

**Maia Nachkebia**

*Georgia, Tbilisi*

*Shota Rustaveli Institute of Georgian Literature*

**From Dissidence to Presidency:  
Vaclav Havel and Zviad Gamsakhurdia**

By the end of the 20th century, fall of totalitarian regime in the East Europe and the former Soviet Union, was followed by radical changes: former dissidents came to the powers of those states. The paper deals with some aspects of intellectual and dissident activity of two important personalities – Vaclav Havel and Zviad Gamsakhurdia – before their presidency. In the paper is pointed out that at the terms of totalitarian regimes, activity of Vaclav Havel and Zviad Gamsakhurdia contributed greatly not only to the social and political life of the nations but also to the spiritual and moral revival of the nations.

**Key words:** totalitarian regime, Dissidence, “samizdat”

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, fall of totalitarian regime in the East Europe and the former Soviet Union, was followed by radical changes: former dissidents came to the powers of those states. It was namely at that time, that by the end of the 80<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 90<sup>th</sup>, persons, well known in their countries, Czechia and Georgia, intellectuals and former dissidents came to the head of the states: Vaclav Havel (5.10.1936 –18.12.2011) – in the former Czechoslovakia in 1989 (President of Czechoslovakia 1989-1992; President of Czech Republic 1993-2003), and Zviad Gamsakhurdia (31.03.1939–31.12.1993) – in 1991 in Georgia (President of Georgia 1991-1992). Both were intellectuals and former dissidents: Vaclav Havel was a playwright and essayist, while Gamsakhurdia – was a researcher and translator. The present paper will deal with some aspects of their activity up to the moment of their becoming presidents.

Vaclav Havel was born to a bourgeois family and due to his origin all doors of those high art schools he desired to study, in socialistic Czechoslovakia were closed for him. Irrespective of it in 1960s he still managed to link his live to a theater and started to write absurd genre plays, which later were staged on one of the small theaters of Prague. It should be stated that by the beginning of 1960s theater acquired political significance and it became the most courageous, daring cultural centers in the struggle for freedom in Czechoslovakia. Havel's plays used to caricature smartly the society and he used deformation of human speech for it. For Havel, speech loses the communication function and it serves not only to parody the language but the author parodies mainly totalitarian speech method and manner of using words (Tomas 1995: 145).

It is interesting that by the end of the 1960s Havel had polemics with the famous Czech writer Milan Kundera. Havel responded to his paper *Fate of Czechs?* where he discussed the fate of the nation. In connection with this polemics Havel states: "I have nothing against discussion about historic parallels and national history of Czechia, I don't like only that they serve shifting of attention from actual, human moral and political dilemma of the epoch, that is namely from the facts which create our history" and he used to criticize historic alibism (Havel 1986: 198). In 1960s Havel created experimental, the so-called Concrete poetry and he published a book under the title *Antykody* (1964). Poetry offered by him in the book elucidates critical attitude of a poet to the regime.

In the epoch of "normalization", in 1975 Havel wrote an open letter to the head of Czechoslovakia at that time, General Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party – Gustav Husak. In a *Letter to Dr. Gustav Husak* Havel touched many problematic for that time issues: he analyzed phenomenon of fear which was rooted by Husak's government in the society. Havel characterizes it as a system of existential pressure, which couldn't be avoided by any citizen and because of it every person was forced to play the hypocrite, which incited indifference; because of it people thought that struggle for anything had no sense and it was useless to fight. People were seized with apathy and they lost interest to universal values. To be quiet they fulfilled all political rituals and the government welcomed the situation that people thought only of their self and didn't pay attention to spiritual, political and moral violence. Order and calm

was reigning in the country at the expense of spiritual and moral death of the society (Havel 1990: 22). In his letter Havel touched issues of culture too. He wrote that culture is the major weapon of self-cognition for the society, which is absolutely castrated and reduced to the psychology of philistine, the average man. Havel put the question: "How deep the spiritual and moral impotency will bring the nation tomorrow by the present day castration of culture? (Havel, 1990: 38). In this letter Havel expresses interesting opinion, he writes that the power that kills life, simultaneously kills his self and because of it, later something not planned before by the official calendar will happen: history will say its word.

In 1976 because of arrest of members of the musical group *The Plastic People of the Universe*, Vaclav Havel, jointly with like-minded persons started a campaign to protect young musicians. It was after this act of solidarity that the public initiative *Charter 77* was created. Vaclav Havel was one of the first speakers of *Charter 77*. For years *Charter 77* worked actively and criticized the powers because of violation of human rights. In 1978 Havel wrote a broad political essay *The Power of the Powerless*, which deals with the possible matters of political regime, dissidence and *Charter 77*. In it, dissidence is characterized as political activity of the groups which at the terms of political post-totalitarian regime tried to lead political activity: the title *The Power of the Powerless* takes origin from it. Havel, in his essay *The Power of the Powerless* juxtaposes two notions to each other – "the life within the lie" and "the life within the truth" and localizes their conflict in human soul. Here the concrete forms are interesting which were formed in socialistic Czechoslovakia in "life within the lie". Havel brings a sample of a common citizen's loyalty in post-totalitarian state, that is in such system; this is a slogan: "Workers of the world, Unite" placed by a greengrocer between onion and carrot. This motto is a sign which contains somewhat veiled but clear notice. It implies: "I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace" (Havel 1978: 6). The greengrocer expresses his loyalty to the regime to show that he agrees to play according to the regime rules. But the ideology is based on falsehood and it works till people agree to live within the lie. Havel writes: „Let us now imagine that one day something

in our greengrocer snaps and he stops putting up the slogans merely to ingratiate himself. He stops voting in elections he knows are a farce. He begins to say what he really thinks at political meetings. And he even finds the strength in himself to express solidarity with those whom his conscience commands him to support. In this revolt the greengrocer steps out of living within the lie. He rejects the ritual and breaks the rules of the game. He discovers once more his suppressed identity and dignity. He gives his freedom a concrete significance. His revolt is an attempt to live within the truth“ (Havel 1978:18).

Letters sent to his wife Olga from the prison within 1979-1982 occupy significant place in Havel’s creative activity. These letters were published as a separate book by “Samizdat”. The book under the title “Letters to Olga” deals with the thoughts about the themes of art, literature, moral, religion and philosophy.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia was a son of the famous Georgian writer Konstantine Gamsakhurdia. Konstantine Gamsakhurdia was known for his national aspiration and from the very childhood Zviad Gamsakhurdia assimilated patriotism and love to literature.

As to the anti-soviet activity of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, it should be stated that in 1956 Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his friend spread anti-soviet proclamations and it was an unimaginable act within the scales of USSR. In 1975 Gamsakhurdia was elected as the member of International Society for Human Rights (ISHR-IGFM). In 1976, at the leadership of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his friend and comrade-in-arms Merab Kostava, Helsinki Group was founded in Tbilisi which was chaired by Zviad Gamsakhurdia to the end of his life. Helsinki Group used to lead active fight for protection of human rights, first of all for protection of the rights of Georgian nation, for protection of monuments of Georgian culture, Georgian Orthodox church. The group issued underground (“Samizdat”) publications, journals “Georgia”, “Golden Fleece”, “Sakartvelo Moambe”. At the initiative of Gamsakhurdia for the first time in Tbilisi Solzhenitsin’s “Archipelago Gulag” was printed by “Samizdat”, an art-historic work, which expressed repressions reigning in 1918-1956 in the USSR and which was based on personal experience, letters, recollections, oral narratives of prisoners and the author himself. Besides, Gamsakhurdia actively collaborated with the journal issued by “Samizdat” – “Chronicle of news

(editor S.Kovalev). In 1977 Gamsakhurdia was arrested for anti-soviet activity and for definite period was even exiled (Gamsakhurdia 2010).

Zviad Gamsakhurdia used to lead active research and creative activity. He is an author of many scientific works. He published significant scientific papers in Rustvelology, history of Georgian culture, theology, issues of American literature. He wrote verses and fables, translated works of Shakespeare, Baudelaire, Gogol and others.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia graduated from Tbilisi State University, chair of English language and literature and in 1966-1975 he was a teacher at the chair of English language at the Faculty of Natural Sciences of Tbilisi State University, delivered the course in American Literature. In 1972 he published a small size research *XX Century American Poetry* (Gamsakhurdia 1972) in which he considered creative activity of American poets of the first decade of XX century.

One of the main themes of his scientific interests was *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* since this poem created by Shota Rustaveli in the 12<sup>th</sup> century is a work expressing Georgian national soul which for centuries served to bringing up many generations. Gamsakhurdia, as a specialist of English language and literature, selected and gave preference to the following theme for his candidate thesis: *Issues of Rustaveli's World Outlook According to English Translations* and defended it in 1973. From 1976 he worked at the position of a senior researcher at the Department of Rustaveli Studies of Shota Rustaveli Institute of Georgia Literature (Kalmasoba 2004: 8).

His following works are interesting: „Translation of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* by Stevenson” (Gamsakhurdia 1982: 157-167), Rustaveli and Anton, (Gamsakhurdia 1984: 75-87), *Tamariani* and *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* (Gamsakhurdia 1987a: 212-249), *The Knight in the Panther's Skin and the Cult of St. George*, (Gamsakhurdia 1987b: 212-249). In 1980s he started to works on the theme of doctor's thesis: “*Tropology (Image Language) of “ The Knight in the Panther's Skin*“. On November 1991 he was conferred a degree of a doctor of sciences by the order of Honoris Causa. Study of artistic system of the poem *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* with the artistic-aesthetic point of view became an object of attention of researchers rather lately. Namely to this cardinal problem is dedicated the work of Zviad Gamsakhurdia “*Tropology (Image Language) of “The*

*Knight in the Panther's Skin*'. The work considered specificity of artistic world of Rustaveli; in it his world outlook and artistic methods are defined, hidden allegorical essence is elucidated, secret layers of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* are analyzed. In his work, Gamsakhurdia studies the issues by the use of symbolic-allegorical methods; these are woman's cult, cult of St. George, heroic initiative. Specific attention is paid to analysis of genetic roots of St. George's cult and establishing this cult in Georgia. In macrocosmic aspect St. George personifies victory over the evil, while in the microcosmic aspect it is a symbol of initiation – symbol of purification of soul. Gamsakhurdia considers that according to this point of view it is a source of the institute of chivalry and as a saint rider that suppresses the evil, is the first image of ideal chivalry of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* (Kalmasoba 2004: 9)

One of the important spheres of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's activity were his public lectures, which were very alluring and interesting for the society. In his lectures he used to speak about Georgian culture in a rather wide context. In the lecture – *Spiritual Mission of Georgia* – he sees Georgian culture as the mission of Georgia and refers to the coincidences between Georgian and western cultures. He says: „Creations such as *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*', odes, novels about knights in western countries, poem by Wolfram von Eschenbach, give us the hints about those deep relations, which existed between Georgia and western countries of that period. In particular the fact that *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* and *Amiran-Darejaniani* are very close to western novels about knights, although they are characterized by the original, extremely characteristic specificity and in it the mission of Georgian culture is evident. In these works traditions of oriental and western literatures are given in one integrity. Mission of Georgian culture and Georgia as such with the cultural point of view is a synthesis of western and oriental cultures and their presentation in one whole (Gamsakhurdia 2007: 20).

One of his lectures deals with Gelati Academy, the old Georgian Ecclesiastical School, which was founded in 1106. In his lecture *Ideals of Gelati Academy* he notes that “our ancestors even at the extreme political situations never forgot science, poetry, cognition. Even during wars they used to care about development of spiritual culture. Such was the history of Georgia. If we try to justify ourselves by stating that we are mingled

in the political struggle and we have no time left to care for science and culture, we'll betray our historic traditions" (Gamsakhurdia 2007: 60). Public lectures of Zviad Gamsakhurdia show vividly that they served to awakening of the national spirit and patriotic strife.

Cultural feedback Czechoslovakia – Georgia is very interesting: it should be stated that publication of translations of Vaclav Havel's essays in 1990, when Georgia was still in the Soviet Union, turned out rather difficult, since official press refused to publish such acute text as Havel's *Letter to Gustav Husak*. Printing of this translation was undertaken by a newspaper of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's party "Tavisupali Sakartvelo" ("Free Georgia"). Georgian translation of Havel's *Letter to Gustav Husak* in "Tavisufali Sakartvelo" was published under the heading "Famous Politicians of the World" in parts (Free Georgia 1990a; Free Georgia 1991). One more essay by Havel – *Crisis of Identity* – was printed in the first issue of the newspaper *Free Georgia* (Free Georgia 1990b).

At the terms of totalitarian regimes, dissidence activity of Gamsakhurdia and Havel and their intellectual activity had extremely great significance for awakening of the society. By their activity, at the situation of totalitarian regime, they contributed greatly not only to the social and political life of their countries but also to the spiritual and moral revival of the nations.

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## **Elena Ponomareva**

*Russia, Chelyabinsk*

*Federal State Autonomous Education Institution of Higher Education  
South Ural State University (national research university)*

### **Human, History and Politics in Documentary Novel of N. Mamulashvili „My Chechen War. 94 Days in Captivity“**

The value of the documentary novel by Nikolai Mamulashvili «My Chechen war. 94 days in captivity» is that it is a living testimony of history, a reflection of the political events of the period of the Chechen campaign, given through the prism of a prism of human consciousness, who has become a literal hostage to history. The work is a complex analytical material that combines objective and subjective approaches, documentary and journalistic beginnings in resolving complex historical contradictions,