin*, translated into English prose by Marjorie Wardrop in 1910 or the 1968 translation in verse by Venera Urushadze. Some readers in the international community may have been teased by the selections in Urushadze's 1958 *Anthology of Georgian Poetry*. While these are important translations, there is room for more, and a forum is needed for today's Georgian writers.

Modern Georgia: Poetry & Prose, a project of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport of Georgia offers such a forum. The Project Director is Ketevan Dumbadze. The Project Coordinator is Mariam Tsiklauri. The Editor is Manana Matiashvili. The book's ISBN is 978-9941-9651-7-3. The Publisher is Publishing House Kalmosani, Ts. Dadiani Street in Tbilisi (Telephone +995 571 19 19 39. Email Kalmosani@yahoo.com).

The book is available in a paperback edition of 196 pages and includes the poetry and prose works of thirty contemporary Georgian writers, about evenly divided between male and female authors.

The collection is commendable for its variety, both in form and substance. Right out of the gate, Ina Archuashvili's "Lala," translated by Mzia Urdulashvili, offers a sample of the modern realistic prose poetry that engages readers on their own terms. Then Zaza Bibilashvili's "Puzzles," translated by Manana Matiashvili, with its verses of two or three lines is reminiscent of Pridon Khalvashi and Terenti Graneli. Givi Chigvinadze's prose "To Recall the Forests and the Mountains" and other essays, translated by Lela Abdushelashvili, show to the reader a bit of that beauty of Georgian nature that has inspired artists for centuries.

Eka Kurkhuli's narrator states emphatically in nine lines, "I Am a Woman," translated by Manana Dumbadze,

I know, I am a woman,
I need to wear my modesty as a veil,
Though, love seems to have no limits
Of age, religion, place...I, the spring,
Drunk with the scent,
Will take off that veil...
And assure you, that
There is a woman,
Who loves you still - verily!

As if to proclaim the global awareness of and concern for humanity, *adamiani*, the collection offers Irakli Shamatava's powerful first-person "Hiroshima is My Name," translated by Lela Abdushelashvili. Any reader will be moved by the



account of a university student reflecting on the most catastrophic event of human history. “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.”

In all, this collection of poetry and prose by modern Georgian writers and translators is a treasure to be acquired and maintained by readers and libraries around the world and read from cover to cover to gain some appreciation for the richness of Georgian culture.