

# CHARACTERISTIC

## FEATURES OF POSTMODERNISM IN GERMAN AND AZERBAIJANI NOVELS

### RASGOS CARACTERÍSTICOS DEL POSMODERNISMO EN LAS NOVELAS ALEMANAS Y AZERBAIJANAS

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#### ABSTRACT

Postmodernism's arrival in German and Azerbaijani literatures—shaped respectively by Germany's post-Cold War reunification and Azerbaijan's post-Soviet cultural awakening—offers a revealing case study of how socio-historical upheavals inform narrative innovation. Although previous scholarship has detailed the national trajectories of postmodern prose in each country, a systematic comparison of how German and Azerbaijani novelists deploy core postmodernist devices—particularly intertextuality, fragmentation, parody, irony, and play—remains largely unexplored. Thus, in this research is undertaken a comparative literary analysis of Botho Strauss's *Oniritti Cave Pictures* (2016) and Sabir Ahmadli's *Forbidden Game* (1988), examining how each text reconfigures classical sources and folk motifs into a metanarrative “play.” Close reading of narrative structure, motif deployment, and thematic resonance grounds our inquiry in both German and Azerbaijani aesthetic contexts. Both novels exemplify postmodern fragmentation and theatricality: Strauss weaves Dante's *Divine Comedy* into a multimedia collage—incorporating myth, painting, film, and music—to dramatize humanity's aimless descent into a digital “hell,” thus renewing classical intertextuality through ironic pastiche. Ahmadli, by contrast, deconstructs the Soviet-era “King's Game” into a series of ludic stages—each chapter title functioning as a folk-play motif—to collapse distinctions between game and reality, turning narrative deconstruction into the very structure of his novel. By highlighting convergences and divergences in German and Azerbaijani postmodern prose, this study broadens our understanding of how peripheral literatures internalize and transform Western avant-garde strategies. It suggests that cross-cultural comparative frameworks can illuminate under-examined regional inflections of postmodernism and encourages further research into other post-Soviet and non-Western literary landscapes.

**Keywords:** Postmodernism, German and Azerbaijani novels, Botho Strauss, Sabir Ahmadli.

#### RESUMEN

La llegada del posmodernismo a las literaturas alemana y azerbaiyana “moldeadas respectivamente por la reunificación de Alemania tras la Guerra Fría y el despertar cultural postsoviético de Azerbaiyán” ofrece un estudio de caso revelador de cómo los trastornos sociohistóricos informan la innovación narrativa. Aunque la investigación previa ha detallado las trayectorias nacionales de la prosa posmoderna en cada país, una comparación sistemática de cómo los novelistas alemanes y azerbaiyanos despliegan dispositivos posmodernistas centrales “en particular la intertextualidad, la fragmentación, la parodia, la ironía y el juego” permanece en gran parte sin explorar. Por lo tanto, en esta investigación se emprende un análisis literario comparativo de *Oniritti Cave Pictures* (2016) de Botho Strauss y *Forbidden Game* (1988) de Sabir Ahmadli, examinando cómo cada texto reconfigura fuentes clásicas y motivos folclóricos en una “obra” metanarrativa. Una lectura atenta de la estructura narrativa, el despliegue de motivos y la resonancia temática fundamenta nuestra investigación en los contextos estéticos alemán y azerbaiyano. Ambas novelas ejemplifican la fragmentación y teatralidad posmodernas: Strauss teje la Divina Comedia de Dante en un collage multimedia, incorporando mito, pintura, cine y música, para dramatizar el descenso sin rumbo de la humanidad a un “infierno”

digital, renovando así la intertextualidad clásica a través del pastiche irónico. Ahmadli, por el contrario, deconstruye el “Juego del Rey” de la era soviética en una serie de etapas lúdicas, cada título de capítulo funcionando como un motivo de obra popular, para colapsar las distinciones entre juego y realidad, convirtiendo la deconstrucción narrativa en la estructura misma de su novela. Al destacar las convergencias y divergencias en la prosa posmoderna alemana y azerbaiyana, este estudio amplía nuestra comprensión de cómo las literaturas periféricas internalizan y transforman las estrategias de vanguardia occidental. Sugiere que los marcos comparativos interculturales pueden arrojar luz sobre las inflexiones regionales poco estudiadas del posmodernismo y fomenta la investigación en otros panoramas literarios postsoviéticos y no occidentales.

**Palabras clave:** Posmodernismo, Novelas alemanas y azerbaiyanas, Botho Strauss, Sabir Ahmadli.

## INTRODUCTION

Literary postmodernism, arose in the mid-20th century as a reaction against and evolution beyond modernism, is characterized by several key elements. It embraces pluralism and diversity, rejecting rigid Western dualisms (e.g., male/female) in favor of multiple perspectives. Fragmentation and structural play are central, employing non-linear, disjointed, or self-referential narratives to undermine notions of objective truth or singular reality. Intertextuality and metafiction are prominent, weaving references to other texts and deliberately exposing the constructed nature of the literary work itself, often breaking the “fourth wall.” Crucially, postmodernism exhibits profound skepticism towards grand narratives (totalizing ideologies or explanations), promoting ambiguity, uncertainty, and a rejection of absolute truths. Collectively, these elements reflect the complexity and instability of the contemporary world and foster self-awareness about the act of writing (Duignan, 2025; Greene, 2024).

But although American postmodernism had a certain influence on modern German literature, it has been formed on its national basis and has preserved its uniqueness. The reason for this was the existence of the idea of the “German way” that has persisted in German culture for centuries (Norberg, 2018). The history of German literature also confirms that adherence to tradition and national-cultural sources is among the unique features of Germany. Adherence to tradition, to classical heritage is a characteristic feature of the national identity of German literature, and we can clearly see this tendency in modern German literature. German literature, which was divided into two

after the Second World War, wrote about the military past, state and personal responsibility, guilt and justification for what happened, law and conscience, but in all cases, it did not lose touch with eternal themes such as national identity, selfhood and existence. In the history of German artistic thought, the idea of the “German way” passes from century to century as a characteristic feature and continues as an urgent problem in the literature of divided Germany, as well as in the literature of united Germany.

Interestingly, the idea of the “German way” doesn’t bypass postmodernism that was formed in Germany. Richard W. McCormick, who studies the problematic sphere of postmodernism in German literature, analyzes the novels of Peter Schneider and Botho Strauss and comes to the conclusion that the prevailing climate in the country led to changes in life and art, individual and society, personal and political worldviews (McCormick, 1991). Writers who adopted the artistic and aesthetic features of postmodernism changed the artistic direction of German literature, moved from traditional narrative to the postmodernist writing principle, and presented the reader with works based on reflection, with multiple endings. However, it should also be noted that in all cases the idea of a “German way” does not lose its relevance in postmodernist novels. Thus, literary forms change, a new genre unity is created, and at the same time a German postmodernist novel with specific features emerges.

One of the leading representatives of German postmodernist literature is undoubtedly the playwright, writer and essayist Botho Strauss. In his works, the national code is deciphered, and the postmodernist writing method takes its place. The game concept of postmodernism stands out as a leading principle in B. Strauss’s novels, substantiates the idea-meaning of the work, and creates a special postmodernist citation. The fate of art, the spiritual world of man and his moral crisis in a post-industrial society become the writer’s creative credo. Botho Strauss’s novels “The Young Man” (1984) and “Oniritti Cave Pictures” (2016) are of this type.

In Azerbaijani literature, postmodernism emerged very late and there are many reasons for this. According to Abdullayeva, Azerbaijani literature was associated with the Soviet Union and only after its collapse did it join the new trends in the world. For this reason, “the Azerbaijani postmodernist novel is the modification of Western (America and Western Europe) and Eastern (Eastern Europe) postmodernist prose, which combines both models with a more diffuse zone” (Abdullayeva, 2021, p. 12). Ingo R. Stoehr puts forward a similar idea and writes that a new phase of postmodernism is developing more broadly

after the reunification of Eastern and Western Germany (Stoehr, 2001).

As a rule, when we talk about postmodernism in Azerbaijani literature, the first thing that comes to mind is the creativity of Kamal Abdulla. This idea is undoubtedly an undeniable fact, and for many years now, literary criticism has been writing in this direction, trying to substantiate the characteristic features of the poetics of postmodernism in K. Abdulla's creativity. K. Abdulla's novels "Incomplete Manuscript" (2004), "Valley of the Sorcerers" (2006), "No One to Forget" (2011), and "The Adventure of Secrets" (2019) are novels that contain the ideological and aesthetic features of postmodernism. However, we should also note that, as U. Babayev rightly pointed out, "postmodern elements in Kamal Abdulla's creativity are manifested in the stories and dramas he wrote before the novel 'Incomplete Manuscript'" (Babayev, 2021, p. 25). Thus, according to critic-scientist Asif Hajili, Kamal Abdulla's creativity is "questioning, searching and inciting to question, search and choice, both in terms of meaning and content, as well as in method and style, and ultimately, it is deep-reaching and future-oriented" (Hacili, 2010, p. 8). Before "Incomplete Manuscript", there was a stage of "Hidden Dede Gorgud" and "Epic in Mystery" in K. Abdulla's creativity, and literature lovers cannot help but see a new line in the stylistic and thematic problems of both works - the postmodernist writing line. The poetics of both aforementioned works and the last four novels are rich in postmodernist styles such as neo-mythologism, ambivalence or mirror division, metalanguage play, intertextuality, deconstructivism, dual coding, dialogism, intellectual imagination, etc.

It should also be noted that the first postmodern novels in Azerbaijani literature include Isa Mughanna's novels "Ideal" (1980) and "Hell" (1993), as well as Sabir Ahmadli's novel "Forbidden Game" (1988). Shamil Sadiq, who researched Isa Mughanna's creativity and discovered postmodernist elements in his work, writes that "Isa Mughanna's novel 'Ideal' written in the 1980s and the novel 'Hell' first published in the 3rd issue of 'World' magazine in 1993 are among the first postmodern works of Azerbaijani literature" (Sadiq, 2017). The same idea is expressed in a different way by literary critic A. Jahandir:

The evaluation of Isa Mughanna's novel 'Ideal' should be approached from several contexts: First, let's talk about the place of the novel in Isa Mughanna's own creativity. This novel is an ingenious editing of the novel 'Burning Heart' written by the writer in 1958. The first novel was written with a realistic-psychological, and the second with a postmodern thought. (Cafarli, 2014).

Considering the above, the objective of this study is to systematically compare how Botho Strauss, in *Oniritti Cave Pictures*, and Sabir Ahmadli, in *Forbidden Game*, employ the postmodern resources of intertextuality, fragmentation, parody, irony, and play to destabilize classical narratives and shape new reading experiences. To this end, a comparative literary analysis approach is applied based on a close reading of narrative structure and thematic motifs, identification of intertextual sources (such as Strauss's *Divine Comedy*), and examination of the playful materiality of prose (the "stages of play" in Ahmadli). A study of the historical and cultural context—German reunification and the collapse of the Soviet Union—is also used to situate each.

## DEVELOPMENT

### Intertextuality in B. Strauss's novel "Oniritti cave pictures"

Botho Strauss's novel "Oniritti Cave Pictures", published in 2016, has gained a large readership and, as a sample of a postmodernist text, talks about the decline of the eternal feelings of thinking, understanding and comprehension of the human race, which suffers from the lack of interpersonal relationships in the era of the dominance of digital technologies. This novel has a special place in the history of German postmodernist literature and it is necessary to consider it in the context of the problems of postmodernism. It is precisely this novel that clearly embodies the path of German postmodernism, which began in the 80s of the last century and has come to the modern era. M.O. Johnson, who studied B. Strauss's creativity, rightly writes that "Strauss's writing shows only an intellectual resignation and elite aestheticism" (Johnson, 2005, p. 17). There is some truth in this idea, because B. Strauss is indeed the author of the intellectual novel genre. Postmodernist novels are also examples of intellectual prose. N. Saul also confirms this idea from another perspective, saying that "intellectual formation, founded alike in the then dominant, alternative French literary theory and philosophy of Derrida, Foucault and Barthes, ... left a lasting mark on his work" (Saul, 2021, p. 151).

Now let's clarify the word combination "Oniritti". "Oniritti" means "oneiros" (dream) and "grafiti" (painting) in Greek. B. Strauss mocks the virtual era, turning it into an object of ridicule. The novel consists of fairy-tale images written in the form of fragments. The writer enters into a polemic with Plato's allegory of the cave in his work "The Republic", that is, his thoughts about "idea", demonstrating how painful the pain of thinking and understanding is for a person. Like Plato, he creates new images and expresses his

thoughts with symbols. The paintings in Plato's cave are only the external appearance of objects, while hypotheses, assumptions, and dreams are a cave full of doubts of human perception. The writer repeatedly calls his brain a "stalactite cave" (a karst cave with dripping water – M.O.), thus examining Plato's ideas. For this reason, it can be said that the "cave pictures" in the title of the novel express both his idea and its content. The writer seems to wander through a cave covered with nets, wanting to get to the essence of things.

His breadth of thought leads to the creation of small stories and tales, aphorisms, opening the way for new thoughts that are far from human eyes, but take up residence in his spiritual world. The writer puts forward ideas about myths and fairy tales, heaven and hell, the world of man and the animal world, mocks the person who yearns for the virtual world, and laments the arrival of holy spirits to earth along with the spiritual world of man. The writer shows that all the paths of human life pass through the cave, and as we live, we live with images and stories we create from images. Both women and men search for themselves and their identity throughout their lives. The images created by B. Strauss and the stories he tells are graffiti from the depths of dreams. Grombacher explains this idea in an interesting way: "While Nietzsche sends Zarathustra to the mountains, Botho Strauss is driven into caves" (Grombacher, 2017). That is why the reader gradually realizes, as if in a dream, that it is his own face that seems so magical to him. B. Strauss presents the present and past of a person with a world of images and deciphers the graffiti on the cave walls.

B. Strauss writes his novel in parallel with Dante's "Divine Comedy", bringing the thoughts in his cave closer to the meaning of life after death, the afterlife. He describes the passages descending into hell and ascending to heaven with postmodern fragments, and in this way presents himself as a follower of poetic texts, Dante's writings. Thus, he breathes new life into the tradition, transforms it poetically, and makes it accessible to modernity. Dante's hell acquires a new meaning within the scope of postmodernism, harmonizing the "Divine Comedy" with the aesthetics of postmodernism. B. Strauss doesn't refer to Dante's political views or his theological ideas; the writer likes the symbiosis of his poetic sense and knowledge, and emphasizes his admiration for the beauty of such a union: "Poetic understanding is the treasure of self-awareness, 'the knowledge of the cave'" (Strauß, 2016, p. 49). B. Strauss represents Dante's poetic worldview by the descent into hell: "indeed, there was no cult behind all this running and rushing, no secret rules were followed that would have been subject to revolution, and no invisible rituals

protected these continuous ups and downs" (Strauß, 2016, p. 54)

The unnecessary worries of a person throughout his life are transformed by the writer into the torments of hell; the absence of tradition and religious foundation in B. Strauss's work resembles an existence without a fulcrum, without a purpose, without metaphysical meaning. He shows that on the one hand, a person strives for complete freedom, wants to get rid of the taboos and rituals that suffocate him, and on the other hand, he suffers spiritually from its absence. For this reason, a person becomes a prisoner without a purpose. His desires are under the control of digital media, and it seems that this is why he is always determined to get something, benefit and have fun. B. Strauss creates Dante's hell with an allusive background, a postmodern hell, with the modern man's pursuit of wealth, profit and entertainment. Thus, the writer transfers the hell of the "Divine Comedy" to the postmodern era. As he himself noted, he continues Dante's writings. In other words, the "cave pictures" created by B. Strauss are a postmodern "hell". Also, in the novel "Oniritti Cave Pictures", memory and history merge in the cave pictures, Dante's hell now wanders through the labyrinths of memory and falls into the lap of modern man. The cave dweller, who encounters the spirits of the dead, "wants to die and be resurrected again" (Strauß, 2016, p. 7)

"Just look: the entrance to the cave is everywhere, on the road in the city, on the road to justice, on the road to love, everywhere disguised entrances, in the stones that fall in the face of human misery... Seek protection; go to caves with signs of fertility on damp walls. But hardly anyone would dare to enter a cave that deprives him of his sight and makes his heart beat faster" (Strauß, 2016, p. 8). B. Strauss puts forward the idea that, as in mythical rites, he wants human thoughts to "die and come back to life"; in other words, he suggests that being able to think is a torment, and that the thinking person is composed of the most painful "cave pictures". The writer shows that the labyrinths in the cave consist of risky descents and ascents, paths to the unknown. However, a person gains knowledge and experience on this terrible path. The metaphor of the descent into hell reminds the reader of ancient Nekia in Virgil's "Aeneid", Odysseus's journey to the kingdom of the dead, Hades, and Orpheus's descent into the underworld following Eurydice. B. Strauss's unknown paths in the cave are human knowledge, passages to them. However, in order to reach heaven, it is necessary to descend into hell, to establish contact with "deep memory". Then, living in the kingdom between heaven and hell, one can obtain the secrets of the universe.



B. Strauss's postmodernist concept is the concept of writing that resists death and opposes forgetfulness. For B. Strauss, the continuation of Dante's text in turn means the existence of memory, connecting the past to the present through the postmodernist text. B. Strauss's text is the "infinite textual unity" of culture. If the reader perceives the "Bible" from a different perspective after reading Dante's "Divine Comedy", then after reading "Oniritti Cave Pictures" he will also look at the "Divine Comedy" from a different perspective: "now my journey to the underworld and the kingdom of the four rivers will begin" (Strauß, 2016, p. 14). "Now he will witness those who run up and down in the fifth circle of hell, then on the mountain of purification." For B. Strauss, Purgatory is a limited place, a "subway station with weak lights" (Strauss, 2016, p. 256), and heaven is a place of unreal desire for the networked postmodern world, enclosed in a glass box. If Dante in the "Divine Comedy" appeals to myths that existed before him, B. Strauss also creates new myths, reviving existing myths, giving them new breath, proceeding from the postmodernist principle "the world is a text" (Derrida, 1998). Dante's ancient myths continue in B. Strauss's novel "Oniritti Cave Pictures", reworked with postmodernist artistic principles, creating the writer's postmodernist "hell".

The postmodernist "hell" of B. Strauss is the eternal anxiety of a thinking person, an endless, never-ending punishment. To settle into this metaphysical system means to be condemned to eternal loneliness. If after Dante's Inferno comes Purgatory, and then the existence of Paradise, then B. Strauss's Purgatory is replaced by aimlessness: "As in Burne-Jones's painting, I saw again the Golden Stairs and the angels descending. But the Golden Stairs was released into the black stairs divided into many forests, into the underworld of Piran, and the earthly crowd that I saw attacked the stairs, running from below to above, from above to below, running, pushing, pushing, knocking down heavenly desires as they ran, but they couldn't escape from the space itself. Now they are already lost, tired, now slowly, but forever running up and down again" (Strauß, 2016, p. 268).

B. Strauss laughs at the man of the modern world, mocks his pursuit of eternal worldly desires, shows his meaningless lives in shopping centers and sports arenas, and his direct role in the sacralization of the consumer society. He replaces the feelings of the angels descending the stairs in the work of the English artist Edward Burne-Jones "The Golden Stairs" with the crude desires of the human race, and if Jacob's ladder depicted by Dante expresses the unity of earth and heaven, B. Strauss gives a double meaning to Dante's image with his painting. If Dante's Purgatory shows the path to God, the connection of the Purgatory

Mountains with Heaven, B. Strauss turns this spiritual ascent into an aimless, wandering walk in the world. The writer shows the new history of humanity, and highlights the position that represents the worldview of man in postmodernism. Such a description is reminiscent of R. Barthes's model of an "echo chamber", where sounds are heard, but where they come from is unknown; in other words, in B. Strauss's "Oniritti Cave Pictures", the sounds of culture also merge, and one text comes into contact with another in the creation of a new text. B. Strauss revives the poetic power of the "Divine Comedy", as if creating a connection with the past, an intertextual dialogue.

Postmodernist play in S. Ahmadli's novel "Forbidden game"

As for Sabir Ahmadli's creativity, the date of writing his novel "Forbidden Game" attracted our interest. In the year the novel was published, a new revival, a new atmosphere was evident in the literary and cultural environment of Azerbaijan, and it is not at all accidental that the novel "Forbidden Game" was created in these years. The new historical circumstances created conditions for writers to write new ideas more boldly, to assimilate new trends emerging in world literature outside the Soviet "standards". It is no coincidence that in these years, Yusif Samadoglu's novel "The Day of Murder" (1987), Sabir Rustamkhanli's "The Caravan of Life" (1988), and Farman Karimzadeh's "The Battle of the Chaldiran" (1987-1988) were written. The novels mentioned are literary events with an exceptional set of lines, new content and form in the history of Azerbaijani literature. Undoubtedly, Sabir Ahmadli's novel "Forbidden Game" also belongs to this list.

K. Abdulla's creativity, which is unquestionable in Azerbaijani literature, and the aesthetic principles that manifest themselves in this creativity - neo-mythologism, ambivalence, metalanguage play, deconstructivism, dual coding, postmodernist play, parody, theatricality - these postmodernist principles are also revealed in the novel "Forbidden Game". In particular, the playful beginning and theatricality of the novel do not lose their effect in all chapters and are clearly manifested in the title and chapter titles of the work. Abdullayeva writes that "Such novels are usually encountered in intertextual play, mockery, and parody, which are the artistic paradigms of postmodernism" (Abdullayeva, 2021, p. 24). The points mentioned by Abdullayeva are also found in the chapter titles of the novel and in the idea-content of the work. The first stage, "Laldinmez" (the dumb), the second stage, "Burjutma" (walk swaying), the third stage, "Yanchikhdi-Golchikhdi" (dislocation of arm), the fourth stage, "Almaver" (giving an apple), the fifth stage, "Aghirlashma" (deterioration), the sixth stage, "Yungullasma" (recovering), the seventh stage,

"Kefingeldi" (high mood), the eighth stage, "Gedjagara" (black night) and the end of the game – "Takhtandushme" (dethronement). In these chapters, the problems of the Soviet village, presented through folk plays, along with current socio-political issues, aim to reveal the inner face of an anti-humanist society.

Emphasizing this important point, F. Baghirova writes that the novel "Forbidden Game" was a significant event not only in S. Ahmadli's creativity, but also in all Azerbaijani literature:

Thus, in this novel, the author concentrated the ideas he had previously put forward and applied all the artistic techniques in his reserve. In this novel, he comes to a conclusion that is paradoxical at first glance: in fact, the main essence of the world is play (Baghirova, 2015, p. 43).

One of the features of postmodernist literature is the principle of play. In other words, the postmodernist text is essentially a play. That is, in postmodernist literature, each expression is perceived as a "progress" made in the play. In postmodernist novels, game techniques are accompanied by game techniques at different stages of the text. In such novels, certain texts stand out as a play component, and this play brings together fiction and reality at the level of narration. The researcher who studied this topic writes that "postmodernist literature, bypassing seriousness, preferred irony and satire, and claims the emergence of a new type of investigation between fiction and reality. For this reason, fiction is an important technique in postmodernist novels" (Atamoglan, 2020). Clear proof of this is reflected in S. Ahmadli's novel "Forbidden Game". The postmodernist features of the novel are primarily manifested in its meta-narrative, in which the plot, motifs, and literary devices take on the character of a play.

Considering the history of the writing of the novel "Forbidden Game", we should note that the postmodernist novel had already proved itself in world literature, and its most beautiful samples had emerged. As we have noted above, new themes entered the literary community with new literary samples. Although the echo of postmodernism hadn't reached Azerbaijani literature, a number of its characteristic features are visible in the mentioned novel. In particular, the elements of the play are manifested at all stages of the text, starting from the title of the novel. On the other hand, the serious existential themes of the novel are also conveyed with such characteristic features as fun, laughter, and irony that come from the play. We emphasize this important point because in postmodernist texts, deep thought turns into a joke, seriousness into mockery, and the barriers between contradictory concepts are

erased. As can be seen, this feature also fully applies to S. Ahmadli's novel "Forbidden Game".

Postmodernist play can also be noted in relation to the genre. Thus, a novel that is already history and reflects a period of Sovietization can be defined as a play with history. The author himself says about this: "it sank into my heart that they played it in the thirties" and emphasizes the historical layer of the novel. S. Ahmadli finished the novel in 1988, and these years coincide with the period of national and cultural awakening and national revival. The author makes it clear in the first pages of the novel that he will talk about events that happened in the past: "As everywhere else, there are interesting games in our countries too. A department has been created at the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences to study national games. They collect, research, and prepare games of all the peoples of our country for publication". Regarding the game he will talk about, he says: "I have neither seen nor heard of it. Where and how it came to my mind, I still can't figure it out". He tries to arouse doubt in the reader by saying this, calling into question the reality of the games he will talk about. He plays with the reader, trying to convince him that the games that took place in the village really happened, but at the same time he says: "What is written in this article is a joke, a game" (Ahmadov, 1988, pp. 4–5).

The author tries to convince the reader of his objectivity, but at the same time he convinces him of the conditionality and reality of the events. As the chapters continue, sometimes the reader sees that fiction is real, and sometimes reality is replaced by conditionality. The author says:

Play is for children to break away from the obedience of adults, to become a child for adults, to get rid of care. The work of the world is play, they say. Perhaps, against the hundred kinds of play of existence, man also imitates, laughs and has fun. Perhaps, play is a separate way of understanding the world, of comprehending the world. (Ahmadov, 1988, p. 4).

Thus, the author admits that the heroes in the work never existed outside his imagination. This is consistent with the idea of the "author's mask" of postmodernism. In postmodernist novels, the hero doesn't obey the will of the author in any way, which in itself characterizes the conditionality in postmodernist texts, which stands out as the "author's mask" in the novel "Forbidden Game" (Malmgren, 1985).

It should also be noted that not only the author plays with the reader, but at the same time the heroes play their own games, involving the village population in this game. The first stage begins with the game "Laldinmez" and it turns out that the vizier Ger Khalil goes to the market with his lawyer, among the people, and:

the people of the market who saw the matter immediately fell silent. The condition of the first stage was set from the very beginning: 'Laldinmez'. No one had the right to speak or say a word where the king's man appeared. Ears were closed, tongues were closed" (Ahmadov, 1988, p. 6).

The king's vizier and his lawyer travel throughout the village, go around the market, test the cook Imamali, the miller Hatemkhan, and the herdsman Atdikhan. The villagers do not break the rules of the game until the end. "They went down from Bazarbashi twice in the afternoon, went out from under the plane tree, and wandered along the banks of the rivers... Everything was going on in its own way. The kitchen, the shop, the bakery - all did their work silently". The whole village played the game "Laldinmez": "not only the shepherd, the reaper, in fact, the sheep and lambs did not bleat, the cattle did not bellow" (Ahmadov, 1988, p. 21). This was supposed to be followed by the "Dilachma" game, but Ger Khalil said that the "Laldinmez" game went well and indicated that he was moving on to the "Burdjutma" game. According to the rules of the "Burdjutma" game, "whether a man or a woman, wherever he or she meets someone during the 'Burdjutma' journey, he or she should greet him and sway a little" (Ahmadov, 1988, p. 36). The whole village, including teacher Nazkhanim and her husband Atash, joins in the Burdjutma game. It gets to the point that Geldiyev and Verdiyev, who are driving around the village either by horse or by car, also join the game:

My wife Nazkhan, who was walking between the two men and had fallen into her own gait from the moment she saw them, now walked in such a way that one of her buttocks almost touched Geldiyev and the other Verdiyev. Perhaps sensing this, both companions shifted to the right and left, avoiding being seen too close. This made them look as if they were also swaying. (Ahmadov, 1988, p. 42).

The second stage of the "King's Game" ends like this. In the third stage, the "Yanchikhdi-Golchikhdi" game, the referees punish Raghib, who is "playing a game within a game." Raghib, who was caught in a trap by the king, the lawyer, the vizier, and the spies, is sentenced to "hang," and "hang by his feet" (Ahmadov, 1988, p. 54). The execution of the sentence takes place even though Raghib did not expect it: "As if his mouth, which was closed in the grass, rose from the ground, Raghib could say: - A slave can't be faultless, and a master can't be unkind!"

He saw that each of them was busy with their own work, knowing that the branch he was looking at would soon fall down from the tree, and his intestines and entrails would come out and spill from his mouth. "Oh, Khalil, that's enough!" Raghib, to be honest, still did not believe

it" (Ahmadov, 1988, p. 60). Ger Khalil-the-king plays his game in such a way that no one doubts that he is the absolute ruler. The vizier, his lawyer, and the slaves who accompany him also skillfully participate in the game. Ger Khalil plays his game in relation to the villagers surrounding him, and at the same time "plays" according to the conditions prevailing in the village. The only way to protest the anti-humanist conditions and social situation brought about by Sovietization is through this "game." One of the aspects that makes the novel interesting is that the village people also join the "King's Game" and unconditionally follow the rules of the game.

Thus, it can be seen that the game stands out throughout the work as an element that creates the text of the work and presents real life and fiction as a unified whole at the narrative level. The reader sometimes perceives the real event as a game, and the game as reality. The villagers, who follow the game and its rules to the end, also become addicted to the "King's Game" and become somewhat distant from real life. The author plays with the reader, giving him the opportunity to find the "key" that connects the nine chapters of the novel with each other, and reveals the essence of the "games" that the village and its population, which were victims of Sovietization, "played" together. "In the novel, the style of folk games and the narrative of the novel are so combined and so intertwined with black humor that the perceptive reader knows well what the work is about. From 'The Society of the Godless' to the famous 'Trinity,' the work reveals the face of a large, terrifying group. And the alternative to this is the folk game - the king, the vizier, the lawyer and the 'games' they produce..." (Literary criticism, 2015).

S. Ahmadli shows a surreal depiction of reality, presenting absurd reality through the "language" of the game. G. Guliyev's ideas about postmodernist literature also come into play at this point. The literary scholar writes that "what we consider reality is, in fact, nothing more than our perception of it" (Guliyev, 2016). The characters, their behavior, and the space of the game between them sometimes remain a mystery, and sometimes are presented as a surreal reality. In the game "Kefingeldi," humor and fiction lose their essence in the midst of serious, funny games, where terrible news sounds ordinary, and ordinary events sound like incredible tragedies. The reason why Atash behaved arbitrarily in the village and caused chaos was that he owned a large estate belonging to Mahal, who had been slandered and died. The gossipers of the village "made a vile slander against Mahal, and caused an innocent man to kill himself". Ger Khalil, who wanted to punish Atash for abusing the tragedy of Mahal, drags him into the "King's Game" and "does not want to leave him in

his trance"... "without waiting for the court verdict, he shot himself with a pistol in his house, and soon after his wife passed away. The children were left orphaned". Atash also takes possession of the house of such a person whose "children were left alone." The king, the vizier, and the lawyer want to "play a game of 'Kefingeldi' with Atash". In a place where everyone can see him, they put a horse bag on his head, pour clover, barley, and straw into it, and "feed" him. Thus, they play the game of "Kefingeldi":

Then pull this old horse and take it to the stable. There is as much clover as you want in the mowed area. Tie it there, in the stable. Let him eat the clover and be happy. On your way back, at the foot of Kurban Hill, put the bag on his head, ride it back. (Ahmadov, 1988, pp. 109–112).

## CONCLUSIONS

Both Sabir Ahmadli's *Forbidden Game* and Botho Strauss's *Oniritti Cave Pictures* embody the key traits of postmodernism—fragmentation, intertextuality, play, and deconstruction—yet each author deploys them in distinct ways to interrogate reality and tradition. In Ahmadli's novel, the narrative itself unfolds as a theatrical game: successive "play-stages" dissolve the boundary between fiction and reality, turning the "innovation" into a performative punishment. The silent carnage that befalls the village under the rules of the King's Game exemplifies how deconstruction—a core postmodern aesthetic—both subverts form and becomes the very structuring force of the work, so that the game is at once metaphor and narrative fact. Strauss, by contrast, reimagines Dante's *Divine Comedy* through a postmodern lens: his novel engages in an intertextual dialogue with Dante by weaving together myths, paintings, films, and music into a kaleidoscopic collage that reconstructs the descent into "hell" and the ascent to "paradise" as fragmented, ironic, and carnivalesque journeys within the modern mind's "cave." Just as Dante's love for Beatrice channels the spirit of his epic, Strauss locates divine love in the spiritual cavern of the subject, revealing the cave not merely as a philosophical topology but as a battleground between memory and oblivion. In both works, the postmodern novel abandons linear storytelling to become a critical game: Ahmadli silences the reader with his *Laldinmez* ("Forbidden Game") and Strauss confronts them with a digital "hell," demonstrating that irony, parody, and pastiche are not mere embellishments but potent tools for destabilizing and reinventing literary tradition.

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