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Frame stories in contemporary Armenian prose

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Abstract. This paper examines postmodernist influences on the vitality of frame stories in contemporary Armenian prose. Analyzing the socio-political shifts from the last years of Soviet rule to the post-Soviet era, it identifies key factors shaping the new phase of Armenian literature. Furthermore, the study outlines strategies enabling the integration of the frame story with Armenian postmodernist prose, encompassing incredulity towards grand narratives, intertextuality (including irony, parody, and pastiche), fragmentation, and metafiction. Through the examined frame story examples, this paper illustrates that contemporary Armenian prose is aware of the ideological-psychological reflection of national and global movements. It reveals that this reflection made the above-mentioned strategies preferable for Armenian prose writers, resulting in their frequent application and the proliferation of frame stories in contemporary works. This research sheds light on the dynamic interplay between literary form and ideological and socio-political context, providing a nuanced comprehension of the evolution of Armenian prose within postmodernism.

Keywords: frame story, postmodern Armenian prose, incredulity towards grand narratives, intertextuality, fragmentation, metafiction

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1. Introduction

When in the course of historical events it became vital for the 15 states to dissolve the political bands connecting them with the Soviet Union, and Armenia, which used to be part of that union, appeared in the range of the world powers with an independent and equal status, the birth of a new, modern period in Armenian literature was also announced. This was the main socio-political factor that became the borderline of the new era of literature¹. However, for the artistic

¹ Due to this major event, many literary critics studying this period prefer to call it Armenian literature of the Independence Period.

reflection of the Armenians' life experience, other changes were no less important: the Karabakh movement, the 1988 earthquake, the war in the aftermaths of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, the internal political upheavals, and the process of the establishment of free market relations.

It is noteworthy that these significant events in social and political life were the result of the changes in human thinking, which put the dominant mindset under question. The process began in the mid-1950s with Khrushchev's "thaw" overcoming the mood of fear left over from Stalin's times and the dissident movement and the activities initiated by the underground organizations¹ of the 1960s. It matured due to Gorbachev's policies of perestroika (reconstruction) that began in the second half of the 1980s and outlined the contour of building a new life, restoring historical truth, the perspectives of solving the Karabakh issue, and overcoming the fear of having independence and freedom without the protection of the imperial state.

Contemporary Armenian works also underwent the influence of some historical and social phenomena molding the modern world (globalization, rapid technological development, etc.). Those factors were crucial in shaping the writers' worldview and led to the transition from one significant cultural paradigm to another in the history of Armenian literature, regardless of their preferences and tastes. The year 1985 can be tentatively considered the beginning of the transitional period when Armenian literature freed itself from the ideological patterns imposed by the dominant socialist realism with the "reconstruction" announced in the Soviet Union.

Fundamental changes had already been taking place starting from the 1960s when the modernist trend started influencing Armenian literature (the representatives of this period were Hrant Matevosyan, Perch Zeytuntsyan, Aghasi Ayvazyan, Vardges Petrosyan, Hovhannes Grigoryan, Henrik Edoyan, Armen Martirosyan, Slavik Chiloyan, Artem Harutyunyan, and others). Since the 1980s, a relatively contemporary tendency has come to replace modernist thinking. It was postmodernism formed based on modernism that acted in response to and rejection of Soviet ideology and Soviet socialist realism, as well as in opposition to modernist models of the relationship between life and reality. However, at the beginning of postmodernism in literature, some works stood at the crossroads of modernism and postmodernism and are still wandering in this or that direction.

Without aiming to consider all the features of Armenian postmodern literature within the framework of this paper, we will confine ourselves to discussing the characteristic features that ensured the vitality of frame stories² in contemporary Armenian literature, particularly those in prose.

¹ The underground organizations operating in Soviet Armenia were Armenian Youth Union, National United Party (later renamed Union for National Self-Determination), *Hay Dat* (*Armenian Cause* in Armenian, later known as National Revival Party), *Miatsum* (*Unification* in Armenian), *Krunk* (*Crane* in Armenian), Karabakh committee (on the initiative of which the Pan-Armenian National Movement organization was founded) formed based on the Karabakh movement.

² This genre, as defined in literary dictionaries [1. P. 332; 2. P. 101; 3. P. 330], is generally characterized as a story within a story or a series of stories. From its origin, the frame story

2. The dominant in postmodernist Armenian prose

The starting point in determining the close relationship between frame story and Armenian postmodernist prose is what is at the core of postmodernist literature that guarantees the integrity of the system. The American literary critic Brian McHale was the first to discuss it. Relying on the cognitive–post-cognitive distinction made for art by the American theorist, composer, and poet Dick Higgins [4. P. 101], he considers the differences between modernism and postmodernism in *Postmodernist Fiction* noting that if at the core of the modernist philosophical system the dominant is *epistemological* problematics, then *ontological* is that in the postmodernist philosophic system [5. P. xii]. This means that modernist literature focuses on the nature and limits of human knowledge, and cognitive capacities, answering such "cognitive" questions as "How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?" [5. P. 1, 9], while postmodernist works foreground the diversity of ontologically different worlds, asking such "post-cognitive" questions as "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?" [5. P. 1, 10]. According to the theorist, "Other typical postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world which it projects, for instance: What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured? And so on" [5. P. 10].

These ontological questions helped to artistically respond to human concerns (unstable state of the surrounding world, loss of faith in the future, feelings of loneliness and alienation) about the shifts in world history. As far as contemporary Armenian prose is concerned, it is not difficult to assume that these and other similar ontological questions of the philosophical image of the world have been reflected in it even more because the writers wanted to represent their ideas about the "deCentralized." unregulated, chaotic, unstable and uncertain reality, considering the context of historical changes in the period of independence.

It is worth remembering Guren Khanjyan's novel *Send People Home* in which many ontological questions are raised: "Where did I come from?", "Where have I been?" and the most difficult one: "Where am I?" that "can also sound like this: "where are we?" or "where are you?" or "where are thou", also "where are they", and all of them are the same as: "where am I, what am I doing?" [6. P. 119]. All these queries aim at the perception of one's existence when vital orientations are missing.

genre, while preserving its general content, the main principles of constructing artistic imagery, and key structural features, has undergone significant modifications across different eras and literary movements. These evolutionary changes lead us to assert that the frame story, in contemporary contexts, serves not merely as a genre but as a technical means for developing literary work. It has become an inseparable part of postmodern literature due to its distinctive features in text creation and perception.

In this regard, it is also worthwhile to remember a part of the interview given by Hrant Matevosyan to *Grakan Tert* [7. P. 2]. In it, along with other issues, the writer also talks about Armenia which took the road towards independence and the Armenian people that were standing at the crossroads of the empire. The writer presents the Soviet years as the times that "have remained in human's minds as one word: there was an order." afterwards adding: "...the upper echelon of the rulers of the republic was the Centre <...>. There is no Center now, nor will ever be, shall we be able not to retreat here, be pure in front of ourselves, be afraid of the prosecutor of the republic, beware of the Armenian reader, the audience, and most importantly, not to lose our ephemeral grandeur of a citizen of the Empire by becoming independent, mere men of this land and water" [7. P. 2].

The following is also heard about the current depressing process: "You slide madly through situations and people that were once your life, you are on the point of perceiving and connecting again, but it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen, from the slippery slopes of knowledge you fall, your mad feet of the mountain of drunkenness, blasphemy, fear, and theft. <...> yesterday's day, which was woven with that hypocrisy, "political science" and other deceptions, and yet it was a humane, merely bearable life, and today's day of many sincerity is very ugly – animality, hatred, murder, robbery are walking in the squares with their heads held high" [7. P. 2].

As one can note, by raising ontological questions, we immediately find ourselves in the field of philosophy, assuming that "the ontological dominant of postmodernist fiction" mentioned by McHale is the same as the ontology of postmodernism. Namely, we get the impression that it discusses the foregrounding ontological issues of text and world and the philosophical thematics of ontology. However, the theorist warns that the above mentioned refers to "literary ontology." that is, to the postmodernist repertoire of strategies that foregrounds ontological thematics: "If postmodernist poetics foregrounds ontological issues of text and world, it can only do so by exploiting general ontological characteristics shared by all literary texts and fictional worlds, and it is only against the background of general theories of literary ontology that specific postmodernist practices can be identified and understood" [5. P. 27].

3. Postmodernist repertoire of strategies for creating new quality frame stories in contemporary Armenian prose

3.1. The incredulity towards grand narratives

In Armenian postmodernist prose, one of the strategies used to generate new quality frame stories is the incredulity towards grand narratives¹. What are grand narratives? According to Lyotard, these are stories that attempt to provide a complete, comprehensive explanation of the world based on universal truth or universal values. Therefore, by deconstructing the grand narratives, in order to understand the world and describe the reality of time, the works, in fact, question,

¹ French philosopher, sociologist, and literary theorist Jean Francois Lyotard was the first one who spoke about this in *The Postmodern Condition*.

juxtapose, compete or contradict either **faith-based metanarratives (myths)**, **rationalized complex mental structures (ideologies)**, or **historical events**, creating an opportunity for multiple sub-narratives within one book.

Vivid examples of literary works created by **deconstructing faith-based metanarratives** are Gurgен Khanjyan's "Kill the Savior," "Hysterias" and "Cursed Fig" that deconstruct and elucidate myths of *Pokr Mher* (Little Mher)¹ and Christ, narratives that are central to the mythologized thinking of the Armenian people and related to the issue of the anticipation of a savior.

In the domain of frame stories that deconstruct faith-based metanarratives, Levon Khechoyan's *The Book of Mher's Door* stands out as the most notable, characterized by its complex narrative structure. In his novel, Khechoyan endeavors to novelize the Armenian national epic, facing two distinct chronotopes and their characters. These chronotopes represent the temporal dimensions of the main character-narrator, that is to say a lecturer-writer, and the time of the national epic and its characters. With two plotlines and a unified narrator (the writer-lecturer), the novel incorporates two intradiegetic² frames within. One of these frames unfolds in the form of a novel, sharing the title of the work, while the other takes the form of the "Lecturer's Embedded Diary." Opting for the lecture mode of narration in the first frame, Khechoyan delineates two metadiegetic frames within it:

1. Text within the text, consisting of parts derived from the 150 narratives of the epic.
2. Text about the text, reflecting subjective interpretations of the epic conveyed in the form of a lecture. This second metadiegesis, in turn, encompasses numerous metametadiegesies that contribute to the interpretation of the epic.

¹ Pokhr Mher is one of the main heroes of the Armenian epic *Daredevils of Sassoun* and is considered an everlasting symbol of Armenian identity. After unknowingly fighting his father, David of Sassoun, he is cursed by his father to be heirless and deathless. The father's curse is fulfilled, as the ground can no longer bear Mher's feet. Sasna's last brave is imprisoned in Raven's Rock near the ancient Armenian city of Van. Since that day, Mher has lived in that cave. According to legend, Mher and his fiery horse must remain in this rock until a grain of wheat is as big as the berry of sweet-briar, and a grain of barley grows to the size of a hazelnut. This is to happen until there is justice, honesty, and peace in the world.

² Examining frame story from the perspective of narrative levels, Gérard Genette, in his work *Narrative Discourse*, distinguishes three narrative levels: extradiegetic, which is the narrative instance outside the main story and encompasses the narrator, along with any information or events not part of the main story but framing it; intradiegetic or diegetic, which constitutes the totality of events presented in the main story, incorporating characters, events, and environments actively involved in the main narrative; and metadiegetic, which is the story embedded at the intradiegetic level, essentially the secondary story. This secondary story, in turn, may contain additional narrative frames, giving rise to fourth, fifth, and subsequent narrative levels [8. P. 228–229]. Genette also discusses another phenomenon: metalepsis. In this case, the boundaries between narrative levels are disrupted, leading to scenarios where the extradiegetic narrator or addressee infiltrates the diegetic world, the diegetic characters penetrate the metadiegetic world, or, conversely, the diegetic characters intrude into the extradiegetic level, and the metadiegetic characters intrude into the diegetic level [8. P. 234–236].

The intradiegetic frame of the diary entries, delving into the lecturer's personality, mirrors the lecturer's being and his relationships with his wife, lover, girl, and familiar artist. It sheds light on the endeavors devoted to composing and completing the novel *The Book of Mher's Door*, encompassing metadiegetic narratives as needed.

It is intriguing that, starting from a certain moment, the boundaries of the textual components in the work gradually weaken. This phenomenon allows the metadiegetic character of Little Mher to extend beyond the confines of his story, making a metaleptic jump into the intradiegetic level where he encounters the lecturer – the one responsible for rewriting and analyzing the myth of Little Mher. This textual interplay, marked by metalepsis, serves the novel's overarching goal: to penetrate Raven's Rock, dissolve the boundaries between myth and reality, and unveil the enigma of the national novel's Little Mher. "In later years, this helped to understand that Mher was the spiritual essence of national memory in Raven's Rock" [9. P. 383]. In other words, by deconstructing this myth, Khechoyan no longer associates the Armenian salvation program with Little Mher. Instead, he perceives this character as a pure genome of Armenian cultural and spiritual heritage that will emerge from the rock after the second "Big Bang."

The novel *The Rope of Sin* by Hovhannes Yeranyan is constructed **through the deconstruction of ideology**, with a central focus on dismantling the elements of the "justice" metanarrative and examining its components (moral and legal). This deconstruction is aimed at challenging the prevailing mentality that asserts making sense of reality, at least from the standpoint of moral justice, is rooted in the Armenian identity. By "hanging" the collective sins of the Armenian people from both the past and present on the rope, the author shoulders the responsibility of seeking justice within his reality through the novel, promoting the transformation, recovery, and preservation of Armenian identity.

The story centers around the tragic murder of Tigran Terteryan, a young soldier, the reverberations of which extend across multiple generations, who directly or indirectly address the mystery of the murder with their narrative voice. Key narrators include the murdered man's grandfather, father, brother, sister, and the son and grandchild of the brother, each deeply engaged in an intense search. On a personal level, the sister seeks psychic harmony, the grandfather seeks the murderer of his grandson, and the father and brother search for the killer of Tigran, and the Smiling King. The latter, masked as Tigran, embodies a salvation model – a synthesis of the national Little Mher-Christ archetype. The son and grandchild of the slain Tigran's brother continue the quests of the Smiling King. At a collective level, the overarching concern is navigating a path towards state regulation, citizenry, and overcoming the crisis of collective identification. This is achieved through layers of reality, metafiction, dream, and exploration of the intricate relationships between sin, punishment, and justice within a unified discourse.

While they grapple with individual and collective challenges, a novel takes shape, comprising an extradiegetic level that includes three intradiegetic narrative frames arranged horizontally: "Son," "Grandson," and "Grand Grandchild." Within these, the largest diegetic frame, "Son," consists of four narratives with

clearly differentiated frames arranged vertically – "Father," "Grandfather," "Daughter," and narratives without clear boundaries.

From the contemplative efforts of a dynasty to comprehend "Armenian identity" and "justice" with the archetypal mask of the "Smiling King," the most successful attempt comes from the representative of the last generation, the grandgrandchild. She successfully overcomes the salvation plan that originated not from Tigran's father, but from Christ and Little Mher. Observing that the Smiling King's endeavor remains unconquered (i.e., he persists in Raven's Rock, or the second coming of the Savior is delayed), she seeks to relinquish the "dynastic" initiative. Realizing the impossibility of this, she deconstructs the image of the Smiling King, undertakes the effort of self-overcoming, leaving out the component of metaphysical gift, retaining only the component of the ideological project – the importance of each citizen's consistent commitment to the recovery of the impaired Armenian identity and the legal regulation of the Armenian environment: "There is no Smiling King, but instead I exist. I'll be the smiling queen because madness is constant, never-ending" [10. P. 269].

The novel concludes with the promise of creating a new anticipated Armenian reality through the destruction of the existing socio-political order. The likelihood of realization is significantly enhanced by the individual implementing it with a "transformed behavior and a reborn nature" [10. P. 251].

Remarkable examples of postmodern **references to historical events** (sometimes less significant episodes) are Levon Khechoyan's *King Arshak and Eunuch Drastamat*, Zorayr Khalapyan's *Basil the Great, Armenian Emperor of the Byzantines or King of Jug*, Vahram Martirosyan's *Disguised in the Name of the Cross*, and Vahagn Grigoryan's *Poghos-Petros*. In these historical novels the return to the past, which the literary theorist Linda Hutcheon calls "the presence of the past" [11. P. 4], is not nostalgic.

They do not simply tell us what happened in the past, but take an event, characters, and other necessary details from the past and try to subvert historical "facts" and rewrite them from perspectives different from the accepted interpretation. The aim is to reevaluate the past in the light of a dialogue with the present or, as stated in Vahagn Grigoryan's novel *Poghos-Petros*, to travel "through the labyrinths of the past and the present" for the sake of tomorrow "coming from the past and the present" [12. P. 5]. In this sense, the novel is gripping in that, despite its telling about historical events, namely from the capture of the Yerevan fortress in 1828 to the present day, and from the very beginning the reader comprehends that this work is not an ordinary historical novel. The story emerges through the imagination of the author, who says that he will lead the story from stop to stop. Afterwards the story itself is presented from the perspective of those who might have existed in the margins of the past. Moreover, analyzing the metanarrative of the 200-year-old relationship between the Armenian and Russian nations with the voices of the representatives of one

dynasty, V. Grigoryan essentially challenges the ability of the history to represent the reality and distrusts the reliability of historical knowledge¹.

3.2. Intertextuality: Irony, parody, and pastiche

The use of intertextual narrative devices; irony, parody, and pastiche, should be considered a consequence of the postmodernist awareness of the impossibility of erasing the past and the demand to reinterpret the reality by the confrontation of the past and the present and in the light of each other. It is worth noting that these devices are not aimed at creating work with satirical content, but at ironically reinterpreting the stereotypes of the past. In this regard, Umberto Eco writes: "The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently" [13. P. 67].

Ironical reworking with the frame structure in the contemporary Armenian prose can be found in the artistic space of Levon Khechoyan, Gurgen Khanjyan, Zorayr Khalapyan, Vahagn Grigoryan, Armen Ohanyan, and others. Ohanyan's (pen name Armen of Armenia) short story "Radio Yerevan," for instance, stands out for its ironic dialogue between the past and the present. In it the author ironically plays with various quotes taken from well-known songs and fictional works, mainly during "musical pauses."

The use of parody has also become very popular for various experiments in contemporary Armenian prose. The study of postmodern parody allows us to argue that it can either become a means to closely follow the texts of the past or take on the role of subverting them (in both cases, the presence of mockery is not necessary).

Quite a remarkable manifestation of the parody that examines the texts of the past is Aram Pachyan's short story "Robinson," in which the narrative of Daniel Defoe's well-known novel becomes an object of critical examination. From the very beginning of the novel, through the epistolary exchange between Friday and Robinson, Pachyan tries to reinterpret the theme of loneliness. While in Defoe's narrative Robinson considers his appearance on an uninhabited island to be a bitter fate in response to the sins committed, in Pachyan's narrative it is a conscious choice for Robinson (as well as other characters): the island is the salvation area, the comfort zone, in which Pachyan's characters want to appear to rediscover themselves and live in harmony with both themselves and the world around them. The problem, however, is the fact that the new shore of salvation is in the obscurity, and there is no hope that there is another shore left. "Don't waste

¹ This reminds Umberto Eco's observation on *The Name of the Rose*, according to which he wanted to write such a novel about the past, in which "...it is not necessary for characters recognizable in normal encyclopedias to appear. <...> What the characters do serves to make history, what happened, more comprehensible. Events and characters are made up, yet they tell us things about the Italy of the period that history books have never told us so clearly" [13. P. 75].

your time on that dream" [14. P. 17] says the hero of the short story, "You will be discovered and killed, wherever you go" [14. P. 17].

While Pachyan's *Robinsonade* is tasked to simply interpret the well-known text from the past in a new way, then Ohanyan's *Kikosade*¹ wants to achieve this reinterpretation through the text's destruction.

In the short story "The Return of Kikos," which is also in the book of the same name, Ohanyan deconstructs the tale "The Death of Kikos" presenting a unique reconstruction of that narrative in terms of content and structure by "reliving" Toumanyanyan's *Kikosade*. In the main frame of the story, the central character, Kirakos ("Kikos" for short), first through the intertextual reference reminds us that the story is a parodic interpretation of Toumanyanyan's tale, meanwhile realising that he is a fictional character. Later on, through self-reference and self-reflection he presents the author of the given work, Armen, and his and the author's motivation to create the story by actually deducing that he is a fictional character in this new artistic realm (also acquiring metafictional elements, which will be discussed in part 3.4): "For a long time, after him, I had been looking for somebody to tell the real story of my life and I found him at last. His name is Armen and he is the author of these lines. <...> My author wants to overcome the story of my death because he is convinced that the future success of his people depends on reliving Toumanyanyan's fairy tales. According to him, Armenian time has stood still in the following three great tales: "Panos, the Unlucky Wretch" is the Armenian past, the Armenian luck that didn't strike; "Brave Nazar" is the Armenian present, the Armenian dream and daydream; and "The Death of Kikos" is the anxiety about the future, and he decided to start from the end" [15. P. 124–125].

This is the reason why, at the next, embedded level of the narrative, we see how the author manages to interweave the *Kikos*es of two fictional worlds with the complex penetration of Toumanyanyan's tale and Ohanyan's short story. As a result, three years after his famous death, Kikos is born and enters a new fictional reality bringing along all the characters of Toumanyanyan's tale (the only exception is Kikos' father, whom the author brings, and when he loses the purpose of his existence in that fictional world and becomes odd, dies). Here he is introduced to the story of his death, which he first hears from his grandmother, then is given an assignment at school and has to learn the story about his death by heart and cry over himself incessantly.

Eventually, with a subconscious feeling he realizes that he cannot live a life on his own because he is a character of a tale by birth, and his identity, the key of his existence, in the form of Thickwood, calls him. He has the same nightmare over and over again: whenever the Thickwood near the fountain calls him, he climbs it up and falls down. He does not realize what it is until he decides to actually climb a tree. And when everything goes as planned, and Kikos can

¹ By the analogy of *Robinsonade*, I found this word convenient to use for the Armenian word *Kikosapatum* (narrative of *Kikos* in Armenian) meaning a fictitious narrative written in imitation of famous Armenian writer Hovhannes Toumanyanyan's tale, "The Death of Kikos," that deals with the heartbroken family mourning of the unborn child's death.

approach the origin of his existence, mount it and not fall, the author's goal to overcome the fear of the future is accomplished. But what happens inside Kikos? Climbing up the tree and not dying when falling down, he passes the border between the two worlds (that is why he does not understand if it is "a story, a life, a dream or literature" [15. P. 135] and no longer obeys the dictates of the narrative of his creator, Toumanyán. At that moment, Kikos feels that the story is coming to a happy ending thanks to Armen, and he is afraid that he may die of happiness now. Being well-conscious of the things (perhaps regretful) he realizes that in the case of his second death, a new author and a new world must be pursued, because the current author has already achieved his literary goal in this world, and a new meaning of life must be found to continue living.

As we can see, in the case of parody, the postmodern reverence (rarely mockery) for canonical texts and folklore of the past does not imply a simple imitation of the cited texts, but also a transformation to criticize, interpret, or through these authoritative texts to perceive the phenomena that concern postmodern person and overcome the problems. *Pastiche*, like parody, reverently imitates the classical works of the past. However, unlike parody, which imitates one specific text, pastiche (a French word meaning mixture of diverse ingredients) combines both one and more previously created texts¹, genres², or is composed by several authors (for example, the two short stories included in Ohanyan's collection *The Return of Kikos*; "Mysterious Breakfast" and "Flying Bicycle," the former co-authored by Lilit Karapetyan, the latter by Aram Pachyan).

In the period of postmodernism, when parody and pastiche significantly departed from their traditional form of perception and definition, it became relatively intricate to distinguish these two intertextual and imitative strategies from one another. However, apart from the main above-mentioned distinguishing feature, other characteristics help differentiate these two phenomena. While parody emphasizes the search for difference through interaction with a text, pastiche works by relying on similarity and correspondence. Moreover, as the French literary theorist Genette [17. P. 25] argues that dealing with past texts, parody has a transformative nature, while pastiche has imitative nature. For example, in short stories such as Pachyan's "Robinson," Ohanyan's "The Return of Kikos," and Voskanyan's "The Wolf with a Red Hood," the classic narratives that are the basis for these works are significantly changed from the original. While in Khechoyan's novel *The Book of Mher's Door*, the 150 narratives of the Armenian epic poem *Daredevils of Sassoun* are mimicked, analyzed, clarified, and interpreted without significant deviations with the complementary help of the used literature mentioned in the reference. As a result of these efforts, a new book has been created as an attempt of Khechoyan's reading and rewriting aimed at "approaching the spiritual depth of the national epic" [9. P. 12].

¹ In this case, we are dealing with what the French literary critic Daniel Bilous [16] calls the interstyle, not the intertext; therefore, only imitation of style cannot lead to having a work with a framed structure.

² It is also not possible to get a frame story only through genre penetrations.

3.3. Fragmentation

In the context of the creation of frame stories, it is worth mentioning another preferred way of constructing a postmodern narrative – fragmentation (only intentional) as a literary device to express the rejection of completeness, interconnection, linearity, and order, as well as the establishment of chaos, relativity, randomness, freedom, and pluralism. The widespread use of this literary device is due to the fragmentary nature of a modern person, about which Pachyan talks in one of his interviews: "Scattered feelings, memories, coffee leftovers, incomplete lessons, half-dark and half-light childhood. A summary of found incompleteness-fragmentation in the form of short stories, novels, essays, and featured columns, which will always remain as incomplete, and fragmented, as the consciousness, the mind, the inner will of the imagination are and against which I once unwisely tried to rebel, fight, live with a *vision of completeness*... To fight against something impossible to make it disappear at least from my life. But now everything is clear. We are together, completely immersed in the nature of fragmentation" [18; emphasis in the original].

To achieve fragmentation in the composition of the literary text in contemporary Armenian prose, writers have used various means, such as interweaving separate narratives, connecting different short stories, and cutting-up.

The interweaving of separate narratives can be expressed by paralleling different plots, using different narrative voices, having several beginnings or endings, imitating the forms of reportages, radio programs, movies, popular games, inserting articles from newspapers, encyclopedias, dictionaries, as well as through the diaries and correspondence (text messages, emails, and letters), etc. For example, Khanjyan's novel *Inside Out* was created by paralleling different narratives, in which the "inside" and "outside" stories, narrated by two voices, intersect. The story revolves around an anonymous narrator in his sixties, navigating the "way of finish" grappling with dissociative identity disorder. The inner conflict within the ego is portrayed through the expressive selves of *id* and *superego*, each taking turns to surface and articulate their experiences in unique voices. The two controlling egos lead concealed lives from each other, appearing in turns to fulfill assigned roles and articulate their experiences in distinct voices. For instance, the superego, deeming itself exhausted, initiates the contemplation of identity crystallization – the journey it has traversed: "There is, undoubtedly, a circumstance favoring the peaceful passing of the end's road; it's age, that is, the end's road itself, as you age, your hormones don't erupt, bubble, rebel like champagne on every occasion and without occasion—they are calm, the number is small, the process is lazy, the consciousness remains steady, functions in the correct direction, balanced, calmly summarizes, and draws conclusions" [19. P. 8]. In contrast, the *id*, driven by instinct and impulsive urges, resists accepting biological aging: "*Shave hair, dye beard, dark glasses on the eyes, jeans on the legs and hips, jacket on the waist, silver skull on the index finger <...> Ready, I'm ready to go to a rock concert, hike, crash, even jump... Yes, what if I'm over sixty, don't I have the right to jump?*" [19. P. 21–22; emphasis in the original].

As a result, two intradiegetic narrative frames emerge, both crafted by individuals of the same nationality, gender, and age but possessing distinct thoughts, character traits, and interests – existing within a singular identity. These frames are inserted into one general frame part by part, according to the shift of active selves. Horizontally arranged, they progress with parallel construction, juxtaposing different actions transpiring in the inner (id's) and outer (superego's) realms, creating a mirrored reflection effect. To underscore the separation of the two narratives for the reader, the 7 odd-numbered chapters of the 13-chapter text, forming the inner frame, are presented in regular, straight type. In contrast, the remaining 6 even-numbered chapters, representing the outer frame, are stylized in italics.

Voskanyan's "Yerevan Dreams: A Reportage" short story, as can be inferred from the title, is written by imitating the form of reportage. It is a collection of stories about five different persons' dreams and the impossibility of realizing them in Armenian reality, marked with the author's analyses, comments, and summaries. What unites these stories is the central event of the reportage, the visit of the American-Armenian billionaire Margar Peipunjan to Armenia, who came to realize his unfulfilled dream, namely to see the national symbol of Armenia, the Biblical mountain Ararat, where Noah's Ark landed after the Great Flood, as well as to die in his motherland. By choosing the citation type of reportage, the author gives the opportunity to the persons related to the central event to speak, by presenting both their own story and that of meeting Peipunjan in the last days of his life and even after his death.

Some works created in the form of TV and radio shows, as well as through game imitations, can be found in Ohanyan's collection *The Return of Kikos*. Whereas in "Red Beret" the TV show *Visit a Patient* grabs the reader's attention through the multi-stage creative and productive process consisting of episodes, doubles, running lines, and scenes accompanied by song, "Radio Yerevan" presents itself as a radio program created by the combination of a conversation, "music breaks" and stories dedicated to Yerevan, within the framework of one broadcasting. The titles of other short stories such as "Superstar Mario," "Hide-and-seek," and "Who Wants to Become a Millionaire?" easily prompt which game idea, structure, and even plot content (in the case of "Superstar Mario") were used in each of them.

Mher Beyleryan's "Writers' Affairs Commission" is an example of a work based on fragments and statements from fictional newspaper articles. The story touches on some painful issues for contemporary Armenian literature: the unhealthy atmosphere in the environment among writers and literary critics; literary mediocrity and their abundant outputs; the inability or shortfalls of literary critics to evaluate and analyze the literature of the given period in compliance with new standards; the ineffectiveness of the decisions made for the advance of literature, etc. All of these are presented to the reader through the application of references to the articles of various titles of the newly created newspaper *Vkayutyun* (*Testimony* in Armenian) of the Committee of Writers' Issues.

Khanjyan's collage stories, of which "Collage for the Poor" is especially versatile, have been created by intertwining, not only individual narratives but

also various phenomena with narrative value. Here one can find different extracts from several literary works (Grigor Narekatsi's *The Book of Tragedy*, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Toumanyan's "The Death of Kikos," and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*), an authored song-insert, a musical notation of one of John Coltrane's songs, as well as some chemical and physical formulas.

In terms of fragmentation, Hovhannes Tekgyozyan's virtual movie-novel *Fleeting City* is quite diverse. It is composed of an author's summarizing frame in the form of a postscript, in which two narratives are included: the first, told from the point of view and voice of one of the main characters, Gagik, and the second, from those of the other character, Grigor. The novel also stands out for its use of significantly different types of texts: psychological interviews, text messages, letters, and episodes of movies. Besides borrowing the opportunities provided by technological innovations, the book is also interesting in that it shows the communication preferences of a modern person (the young characters of the novel communicate with each other through text messages, unlike Gagik's mother, who prefers letters), the forms of writing (the modern Armenian text messages are mostly written in capital Latin letters and deviate from the spelling and grammar of the literary language, unlike Gagik's mother's letter written in pure literary Armenian) and makes us think about the change of epistolary style.

Pachyan's textual realm also has a quite complicated structure and hybrid nature of different narrative forms and narratives, in face of his novel *Goodbye, Bird*. In this novel readers come across journal notes; real and fictional letters; intertexts (from the poem *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, the song "One of the Few" by Pink Floyd, the prayer book *Book of Lamentations* by Narekatsi); an inserted frame created by parodic imitation of the style and genre of Narekatsi's book; the presentation of the imaginary life of an actor in a movie; discussions of texts related to the character of Christ, etc. Apart from this, *Goodbye, Bird* is a complicated braid of narratives from three points of view (first-person, second-person, and third-person). It is complicated, because it is hard to distinguish whether it's the same narrator who tells the story in the first, second, and third person, or whether we deal with different narrators. Pachyan wants to attempt to reveal the mystery in the afterward written on reprinting the novel but then backtracks on his decision, preferring to leave the question as an unsolved puzzle to the reader's discretion: "I had decided <...> through the attempt of the epilogue to reveal who was the narrator in the novel, why the personal pronouns are being constantly changed, why the second person is becoming increasingly dominant, why I give preference to You in the novel and, in general, the prose that I have written and write. I had decided to think through writing and I thought through writing, there is a possibility that the distractions that do not allow me to focus on the above-mentioned tendency come from the very midst of them, notifying that the studies have begun anyway" [20. P. 227].

Despite this uncertainty, we get the impression that the narrator in the novel is always the same person, only the viewpoints change. The explanation is as follows: a young man portrayed in the novel with the nickname *Bird*, was subjected to severe trials in the army (allegorically, in a closed society), and although five years have passed since his demobilization (leaving the closed

society), he cannot forget the years that left a profound imprint in his life, and finds it hard to get used to reality again and bring life back to normalcy. The young man is already twenty eight years old, which means that he is at the turning point of transition from youth to maturity, and if he does not find courage, power, and determination in himself now to settle scores with that stage of life, he can never have time left to himself, besides Bird (in other words, besides two years spent in the military unit in the army). The protagonist realizes this and decides to act like the German artist Albrecht Dürer when portraying himself: he tries to go towards himself "from deep outer space with a guiding mix of the mind and the senses" [21]. For psychological distance Pachyan uses the second-person narration, due to which, a twenty-eight-year-old young man, who is trying to mature, turns over his journal written in the first-person and from a safe space (because the second-person narrator is separated from the first-person narrator) dialogues with the self of the journal, follows his feelings step by step and analyzes what happened. Through this, he helps himself to realize the fact of liberation from the army, from the closed space, to forget the two years spent in the military unit, and to eliminate inner anxiety. In other words, "you" is the project of the overcoming of "I," that is to say, self-overcoming, and when depicting this process a link, the help of the third-person to move through the thoughts and emotions of the protagonist and his transformed self is necessary to communicate them and to make the dialogue more understandable. When led by logic, the last one of these several attempts (the chapters of the novel: "one," "two," "one," "two," "three") turns out to be successful. In the third attempt of self-communication, the voice of the traumatized self, Bird, is heard only for a short while: "I'm wearing my grandfather's worn woollen fur coat, I'm standing in front of a mirror, and with my right hand, like Albrecht Dürer, *I'm trying* to gently bring together the lapels of the coat" [21; my emphasis].

The third-person narrator then gives the narrative voice irrevocably to the second-person narrator, who gathers the courage to "gently hold the lapels of Dürer's fur coat" [21] with the fingers of his right hand. It symbolizes the fact that the protagonist has seen and understood what happened to him and now, with Dürer's determination and self-confidence, he is ready to close the pages of his youth, say goodbye to Bird, take up his cross, move forward, and have other times left to him.

The next manifestation of fragmentation is the connection of such frames of the work, each of which is a complete story in itself, and the internal connection of these stories must be found by the reader. For example, "Two Love Stories" by Pachyan comprises two frame-narratives "The Suitcase" and "The Box." What interweaves them is the attempt to reunite departed beloved ones in a closed space, a mental hideout. Another memorable short story by Ohanyan is "P(och)ATUM" (roughly translated to cutting off or docking one's tail) which consists of two cut-off tails-narratives. The story is also interesting in that the author offers two versions of the ending, two "tails" (this is one of the ways of interweaving separate stories, which was discussed previously), written by real readers, that complete the narratives. Moreover, the author encourages others, at their discretion, to write a new ending that completes the unfinished, "tailless" work, that is to say, to find new "tails." The ending of the plot looks like this [22. P. 16–18]:

TAIL A

author: KAREN GHARSLYAN, writer

When the student, feeling irritable due to a lack of calcium and recently formed, but not properly utilized excess of sexual energy, licked the short horizontal side at the bottom of the triangle, the other two sides became orphan and mourned the loss.

TAIL B

author: SONA, stranger

The teenager, engrossed in his first kiss, failed to notice that his newly chosen lover was wounded. She is in the chalk stream. All that was left of the Right Triangle was the broken corner. That day he ran out of love, and the insatiable teenager was drawing new triangles on the wet blackboard.

YOUR TAIL?

In the case of large-volume frame stories of this type, however, it becomes clear that the dividing line between a novel and a collection of short stories is blurred, therefore the fact those are novels is sometimes disputed. Such is, for example, Hovhannes Hovakimyan's *(Not) A Novel ((Ch)vep)*, consisting of four fragmentary chapters ("P," "E," "V," and "(Ch)"), which, in their turn, include many short stories. The novel has a frame generalizing the embedded short stories, which is separated from the rest implicitly by italics. In this book, as well as in Ohanyan's short story "P(och)ATUM," we find various manifestations of the interweaving of separate narratives, including two versions of the entry of the work: after the author's "unsuccessful" attempt to move forward with the first three paragraphs opening the book, the narrative begins anew.

Opposed to the method of fragmentation of connecting stories is the principle of scissoring, in which the entire text of the work is scissored, turned into small parts, and rearranged to create a new text. It results in the work consisting of many pieces, each of which has one or more words, sentences, or paragraphs. In contemporary Armenian literature, Pachyan's novel *P/F* was created in this way. In this novel, which is dedicated to his Zen-Buddhist teachers, Pachyan uses the technique of *koans*¹ to portray the Yerevan space. It is possible to get acquainted with the meditation and mental exercises about the past and present of the city presented in fragments, both through the linear and non-linear readings (a feature that is characteristic of most of the scissored works). Additionally, the author consistently employs lowercase letters as a stylistic choice.

story with nothing		today,
	and	in yerevan
here		the final tram was decommissioned
the story		
is over [23. P. 5]		[23. P. 6]

¹ *Koans* are short narratives, dialogues, questions, or statements to ponder, mostly of a paradoxical nature. They are used to teach Zen Buddhist monks to abandon their dependence on reason, encouraging them to acquire sudden, intuitive thinking.

3.4. Metafiction

The last characteristic of contemporary Armenian prose is metafiction or text self-reflection. Although the phenomenon is not a derivative from postmodernism, it's closely related to the latter, because it was during this period that metafiction became a regular phenomenon and attracted the attention of the literary community, leading to its recognition and definition¹. For instance, in *Phaeacian's Misfortune* by Diana Hambardzumyan, the reader's attention is drawn to the imaginative nature of the text from the very beginning of the novel, when the main character, Maneh, contemplates the process of presenting the story to be narrated and the logic of text creation from a higher narrative level: "This is the movie of my life and yours, which I wrote frame by frame, episode by episode..." [25. P. 15]. As a result of self-reflection, the fiction appears. Another example is the historical novel *Hiddens for the Cross* by Martirosyan, in which the presentation and discussion of the fictional character (literary character Matthew of Edessa) are carried out only at the end of the novel through two parts of colophons, composed in the names of Grigor Yerets and Sempad the Constable.

Of course, there are also many works in which the author consistently reminds the reader about the fictionality of the text, regularly throughout the novel, as seen in *Poghos-Petros* by Grigoryan. Here is one such verse: "We certainly understand you, reader, if this text of ours has been fortunate enough to be printed and reach you, then your surprise is quite reasonable: what happened, where did Nver go? The wife has passed away, the boy was born an orphan, we learned more or less about everyone's attitude, but not a word about his feelings, actions, the most we have learned is that he was not arrested; he even participated—what a success – in his wife's funeral. Is there nothing to say or mention, or, sorry, the writer's head does not know what his hand is doing. The writer is not impressed with his head and hand, but asks to believe that one does not act independently of the other. He failed due to powerlessness. Unable to understand what's going on with Nver, unable to commit the incomprehensible to paper. Because it is difficult to understand that Nver has become a different person. The outside is the same, the inside is different. But patience, time puts everything in place, opens the brackets" [12. . 403–404].

4. Conclusion

This overview offers a comprehensive exploration of how postmodernist tendencies have influenced the resurgence of frame stories in contemporary Armenian prose. By meticulously examining socio-political shifts from the waning years of Soviet dominion to the post-Soviet era, this study sheds light on the pivotal forces guiding Armenian literature into a transformative phase.

¹ The term "metafiction" was proposed by the American novelist and critic William Gass in 1970. Speaking about the fiction of John Barthes, Jorge Luis Borges, and Flann O'Brien, he writes: "Indeed, many of the so-called antinovels are really metafiction" [24. P. 25].

Additionally, it elucidates the writing strategies facilitating the integration of frame narratives with Armenian postmodernist prose, encompassing incredulity towards grand narratives, intertextuality (including elements of irony, parody, and pastiche), fragmentation, and metafiction.

Incredulity towards grand narratives emerges as a potent tool for dismantling established myths, ideologies, and historical events, thereby creating space for multiple sub-narratives. Intertextuality, which incorporates irony, parody, and pastiche, empowers writers to engage with the past in a playful and subversive manner. The use of fragmentation mirrors the disjointed nature of modern existence, challenging traditional notions of narrative structure. Lastly, metafiction encourages readers to critically contemplate the art of storytelling itself, blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction.

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated that contemporary Armenian prose serves as an intellectual-psychological reflection of national and global changes, employing these writing strategies and presenting a diverse array of frame stories.

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