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Sacred Silence and the Genealogy of the Nation: Religious and Metaphysical Dimensions in the Poetry of Nikoloz Baratashvili

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Abstract

This article examines how national identity is constructed through religious representations in the poetry of Nikoloz Baratashvili, one of the leading figures of 19th-century Georgian Romanticism. Through a text-centered analysis of four key poems, it explores how a religious memory woven around motifs of sacred silence, divine absence, and sacrificial imagery is transformed into a poetic narrative within a postcolonial context. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Søren Kierkegaard, Paul Ricoeur, Edward Said, and post-Soviet Georgian thinkers, the study interprets Baratashvili's poetry as an expression of an existential national narrative. It argues that the poet's poetics articulate both individual and collective trauma and that the nation is reimagined as a metaphysical community. In this regard, the study offers an interdisciplinary contribution focused on how the Georgian national genealogy is constructed poetically, the role of Orthodox cultural symbolism, and the impact of colonial modernity.

Keywords: Nikoloz Baratashvili; Georgian Romanticism; religious memory; national identity; postcolonial poetry; sacred silence; sacrificial imagery

1. Introduction

The first half of the 19th century marked not only a period of political transformation for Georgia but also a cultural threshold wherein national identity was reconstituted through religious and literary means. During this historical era, Georgian Romanticism moved beyond individual sentiment to become a poetic site for the representation of collective trauma and metaphysical quests, shaped through religious imagination. In this context, Nikoloz Baratashvili emerges as a distinctive figure who articulates both personal and national existential crises through religious imagery, positioning Eastern Christian mysticism between Romantic individualism and a collective sense of mourning. The religious symbols in Baratashvili's poetry serve not only as carriers of individual faith but also as representations of collective memory and historical trauma. They are also poetic structures that signify historical memory, national destiny, and cultural continuity. Themes such as "silence", "sacrifice", "cross", and "eternity" form a multilayered semantic universe when combined with religious resonances that have gained collective meaning in Orthodox Christianity.

Baratashvili's poetic language overlaps with Kierkegaard's notion of tragic hope, which marks the transition from esthetic to ethical existence. This approach will be further elaborated in the Theoretical Framework section.

This study investigates the forms of religious representation in selected poems by Baratashvili and their roles in the construction of national identity. The theoretical basis of



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this analysis is grounded in Said's theory of cultural representation, Ricoeur's approach to symbolic meaning and hermeneutics, and Kierkegaard's existential–ethical model. This framework enables an analysis of religious representations not only at the level of belief but also in the context of political memory and cultural identity formation. Accordingly, the religious, esthetic, and historical layers of the poems can be evaluated simultaneously. Poems such as *Merani*, *Khma Idumali*, *Sulo Boroto*, and *Pikrni Mtkoris Piras* are not merely narratives of individual faith; they represent the poetic memory of a nation's historical relationship with God. These poems are not only poetic records of a nation's struggle to confront historical trauma and reconstruct itself but also metaphysical testimonies. In these poems, religious representations not only assume a metaphysical role but also have epistemic and political functions. Therefore, Baratashvili's poetic practice offers a powerful theoretical and esthetic field in which to rethink the relationship between religion, identity, and esthetics in the modernization of Georgian literature. In this respect, this study positions Georgian Romanticism not merely as a local literary period but also a poetic site of universal religious crises and postcolonial identity negotiations.

Nikoloz Baratashvili (1817–1845), Nikoloz Baratashvili (1817–1845), one of the most prominent representatives of Georgian Romanticism, left a profound mark on the literary history of his country despite his short life. Born into a noble family in Tbilisi, he received both classical and modern education and at a young age became acquainted with the deep traditions of Georgian history and culture. His works reflect the era in which Georgia, under the dominion of the Russian Empire, experienced the early nineteenth century—a period when the redefinition of national identity, restrictions on freedom of expression, and political discontent were directly mirrored in literary production. Baratashvili's poetry, written in a romantic-melancholic tone, unites personal crises of faith with the search for collective freedom within national destiny. Owing to his early death, his literary legacy is limited in volume, yet his works function as symbolic texts that combine religious symbolism, metaphysical questioning, and national themes, resonating across generations and establishing him as an iconic figure of Georgian literature.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is shaped through three key approaches: Kierkegaard's existential–ethical model, Ricoeur's theory of symbolic interpretation, and Said's theory of cultural representation. Together, these approaches are used to interpret the meanings of religious symbols in the poems at both individual and collective levels.

2.1. Søren Kierkegaard's Existential–Ethical Model

According to Kierkegaard, human existence consists of three stages: esthetic, ethical, and religious. This study emphasizes the moment of transition between the ethical and religious stages, particularly highlighting the crises of faith that accompany this shift. In Baratashvili's poetry, the individual's relationship with God is interpreted through Kierkegaard's concept of the “leap of faith.” This leap denotes a movement beyond the boundaries of reason and ethical norms toward a direct and personal relationship with God. Kierkegaard's model provides a foundational lens for understanding the individual's existential conflicts and metaphysical inquiries depicted in the poems in question.

2.2. Paul Ricoeur's Theory of Symbolic Interpretation

Ricoeur approaches symbols not as single-layered entities but as complex and multilayered structures. From this perspective, symbols bear meanings at metaphysical, ethical, historical, and psychological levels. The symbols in Baratashvili's poetry—such as “silence”, “cross”, “sacrifice”, and “river”—create multilayered semantic spaces

where personal spiritual experiences intertwine with national history and identity. Ricoeur's theory allows for an in-depth analysis of these poetic images by revealing their multidimensional significance.

2.3. *Edward Said's Theory of Cultural Representation*

Said relates cultural representations to their historical and political contexts. In post-colonial studies, this approach is particularly used to interpret literary texts not only as personal or esthetic expressions but also narratives that articulate historical trauma and political resistance. From this viewpoint, the religious symbols in Baratashvili's poetry are associated with Georgia's postcolonial history and collective memory. Said's theory situates the poems within global postcolonial discourse, clarifying the relationship between national identity and cultural resistance.

In this study, the term "postcolonial" is employed not in its strictly chronological sense of describing societies after the end of colonial rule, but in the critical-theoretical sense developed within postcolonial studies. Following Said's conception of cultural representation, the analysis applies postcolonial theory as a framework for interpreting the ways in which colonial domination—here, Russian imperial rule—was negotiated, resisted, and symbolically reimagined within 19th-century Georgian poetry. In this context, "postcolonial" refers to a critical lens that can be retroactively applied to works produced during the colonial period, enabling an examination of how literary texts anticipate, reflect, or contest the structures of imperial power.

2.4. *An Integrated Theoretical Approach*

When applied together, the theories of Kierkegaard, Ricoeur, and Said enable a multilayered interpretation of the religious symbols in Baratashvili's poetry. Kierkegaard illuminates the individual's metaphysical and ethical experience; Ricoeur unveils the plurality of symbolic meaning; and Said contextualizes these symbols within historical and political frameworks. As a result, the religious symbols in these poems acquire meaning both within the inner world of the individual and in the collective memory of the nation. Thus, in this study, we aim to transcend the local confines of Georgian Romanticism, contributing a new perspective to global religious and postcolonial debates.

3. Method

This study employs a multilayered reading strategy across three principal dimensions. First, on the symbolic-semantic level, religious images such as the cross, sacrifice, silence, and eternity are explored in terms of their semantic depth and cultural-religious contexts. This analysis is grounded in Ricoeur's theory of symbols, revealing the metaphysical background of the poems through the multilayered structures of their imagery.

Second, at the level of poetic narrative and narrator's voice, the lyrical subject's metaphysical inquiry and existential relationship with God, as well as the mode of poetic expression, are examined. Kierkegaard's ethical-existential model—centered on the transition from the esthetic to the ethical stage—guides the interpretation of the poetic subject's inner journey, shaped by the themes of faith, destiny, and surrender.

Third, in the historical and postcolonial context, the representation of national identity, historical destiny, and the discourse of collective resistance in the poems is analyzed through Said's theory of cultural representation. This framework enables a re-reading of Georgia's position within the colonial networks of the 19th century via poetic representation.

This multilayered approach is designed not only to facilitate intra-textual analysis but also to illuminate the historical, religious, and ideological dimensions constructed by the poems. The connections forged by religious poetics between personal experience

of faith, collective memory, and national identity are evaluated in a multidimensional manner through the study's tripartite theoretical framework. The selection of the four poems—*Sulo Boroto*, *Pikrni Mtkvris Piras*, *Merani*, and *Khma Idumali*—is based on their representative function within Nikoloz Baratashvili's oeuvre. While Baratashvili's corpus is relatively small, these works collectively encompass the central thematic and stylistic spectrum of his poetry. *Sulo Boroto* and *Pikrni Mtkvris Piras* capture the formative stage of his religious symbolism and metaphysical inquiry, marked by personal introspection and moral questioning. *Merani*, often considered his poetic manifesto, synthesizes individual destiny with national eschatology, while *Khma Idumali* embodies the mature stage of his metaphysical poetics, integrating motifs of divine silence, sacrifice, and collective memory. Although other works in his repertoire contain elements of spiritual reflection, these four poems stand out for their density of religious imagery, their layered engagement with philosophical ideas, and their capacity to reflect the evolution of Baratashvili's thought from youthful uncertainty to mature vision.

4. Sulo Boroto: Religious and Metaphysical Symbolism

Sulo Boroto ("The Foolish Heart"), composed around 1839, occupies a distinctive place in Nikoloz Baratashvili's oeuvre as one of his earliest poetic meditations on the interplay between inner emotion and sacred meaning. The poem unfolds as a lyrical self-address, in which the speaker confronts the vulnerability of the human heart in the face of spiritual longing and moral uncertainty. Its imagery draws heavily on religious symbolism—particularly the biblical allusions to repentance, humility, and divine absence—while simultaneously engaging with metaphysical questions of destiny and the limits of human agency. Written during a period of deep personal and national introspection under the constraints of Russian imperial rule, *Sulo Boroto* reflects the embryonic stage of the metaphysical concerns that would later reach full maturity in works such as *Merani* and *Pikrni Mtkvris Piras*.

4.1. Introduction: The Emptiness of the Soul and Ontological Loss

Baratashvili's poem *Sulo Boroto* ("Empty Soul") articulates a personal crisis of faith not merely as an inner metaphysical distress but also as a postcolonial consciousness where historical-collective memory has fractured and cultural continuity has been destabilized. The adjective "empty" (*boroto*) in the poem's title not only signifies emotional deprivation but also alludes to a separation from divine presence and an ontological disintegration experienced by the national subject in confronting historical fate.

Accordingly, the poem merges the individual's disintegration in their relationship with God with Georgia's historical fracture under the cultural and epistemic domination of the Russian Empire in the 19th century. The image of the "empty soul" represents not only an individual subject estranged from God but also the suppressed collective consciousness of a people whose language, religion, and identity have been encroached upon.

During this period, Georgia not only faced the loss of its political independence but also began deeply questioning its religious and existential continuity. *Sulo Boroto* poetically expresses this multifaceted rupture: a poetic space where one's personal experience of faith intersects with the crisis of national identity.

Three theoretical approaches underpin this analysis:

1. Søren Kierkegaard's existential conflict between faith and despair, as articulated in *Either/Or* (1987a);
2. Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic method of layered symbolic meaning, developed in *Freud and Philosophy* (1970);
3. Edward Said's concept of postcolonial representation from *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

According to Kierkegaard, the path to the ethical self can only be reached through a leap of faith—a process often accompanied by God’s silence and a painful metaphysical void. *Sulo Boroto* is the poem of this silence: both the absolute silence of God and the inner echo of a people silenced by history.

In the Orthodox Christian tradition, religious silence is typically associated with contemplation, patience, and inner purification. However, in Baratashvili’s poem, this silence is inverted: it becomes the symbol of a self that cannot connect with God and has lost its sense of meaning. As Jaliashvili (2020) notes, *Sulo Boroto* constructs a poetic space that reflects not merely a personal state of mind but also a national existential crisis. The lyrical subject, caught between prayer and silence, faith and despair, and God and history, resonates with Kierkegaard’s concept of the “self in despair.”

From Ricoeur’s perspective, the “empty soul” is not merely a nihilistic metaphor; it is a symbol of repressed cultural self-awareness. The poem thus creates an epistemic field of silence where symbols speak not to God but rather history and trauma. The function of the symbol shifts from the religious to the historical, existential, and political domains.

Through Said’s theoretical lens, *Sulo Boroto* becomes not only a counter-narrative against colonial discourse but also a poetic reconstruction of national identity. Silence marks not only the absence of God but also a space in which history no longer speaks.

In conclusion, *Sulo Boroto*, in Baratashvili’s poetics, is not merely a moment of disbelief but a search for the lost elements of nationality, historicity, and selfhood. The broken link with God becomes a metaphor for the severed connections with identity, the past, and collective memory. In this sense, the poem serves as an ontological elegy that simultaneously articulates religious silence and postcolonial loss.

4.2. Crisis of Faith and Individual Despair

The dominant affective tone in Baratashvili’s *Sulo Boroto* is the internal dissolution of a self that has lost its connection to faith. This dissolution is not merely a religious hesitation; it represents an ontological rupture wherein the individual has lost the capacity to reestablish a relationship with the Absolute. The loss of faith depicted in the poem is not only an experience of void but also a metaphysical burden—a spiritual weight too great to bear.

The following lines reflect both the semantic and phenomenological depth of this inner conflict:

“How I bore my heart so heavy—

Always in pain, and yet I cannot believe.” (Baratashvili [1843] 2000, pp. 145–46)

Here, the transformation of the heart into a “heavy burden” is not merely an emotional metaphor but rather a sign of existential collapse brought on by estrangement from God. The heart ceases to be a source of feeling and becomes the center of a crumbling self. Faithlessness is not a neutral absence—it is a consciousness acutely aware of divine absence yet unable to reorient itself toward belief.

This condition directly parallels Kierkegaard’s concept of the “despair of despair”, articulated in *The Sickness Unto Death* and *Either/Or*. According to Kierkegaard, this is the state in which the individual has lost the possibility of constructing the self before God. The individual is conscious of suffering, yet this awareness leads not to transcendence but rather inward collapse and paralysis in disbelief (Kierkegaard 1983, p. 223).

The lyrical subject in the poem expresses that their heart is in constant pain yet also senses the futility of turning toward faith. This condition resonates with the idea of “negative religious thought” in Christian mysticism: God may sometimes be experienced only through absence, silence, and withdrawal.

In this context, Baratashvili's poetic language is not the "language of prayer" but the "language of silence." The poet does not directly invoke God; instead, he produces an interior monolog that echoes within divine silence. This silence can be explained through Ricoeur's concept of "double meaning" as developed in *Freud and Philosophy* (1970). According to Ricoeur, the transcendent can only be represented indirectly—through symbols, voids, and silences (Ricoeur 1970, p. 18).

Sulo Boroto becomes the poetic manifestation of this space of indirect meaning. The sacred emerges not through explicit religious declarations but rather denial, silence, and absence. Thus, the phrase "I cannot believe" (*ar mjera*) is not simply a declaration of unbelief but also a suppressed but immanent trace of the desire to reconnect with faith.

This condition aligns with both Kierkegaard's reading of faith as paradox and Ricoeur's view of the symbol as an "unopened field of meaning." The poem voices a religious tradition of absence: it is not God who speaks but instead the loss of God that resounds.

Moreover, Baratashvili's lyrical subject does not merely articulate a personal crisis of faith; he also gives voice to a historical silence. The cultural and religious ruptures experienced under colonial domination echo within the individual's dissolution of faith. Personal loss of belief thus becomes a metaphor for the shattering of national memory and the rupture of sacred connection—at both the individual and collective level. *Sulo Boroto* fuses these layered crises at philosophical, religious, and poetic levels, clarifying the trajectory of Georgian Romanticism as it navigates between the sacred and the traumatic.

4.3. Suppression of the National Soul: Postcolonial Meaning

Baratashvili's *Sulo Boroto* is not merely a narrative of personal unbelief; it is also a profound poetic lament for the cultural silence imposed upon Georgia under colonial domination. The "empty soul" in the poem symbolizes both metaphysical solitude and the suppression of national narrative production within a specific historical context. In this regard, *Sulo Boroto* constructs a poetic threshold between a personal crisis of faith and the loss of the right to national representation.

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said defines cultural hegemony as not only a form of political domination but also the seizure of narrative production—the expropriation of epistemic authority by colonial power. According to Said, such hegemony is not solely coercive; it generates a regime of "epistemic silence" in which the subject becomes unable to speak even in their own language (p. 247).

In 19th-century Georgia, Tsarist Russia's implementation of this hegemonic regime was not limited to linguistic and political suppression. It also operated as a power structure that suppressed the means of expressing national memory, sacred language, and historical belonging. Baratashvili's poetry gives voice to the internal echo of this silenced memory through religious imagery.

This dynamic is poignantly articulated in the following lines:

"In sleep I hide the cry of my soul—

No one hears my prayer." (Baratashvili [1843] 2000, pp. 145–46)

Here, the "cry" and the unheard "prayer" symbolize not only an individual metaphysical rupture but also the silencing of national memory. Prayer is no longer directed solely to God; it is also addressed to an invisible history, to a culture forced into silence. The prayer remains unheard because colonial domination controls not only bodies but also memory, language, and the relationship with the sacred.

In this poetic structure, Baratashvili deliberately reverses the expected dialog with the divine. Instead of the echo of God's voice, the echo of divine silence predominates. This transformation, as in Said's analysis of hegemony, results not only from political coercion

but also linguistic and cognitive suppression. The soul's cry is now "hidden in sleep" because the discursive ground from which it could be voiced has been historically destroyed.

As [Dzidziguri \(1989\)](#) also notes, Baratashvili was the first Georgian poet to deploy the motif of "silence" in such a radical way, linking it both to divine absence and national repression. This silence is not a passive muteness but rather a form of resistance in which a people deprived of narrative authority strive to exist through an inner voice.

Sulo Boroto, in this sense, transcends the boundaries of traditional religious poetry. It unites prayer and resistance, silence and scream, individual and nation, and God and history within the same poetic plane. When read through Said's theory of postcolonial representation, the religious symbols in the poem no longer carry purely religious references; they become epistemic counter-narratives that record the trauma of colonial memory in poetic form.

5. Poem Analysis: *Pikrni Mtkvris Piras* (Thoughts on the Riverside of the Kura)

Pikrni Mtkvris Piras ("Thoughts at the Foot of the Cross") belongs to Baratashvili's mature phase, where the fusion of religious imagery and national consciousness becomes more pronounced. The poem frames the crucifixion not only as a biblical narrative but also as an emblem of collective sacrifice and moral duty. Through the symbol of the cross, Baratashvili addresses the burden of history and the call for spiritual steadfastness, linking personal redemption with the endurance of the nation. This dual register—personal faith and collective mission—positions the poem as a key text in understanding his vision of moral responsibility under imperial domination.

5.1. Historical Context and the Lyrical Positioning

Baratashvili's *Pikrni Mtkvris Piras* (*Thoughts on the Riverside of the Kura*) presents a meditative poetic space in which individual consciousness and national destiny converge within a landscape immersed in nature. The Kura River—flowing through Tbilisi and bearing both physical and cultural memory within Georgian history—functions not merely as a natural backdrop but also a metaphor for spiritual and historical flow.

In this poem, the river serves as a field of imagery representing both the transience of time and the fragile connection between the nation and its destiny. According to Ricoeur's theory of symbols developed in *Freud and Philosophy* (1970), the Mt'kvari becomes an "ontological space of transition" that conveys layered meanings ([Ricoeur 1970](#), p. 312). This symbolic space becomes a meaningful locus that shapes both the reflective flow of the individual and the memory of the nation.

Confronted by this symbolic current, the lyrical subject enters silent contemplation. Though seemingly still, this posture expresses an inner movement—a spiritual vibration seeking confrontation with fate and God. This echoes Kierkegaard's concept of "existential melancholy" described in *Either/Or* (1987a): the subject desires to move toward God, yet this movement requires abandoning the esthetic self and assuming ethical responsibility.

Throughout the poem, the river addresses the self as a bearer of the past and future. Baratashvili's lyrical positioning overlaps with Kierkegaard's understanding of ethical existence as the subject's reconstruction of self in relation to God. This metaphysical dialog with nature weaves together themes of inner dissolution, death, and historical responsibility.

[Jaliashvili \(2012\)](#) offers a clarifying interpretation of this poem. She contends that *Pikrni Mtkvris Piras* is not merely an esthetic withdrawal inward but instead—as Kierkegaard defines it—a process in which the self restructures itself within the interior space in response to God's absence. [Jaliashvili \(2020\)](#) also underscores the metaphysical depth of the lyrical subject, which becomes conflated with the nation's repressed historical memory. Thus,

the Mt'kvari functions not just as a geographic feature but also a poetic conduit for time, memory, and prayer. The lyrical subject positioned along the riverbank seeks not only the past but also a connection with God. However, the response to this yearning is silence. Unlike in *Sulo Boroto*, this silence is not one of disbelief but rather patience, waiting, and contemplation.

Within this framework, *Pikrni Mtkoris Piras* emerges as not simply a romantic Georgian poem oriented toward nature but rather a multilayered poetic inquiry where national consciousness intersects with individual ethical responsibility. The Mt'kvari becomes both the vessel of the past and the symbolic channel of an inner journey toward God. This poem stands out as a metaphysical text that bridges reflection with nature, confrontation with history, and communion with the divine.

5.2. The River Image and the Religious Perception of Time

The opening nature imagery in *Pikrni Mtkoris Piras* initially evokes pastoral tranquility. However, embedded within its deeper structure lies an intense existential and religious inquiry concerning both time and belief. At the heart of this inquiry is the Kura River, which is transformed from a natural element into a silent bearer of the sacred, of memory, and religious rupture.

One of the poem's central lines encapsulates this transformation:

"The Mtkvari flows in silence, like a soul unwashed from sin." (Baratashvili [1837] 2000, pp. 145–46)

Here, the river transcends conventional pastoral representations, becoming the symbol of a soul steeped in sin yet unpurified—a consciousness burdened with guilt but incapable of spiritual cleansing. The Mt'kvari, once a baptismal river associated with Christian purification, is rendered in the poem as a metaphysical void devoid of meaning.

Ricoeur's theory of multilayered symbolism in *Freud and Philosophy* (1970) helps conceptualize this transformation. According to Ricoeur, a symbol represents both the visible and invisible; "polysemy" is essential to its nature (Ricoeur 1970, p. 312). Within this framework, the Mt'kvari River acquires a dual symbolic structure:

1. **Potential for Purification:** In the Orthodox Christian tradition, rivers are linked to baptism—the site of spiritual cleansing and renewed connection with God.
2. **Failure to Purify:** In this poem, however, the river is portrayed as a soul that remains "unwashed from sin", reflecting not only a crisis of individual faith but also a cultural and religious rupture. The river becomes a passive witness to spiritual disintegration.

This duality resonates with Kierkegaard's account of the transition from the esthetic to the ethical sphere. For Kierkegaard, the esthetic life vacillates between beauty and pain, and only through a leap to the ethical can the individual attain true selfhood (Kierkegaard 1992, p. 37). In *Pikrni Mtkoris Piras*, however, this leap does not occur. The Mt'kvari fails to serve as a sacred space, enabling transition—it instead bears only the flow of impermanence and helplessness.

This rupture can also be read as a metaphor for postcolonial silence. The quiet current of the river becomes the suppressed voice of a nation whose historical continuity has been disrupted. Collective memory, silenced by colonial trauma, permeates the stillness of the Mt'kvari's surface. Baptism is no longer possible—because the historical and epistemic grounds for engaging the sacred have been destroyed. Thus, this failure to purify is not just a personal crisis but also a national trauma. The metaphysical continuity of Georgian identity is symbolically effaced in the river's flow. Ricoeur's concept of the "dissolution of meaning" becomes manifest here: the symbol has lost its function, reduced to a hollow form. This symbolic structure also emerges in the lyrical subject's relationship with time. Time here is not a transformative force like in baptism but rather erosive, disorienting, and

decaying. The river carries not the renewing current of faith but the faint, silent pulse of denial, forgetfulness, and despair. Accordingly, in *Pikrni Mtkoris Piras*, the Mt'kvari is not merely a geographic location—it is a poetic metaphor for spiritual and historical drift, the withdrawal of the sacred, and postcolonial fracture. The river cannot be cleansed because access to the sacred is no longer possible. In this poetic dimension where time signifies erosion rather than sanctified transformation, the poem becomes a kind of “modern allegory of unbaptizability”.

5.3. The Transformation of Individual Suffering into Collective Memory

In *Pikrni Mtkoris Piras*, the lyrical subject not only articulates internal turmoil but also transposes this individual emotional state onto a collective plane interwoven with the historical and cultural memory of national destiny. The poem's central metaphysical concern becomes evident at the point where individual existence intersects with national fate: as the subject turns inward, they simultaneously reach outward to their people, contemplating personal mortality while giving voice to the nation's transience. This religious and poetic interlacing endows the poem with existential depth.

This condition is most poignantly revealed in the following lines:

“I weep... but in my tears, the pain of another is mixed.” (Baratashvili [1843] 2000, pp. 145–46)

Here, it is not only the individual who weeps; the tears carry personal shock, but they also bear the weight of collective and historical suffering. The phrase “the pain of another” evokes more than empathic sensitivity—it becomes the poetic projection of the Georgian people's historical pain and collective memory. The subject weeps not only for themselves but also for their nation. Thus, the poem transforms into more than an elegy—it becomes a national lament.

This transformation is directly linked to Said's concept of the “reconstructive power of representation” developed in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). According to Said, literary texts are not only vessels of personal emotion but also carriers of repressed or marginalized historical narratives. In this context, Baratashvili's lyrical subject functions as a bearer of both personal and postcolonial memory. Tears become not merely an emotional expression but epistemic testimony—a poetic articulation of the forgotten or silenced. The lyrical self becomes not only one who feels but one who bears witness in silence; emotion becomes an ethical rewriting of historical memory.

The density of meaning established in the poem is further deepened by Kierkegaard's typology of the “suffering individual.” Kierkegaard argues that the individual, in seeking meaning before God, inevitably encounters suffering. This suffering is not merely physical or emotional—it is an ontological and metaphysical void. In this void, the individual confronts the silence of God and must reconstruct their identity and responsibility and search for meaning within that silence (Kierkegaard 1987b, p. 223). Jaliashvili (2020) reads the line precisely in this context: the lyrical self becomes not merely a sufferer but a witness who speaks through pain in the absence of God (Jaliashvili 2020, p. 4).

This multilayered testimony gains clarity when considered alongside Ricoeur's theories of symbolic narrative and memory. Ricoeur posits that memory does not merely represent the past but instead constitutes an ethical reconstruction of it. The tears in the poem are not simply reactions—they are acts of remembrance, poetic tools for writing history through emotion, rendering visible the tragedy of a silenced people. In this sense, *Pikrni Mtkoris Piras* is not merely a personal outpouring; it functions as a religious-political space where memory and representation are reconfigured.

Viewed from this angle, the poem's metaphysical inquiry moves from the individual self to the national identity. The poet's tears become a silent elegy for Georgia's colonial

past, its cultural repression, and a history echoed in the silence of God. *Pikrni Mtkoris Piras* thus emerges as a poetic structure where emotion becomes politicized, esthetics merges with religious thought, and individuality is enmeshed with collectivity. In this regard, the poem is not only a lyrical text but also a poetic memory shaped by the tragic, religious, and historical trajectories of Georgian national consciousness.

6. Poetic Analysis: Merani

Merani ("The Steed") is often regarded as Baratashvili's poetic manifesto, encapsulating his philosophical reflections on destiny, freedom, and the ultimate purpose of national struggle. The galloping horse becomes a metaphor for the unrelenting drive toward a predestined end, embodying both the courage and the inevitability of sacrifice. Religious imagery interlaces with Romantic heroism, situating the poem within a broader metaphysical framework where personal and national destinies are inseparably intertwined. Written during a period of intense political repression, *Merani* projects a vision of hope grounded in the eschatological belief that suffering can be transfigured into collective renewal.

One of Baratashvili's most frequently cited poems, *Merani* represents the apex of Georgian Romanticism in both metaphysical and national imagination. The poem explores the tragic equilibrium between individual faith and national destiny through the themes of messianic sacrifice and ethical responsibility. In this respect, *Merani* is not merely a personal journey of faith but also an allegorical text in which Georgian national identity is elevated to a religious representation under colonial conditions.

This section analyzes the poem through Kierkegaard's model of existential ethics, Ricoeur's symbolic hermeneutics, and Said's theory of postcolonial representation, thereby unpacking the multi-layered structure of *Merani* on both individual and collective levels. The "divine horse" in the poem is not only a metaphor but also a poetic vessel for ethical transformation, messianic self-sacrifice, and the hope of national resurrection.

6.1. The Resurrection of the Messianic Spirit: The Divine Horse and Sacrifice

Merani should be regarded not only as one of the most original metaphysical texts of Georgian literature but also as a prominent work within modern Christian-Romantic poetics. In a structure where personal sacrifice intertwines with national salvation, the poem stages the poetic resurrection of the messianic spirit. Within this framework, the lyrical subject is not only an individual turning toward God but also a scapegoated savior figure who bears the sins of the people and shoulders the burden of collective destiny.

Although *Merani* literally means "horse", in the textual context, it is laden with eschatological and symbolic density. The divine horse is not merely a means of transportation but a metaphysical vehicle propelling one toward God, eternity, and annihilation. In this sense, *Merani* becomes an allegorical counterpart to the "horse of death" in Rumi's work or the figures of eternity in Blake's work.

One of the central lines of the poem—

"I can no longer endure the vileness of this world." (Baratashvili [1842] 2000, pp. 141–43)

—corresponds precisely to the alienation of the self-trapped within the esthetic stage, as defined by Kierkegaard in *Either/Or* (1987a) and *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849). According to Kierkegaard, the esthetic mode of existence is governed by false pleasures, fleeting interests, and worldly sensitivities; true meaning and salvation become possible only through a transition to the "ethical life" (Kierkegaard 1992, p. 81). Baratashvili's subject, too, breaks away from the esthetic realm and becomes an ethical being willing to suffer in the name of God. Thus, the poem becomes a dramatic narrative of the movement from the esthetic to the ethical, from worldly revulsion to divine calling.

Undoubtedly, the symbolic vehicle of this transformation is *Merani*. According to Ricoeur's theory of symbolic interpretation, this horse is not simply a tangible object but a multi-signifying domain that points beyond itself (Ricoeur 1970, p. 312). *Merani* is the bearer not only of personal spiritual orientation but also of the allegorical embodiment of national liberation. The metaphysical journey undertaken on the divine horse is, in fact, an act of sacrifice unto death. In this way, the poem becomes an esthetic rewriting of the Christian concept of *imitatio Christi*: the subject suffers on behalf of the people, sacrificing himself, and the meaning of this sacrifice resonates only in the divine realm.

This metaphysical structure also resonates with the "narratives of redemption" analyzed by Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). According to Said, colonized nations generate their historical modes of resistance on a metaphysical level through literary narrative. In this sense, *Merani* is not simply a poem of personal salvation but a religious representation that seeks to imbue Georgia's historical fate with divine meaning. The lyrical subject's ride toward God is not only an act of personal faith but also a divine protest against national destiny.

At the heart of this poetic protest lies a subject who is not only sacrificial but also a conscious and responsible ethical self. The subject who rides the divine horse not only transcends temporal constraints but also attempts to liberate himself from historical chains.

From this perspective, *Merani* is not merely a poem of faith; it is a myth of redemption wherein a messianic national imagination is poetically constructed through religious symbols. The horse figure becomes an esthetic vehicle that enables both the ethical transformation of individual existence and the transference of national destiny into the divine realm. In this context, Baratashvili emerges not only as a poet but also as a metaphysical witness and poetic savior who represents the historical tragedy of his people on a divine plane.

6.2. *The Leap of Faith and Existential Sacrifice: The Image of "God's Horseman"*

In *Merani*, the lyrical subject embraces absolute sacrifice in the name of God. As the horseman rides into darkness and the unknown, he links his personal action to a divine destiny. This poetic stance directly corresponds to Kierkegaard's concept of the "leap of faith" developed in *Fear and Trembling* (1987b): the individual suspends the limits of reason and ethics and submits to the command of the Absolute.

The following lines express this radical submission most clearly:

"I am the horseman of the Lord,/By God's will, I am the victim of fate." (Baratashvili [1842] 2000, pp. 141–43)

The image of the "horseman of the Lord" signifies not only a state of mystical rapture but also the metaphysical expression of a sense of national duty deeply rooted in the Georgian collective unconscious. The lyrical subject becomes not merely the bearer of individual faith but also a representative figure who transports the fate of his people into the divine realm.

This figure can also be interpreted in light of Ricoeur's theory of *narrative identity*—the effort of the individual to reconstruct their life within a divine narrative framework. According to Ricoeur, one does not live merely through a sequence of events but through a meaningful narrative whole (Ricoeur 1985, p. 143). The subject of *Merani* structures his death not merely as a physical end but as a process of metaphysical subjectification undertaken in the name of God.

In this sense, *Merani* also exemplifies Kierkegaard's distinction between the "tragic hero" and the "knight of faith." While the tragic hero sacrifices himself in fidelity to an ethical ideal, the knight of faith—like Abraham—submits to the absolute will of God and transcends the ethical (Kierkegaard 1987b, p. 69). The subject in the poem likewise surpasses the limits of reason and entrusts his decision solely to divine authority. Hence,

the poetic self detaches from the social and ethical realms and reconstitutes itself within a direct relationship with God.

This act of faith also intersects with Said's assertion in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) that representation possesses a constitutive power on a collective level. Said argues that literary texts not only express individual experience but also carry the historical experiences of repressed nations. In *Merani*, the subject's self-sacrifice in the name of God symbolizes the assumption of Georgia's colonial suffering and its transposition into the divine domain. Thus, the poem generates a messianic poetics in which national fate is represented through individual faith. The subject dies not only for his own salvation but also on behalf of his people, just as in the tradition of *imitatio Christi*.

Accordingly, *Merani's* lyrical subject becomes a knight of faith who transcends reason and ethics to unite with the divine command. This figure produces multi-layered meaning within the frameworks of Kierkegaard's existential ethics, Ricoeur's narrative identity, and Said's theory of cultural representation. Thus, the poem becomes not only a personal narrative of faith but also a poetic text of collective resistance in which national destiny is transformed into a religious mythology.

6.3. National Destiny in Sacred Uncertainty: The Poetic Construction of Sacrifice

Merani is not only a narrative of personal faith but also a poetic construct in which the ideal of national liberation is inextricably bound to sacred sacrifice. As the horseman advances alone toward eternity, he also bears the historical burden and silent cry of the Georgian people. As Said emphasizes in *Representations of the Intellectual* (Said 1994), the intellectual—or the poet—is not merely an individual voice but also the bearer of a repressed collective consciousness (p. 22).

The following lines encapsulate this notion:

"I go alone—I do not know the road,
But I am wrapped in faith." (Baratashvili [1842] 2000, pp. 141–43)

These verses are a poetic projection of Kierkegaard's concept of the "leap of faith." According to Kierkegaard, authentic faith lies beyond knowledge, logic, and even ethical principles—it is achieved through an individual's radical devotion to God in the face of the unknown (Kierkegaard 1987b, p. 41). This act straddles the thin line between reason and madness; it is the courage to approach the Absolute without any worldly assurance. Baratashvili's subject, proceeding without knowing the path but enveloped in belief, experiences a conscious disappearance woven with faith.

This poetic disappearance is not only a matter of individual metaphysical courage; it is also a collective sacrifice assumed in the pursuit of a nation's deliverance. Though the horseman travels alone, he speaks on behalf of his people and turns toward God in their name. This figure is not only mystical but also, as Said defines, an intellectual representative who bears the responsibility of a silenced collective—a poetic witness to historical injustice.

The structural form of the poem reinforces this theme of sacrifice. The horseman advances without any hope for worldly reward or approval. This stance aligns with Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity: life is not merely a chain of chronological events but a whole made meaningful through narrative (Ricoeur 1985, p. 143). The subject of *Merani* constructs his life not as a private experience but rather a national narrative that addresses both God and history. The poem thus evolves into a multi-layered poetic structure that oscillates between mystical autobiography and national epic.

In this context, the horseman's solitude is not an ordinary isolation but a prophetic solitude. His departure from the people does not signify abandonment but rather the burden of suffering undertaken on their behalf. This loneliness is not an individual withdrawal but a responsibility to convey the silence of the people to God. This distinctive dimension

of Georgian Romanticism offers not only a metaphysical quest but also the poetic form of a postcolonial religious tradition of liberation. Here, Baratashvili becomes not only an esthetic but also an ethical and political figure who dares to “burn himself” for the sake of his people—and this sacrifice reverberates in the divine realm.

In this framework, *Merani* emerges as more than a narrative of personal faith—it becomes an effort to make a nation’s historical fate heard before God. Read through the lens of Kierkegaard’s philosophy of faith, Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity, and Said’s concept of intellectual representation, the poem’s multi-layered metaphysical and political dimension becomes even more apparent. The horseman’s journey does not remain confined to individual belief but instead becomes a poetic act that carries the collective memory and hope of salvation of a nation into the divine realm. Thus, *Merani* functions not only as a literary work but also a religious and ethical manifesto—an effort by a people to “burn themselves into redemption”.

6.4. *Merani: The Religious and Political Formula for Georgian Romanticism*

Baratashvili’s *Merani* should be regarded as not only a narrative of individual faith but also a foundational text that constructs the religious and political poetics of Georgian Romanticism. Beyond merely expressing the metaphysical resistance of the national spirit in the face of historical trauma, the poem also poetically articulates the idea that redemption is possible not only on an earthly level but also on a divine plane. The lyrical subject is not only an individual bearer of fate but also a metaphysical representative sacrificed for the return of the nation to God.

As Dzidziguri (1989) emphasizes, the subject in *Merani* is more than a classical Romantic hero: “This figure is a metaphysical leader who represents the nation’s soul on a divine level and appears before God on behalf of the people” (p. 235). This leadership does not derive from politics; it is nourished by a religious source. The Georgian people, whose collective spirit has been fractured by historical ruptures, can reconstitute that spirit only through a sacred subject. Accordingly, the rider in *Merani* is more than a faithful individual—he is the sacrificial figure who presents the nation’s historical burden to God.

The poem serves as a poetic illustration of the transition between the “esthetic” and “ethical” stages of life as outlined in Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* (1987b). The expression early in the poem about no longer being able to endure “the baseness of time” corresponds to Kierkegaard’s diagnosis of the meaninglessness of esthetic existence. Nevertheless, the subject in *Merani* does not remain in this existential void; he turns to God and leaps into the ethical stage, reconstructing his existence through faith. This leap carries transformative potential not only on an individual level but also nationally. The “knight of faith” becomes a symbolic structure bearing the historical aspirations of the Georgian people.

When read through the lens of Ricoeur’s theory of the “surplus of meaning”, the primary images in *Merani*—the “horse”, the “road”, the “darkness”, and “solitude”—are charged with layered symbolic depth. The “horse”, for example, is not merely a means of transportation; it also becomes the poetic vehicle of freedom, messianic ascent, death, and annihilation. “Darkness” is not merely ignorance or uncertainty; it is the paradoxical path to God, the locus of negative religious thought. According to Ricoeur, such symbols “do not merely represent meaning; they exceed it and summon it” (Ricoeur 1970, p. 18). In this regard, *Merani* is not merely a poem; it is a machine of symbolic multiplicity that generates meaning through excess.

In this poem, Baratashvili reconstructs modern Georgian identity on both mystical and political levels. *Merani* is a messianic poetic formulation that synthesizes Romantic individualism with national collectivism; it is the self-sacrifice of a soul consecrated to God

on behalf of its people. Therefore, the poem should be read not only as a literary text but also as a cultural-religious archetype in which Georgian national memory and Orthodox Christian religious tradition converge.

7. Poetic Analysis: *Khma Idumali* (Silent Voice)

Khma Idumali ("The Secret Voice") represents the culmination of Baratashvili's meta-physical poetics, where the motif of silence becomes a profound religious and national symbol. The poem's restrained tone and elliptical imagery evoke the experience of divine absence while simultaneously preserving a space for faith and endurance. This silence is not empty; it is charged with historical memory, embodying the resilience of a people who persist in the absence of immediate deliverance. The interplay between mystical restraint and collective remembrance marks *Khma Idumali* as both a personal meditation and a communal lament.

7.1. Silence: A Religious Void or Divine Fullness?

Baratashvili's poem *Khma Idumali* ("Silent Voice") opens a paradoxical field of religious and poetic reflection both through its title and internal structure. Although the phrase "silent voice" appears to be logically contradictory, within the traditions of mystical religious thought and existential poetry, it functions as a profound metaphor representing the tension between divine absence and transcendence. The title especially echoes Barth's notion that "the silence of God is His deepest word." According to Barth, God does not always speak through words; at times, He manifests through silence, resonating within the human soul (Barth 1928, p. 87).

The central lines of the poem esthetically embody this paradox:

"I hear a voice. . . no, it is silence—Yet it pierces the heart." (Baratashvili [1836] 2000, pp. 146–47)

Here, the "silence" that is heard is not merely a lack or absence but a transcendent presence perceived through intuition and faith. This structure resonates with apophatic (negative) religious thought, in which God is experienced not through presence but absence, silence, and unknowability. God's voice is not heard; instead, His silence reverberates within the depths of human interiority.

Within the framework of Ricoeur's symbolic hermeneutics, the silence in these lines operates as a mechanism for multilayered meaning-making. For Ricoeur, a symbol does not merely represent things; it also transcends what it represents, calling forth the depths of interpretation. In this sense, silence is not the "absence of speech" but a concentrated field of meaning beyond words (Ricoeur 1970, p. 348). In *Khma Idumali*, silence signifies not God's distance but rather an intuitive perception of His inaccessible transcendence.

Baratashvili's understanding of silence also converges with Kierkegaard's concept of the "individual's solitude before God." According to Kierkegaard, an authentic relationship with God can only be established within an atmosphere of profound inner crisis, fear, and silence. The lyrical subject in *Khma Idumali* is drawn into this kind of contemplation: the outer world is silent; God does not speak. Yet this silence transforms into a divine touch that resonates within the spiritual void. This state mirrors Kierkegaard's concept of the existential void preceding the "leap of faith": faith born out of nothingness.

The poem's formal structure also supports this thematic orientation. Its short, fragile, rhythmic lines reflect not only God's silence but also the poetic fullness that emerges from it. This approach aligns with mystical traditions where "God's silence" is often regarded as a form of revelation. In Georgian Orthodox thought, silence is not merely an absence but the purest means of reaching God. In this context, the poem can be read not only as a religious inquiry but also an inner liturgy—a poetic prayer.

Accordingly, the silence in *Khma Idumali* is not a deficiency; it is the deepest mode of divine manifestation. This silence is both God's way of not speaking and humanity's most intense intuitive experience of the divine. The paradox embedded in the poem's title creates an ontological tension that permeates the entire work: how can a silent God touch the heart? Baratashvili does not answer this through reason or dogma; the answer lies hidden in the poem's silent metaphors, in Ricoeurian symbolic multiplicity, and Barthian transcendence. *Khma Idumali* becomes a poetic revelation in which silence carries not only meaning but also being.

7.2. Existential Conflict: Between Faith and Doubt

Nikoloz Baratashvili's *Khma Idumali* (*Silent Voice*) centers on the existential conflict of the lyrical subject, caught between an intense yearning for God and a devastating doubt provoked by divine absence or silence. This tension directly corresponds to what Kierkegaard describes in *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849) as the state of "despair in despair" (*fortvivlelse*). According to Kierkegaard, the individual seeks union with God, yet the awareness of human limitations transforms this longing into spiritual anguish (Kierkegaard 1983, p. 44). *Khma Idumali* is the poetic articulation of this religious and ontological upheaval.

One of the poem's central lines,

"When I pray—there is no answer,

As if the sky were sealed. . .", (Baratashvili [1836] 2000, pp. 146–47)

conveys not only God's silence but also a cosmic closure symbolized by the sealing of the heavens. While this silence is associated with the classical Christian religious concept of *Deus absconditus* (the hidden God), in modern religious consciousness, it becomes an epistemological crisis wherein divine remoteness is experienced as individual trauma. The "sealed sky" symbolizes not only the inaccessibility of God but also a rupture in which the possibility of faith collapses into an inner void.

In this context, Ricoeur's theory of symbolic meaning offers a crucial framework for understanding the poem's multilayered structure. For Ricoeur, the silences and gaps in sacred narratives do not signify the absence of meaning; rather, they provide a space for delayed, indirect, and layered meaning production (Ricoeur 1970, p. 46). Within this framework, prayer becomes less an act of expecting a response and more an effort to produce inner resonance. Even if God remains silent, prayer transforms into an act of fidelity—faith emerges as a form of commitment sustained in the face of divine absence.

The existential rupture depicted in the poem should not only be read within an individual context but also within a historical and cultural context. Jaliashvili (2020) interprets *Khma Idumali* as "the moment when faith collides with metaphysical silence", suggesting that the poem is addressed not to God but rather the impossibility of communication with Him (p. 7). This reading reveals that the poem offers a rupture not only religiously but also poetically: meaning making must now orient itself not toward divine response but rather divine absence.

In this sense, the lyrical subject is not merely a believer but a hybrid figure bearing the weight of postcolonial memory and modern existential rupture. God's silence reflects not only a personal crisis of faith but also Georgia's historical solitude, cultural marginalization, and epistemic uncertainty. The "sealing of the sky" signifies not just divine silence but also an existential impasse in which national identity is left unanswered.

Thus, *Khma Idumali* presents a powerful poetic scene in which the fragmented self, torn between faith and doubt, is situated not only within a metaphysical void but also in a historical and religious ambiguity. Kierkegaard's model of existential despair, Ricoeur's symbolic depth, and Jaliashvili's postcolonial religious reading enable us to interpret this poem not only as a meditation on the individual's relationship with God but also as a

nation's confrontation with silence. In this way, *Khma Idumali* becomes a metaphysical rupture in which faith is shaken, and poetry bears esthetic witness to that tremor.

7.3. Silence and Suffering in the Georgian Orthodox Tradition

Baratashvili's *Khma Idumali* (*Silent Voice*) represents not only the individual's metaphysical solitude before God but also the historical and cultural silence of the Georgian people on a poetic plane. The concept of "silence", which forms the thematic backbone of the poem, has often been regarded in the mystical tradition of Georgian Orthodox theology as a prerequisite for inner contemplation, spiritual purification, and profound contact with God. Silence is sanctified here as a way of turning away from worldly noise in order to listen to the inner echo of the divine. In the Georgian ecclesiastical tradition, ("remaining silent") is seen as "a state of contemplation as powerful as prayer" (Ware 2005).

However, in *Khma Idumali*, silence loses this positive and mystical connotation and descends into a dark space that represents the disconnection of existence from meaning, the collapse of divine communication, and an epistemic closure. In an atmosphere where the poet's voice cannot reach God, silence is no longer a form of union with the divine but rather a condition of deprivation from it. This transformation is vividly embodied in the following lines:

"I search for silence—but lose myself in noise..." (Baratashvili [1836] 2000, p. 146).

These lines articulate not only an inner personal conflict but also a poetic expression of collective historical repression. The "search for silence" symbolizes the Georgian people's historical process of losing their voice and the collective despair that emerged from that silence.

In this context, silence is not merely a mystical turning inward but also a form of political and cultural suppression. As Said emphasizes in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), colonized peoples are often forced to "speak in silence", as the means of representation and expression are stripped from them by hegemonic structures (p. 247). Georgia's incorporation into the epistemic and cultural domination of the Russian Empire in the 19th century institutionalized such a silence. This was not merely a political imposition; it also involved the marginalization of linguistic, religious, and cultural narratives.

The silence in Baratashvili's poem becomes the poetic form of this historical silencing. The lyrical subject appears to have lost not only the right to personal prayer but also the sense of participation in the collective relationship of the people with God. In this sense, the silence in the poem represents both the withdrawal of divine presence and the suppression of national narrative.

Dzidziguri (1989) argues that this poem marks a rupture point in Georgian national memory, emphasizing that the figure of silence is woven with both divine absence and historical despair. As he puts it,

"Baratashvili's silence is not the unansweredness of prayers; it is a metaphysical void in which even a nation's right to speak has been withheld by God" (p. 212).

Accordingly, the silence in *Khma Idumali* ceases to be merely a language of mystical contemplation and becomes the silence of a colonized soul. This silence is not just a lack; through its transformation into a narrative form, it becomes the negative poetic form of epistemic resistance. Ricoeur's insight illuminates this dynamic:

"A symbol speaks most powerfully when it is silent" (Ricoeur 1970, p. 358).

At this point, *Khma Idumali* becomes not only an expression of the individual's desire to communicate with God but also a poetic representation of historical memory, repressed national discourse, and religious rupture. Through silence, a broken communication

with both God and history is poetically reconstituted, elevating the work to a unique metaphysical and poetic status within Georgian literature.

7.4. *Perceiving God Through Silence: Traces of Negative Religious*

Baratashvili's *Khma Idumali* (*Silent Voice*) is not only a poetic expression of an individual crisis of faith but also a profound metaphysical inquiry bearing the traces of the tradition of negative theology (via *negativa*). Within this tradition, it is impossible to speak directly about God since the divine can only be experienced through what it is not—through silence and absence. Even the name of God, in this context, is veiled by a mystery wherein language is forced to fall silent, as God is “the transcendence of transcendence.”

This understanding resonates especially with mystical theologians such as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Meister Eckhart, Jan van Ruusbroec, and John of the Cross. According to these figures, God exists only in the echo of silence; words cannot reach divine truth, grasping only the threshold of its absence. Baratashvili's lines offer a poetic projection of this tradition:

I hear a voice. . . no, it is silence—

Yet it reaches the heart. . . (Baratashvili [1836] 2000, pp. 146–47)

The silence heard here is not merely an auditory lack but a form of intuitive presence. God does not speak through words, but His silence becomes a transcendent touch resonating in the heart. Silence, in this context, is not the absence of God but a form of divine overpresence. Speech can no longer represent God; only silence can touch His absolute mystery. This perspective aligns with Karl Barth's assertion:

While Baratashvili may not be directly situated within this mystical religious tradition, his poetic intuition reinterprets the core insights of via *negativa* with original depth. This idea can be explained through Ricoeur's theory of “radical symbols.” According to Ricoeur, some symbols do not merely carry meaning; they intensify it to the point of overflowing. Silence is one of these symbols. Ricoeur states:

“A radical symbol not only bears meaning; it also facilitates its explosion” (Ricoeur 1970, p. 351).

Within this framework, the silence in *Khma Idumali* operates not as a deficiency but rather a metaphysical fullness arising from God's excessive concealment. The “silent voice” that echoes in silence becomes both a poetic image of mystical transcendence and a symbolic reflection of the historical solitude of Georgian national existence. The individual relinquishes words to commune with God; the people are buried in silence in the face of historical trauma. This double silence—mystical and historical—generates a religious and postcolonial density of meaning within the poem.

Baratashvili's poem positions the figure of silence not merely as a tool of contemplation but also as the bearer of lost meanings, repressed national memory, and metaphysical depth. In this sense, *Khma Idumali* becomes not only the spiritual record of an individual but also a poetic document of a time when a nation could no longer speak either to God or to its own historical being. And this silence, as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite suggests, may in fact be the fullest presence of God.

7.5. *The Poet's Rebirth Through Divine Longing*

In the final section of *Khma Idumali*, the lyrical subject no longer seeks to hear or call upon God through speech but instead reaches an awareness that God can only be experienced intuitively through silence. This transformation aligns with Kierkegaard's concept of the “leap of faith” as presented in *Fear and Trembling* (1987b) and *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849). According to Kierkegaard, when an individual reaches the limit of

reason and ethical judgment, they either plunge into the abyss of disbelief or surrender to the Absolute—God—through an intuitive leap (Kierkegaard 1987b, p. 61). Similarly, Baratashvili's lyrical subject realizes that a connection with God can only be formed through an intuitive bond constructed in silence, rather than through language:

I no longer want sound—I want silence,

For it brings me closer to God. (Baratashvili [1836] 2000, pp. 146–47)

The yearning for silence expressed in these lines signifies not only a withdrawal from worldly noise but also a mystical path toward apprehending divine transcendence. In the context of Ricoeur's (1970) theory of "indirect meaning", silence becomes a space where meaning is produced through symbols, absence, and intuition when direct discourse about God is no longer possible. According to Ricoeur,

"Some realities can only be borne in silence; for words are insufficient, even suffocating".

(Ricoeur 1970, p. 349)

Accordingly, the transformation the poet undergoes is not merely psychological or esthetic; it is an ontological rebirth. Silence here is not an ending but the beginning of an orientation toward God and the transformation of the self. No longer seeking to define God, the lyrical subject instead strives to dissolve into His presence. This desire points to both the intuitive depth of negative religious and the redemptive potential of mystical silence.

The level of mystical discourse that Baratashvili achieves here represents a rare clarity of consciousness within Georgian Romanticism. In this final stage, *Khma Idumali* becomes not just a poem of religious crisis but also one of mystical ascent—a metaphysical threshold opened by intuition. God is no longer an external being but rather an inner truth resonating within the poet's silence.

At this point, the poem reflects not only the individual's journey of faith but also the poetic trace of an intuitive closeness to God that transcends language—a spiritual rebirth through silence. The poem becomes the silent echo of a soul newly born between faith and intuition.

8. Comparative Evaluation: Convergences and Divergences in Four Poetics of Divine Representation

Although Baratashvili's poems *Sulo Boroto*, *Pikrni Mtkoris Piras*, *Merani*, and *Khma Idumali* may initially appear to focus on individual metaphysical quests, their deeper structures reveal multilayered poetic terrains where national memory, collective trauma, and religious representation intricately intertwine. These poems offer a poetic architecture in which individual faith and national destiny, silence and representation, and ethical subjectivity and collective redemption are internally entangled. A comparative reading of these four texts reveals both convergences and divergences along three primary axes:

1. The representation and epistemological status of God;
2. The experience of individual faith and ethical subjectivation;
3. The religious formulation of national memory and collective redemption.

8.1. Divine Silence and Transcendence

In *Khma Idumali* and *Sulo Boroto*, God is not explicitly represented; rather, He is intuited through silence. In *Khma Idumali*, this silence is transformed into the poetic form of negative theology: God neither speaks nor appears, yet He "touches" through silence. As Barth suggests, "God's silence is His most profound word" (Barth 1928, p. 87); in this context, silence functions as a sign of divine transcendence and utter inaccessibility.

Sulo Boroto, by contrast, portrays silence not only as transcendence but also as a form of metaphysical absence and historical rupture. God does not merely remain silent; meaning,

nation, and history have also withdrawn from the individual's world. This poem serves as a metaphorical representation of postcolonial trauma and epistemic void.

Merani diverges from these two poems by articulating not God's silence but rather His command. The lyrical subject assumes the position of a "divine rider" who sacrifices himself for the nation at God's behest. Here, God appears not as a transcendent being but as a guiding presence, and the poem dramatizes Kierkegaard's philosophy of the "leap of faith" as an existential act.

Pikrni Mtkvris Piras occupies a position between these two extremes. God is not directly represented, but the flow of the river, natural imagery, and the continuity of time convey intuitive traces of divine order. God is represented not through silence but through historical cycles and natural continuity.

8.2. Faith, Sacrifice, and Ethical Positioning

Each of these four poems presents a distinct poetic stance regarding the relationship between individual faith and ethical subjectivation. *Sulo Boroto* and *Khma Idumali* depict the fragility of the individual's faith, inner conflict, and the impossibility of establishing communication with God. Faith here is not a source of power but a state of deficiency. This condition corresponds to Kierkegaard's concept of "despair within despair" (*fortvivelse*) as described in *The Sickness Unto Death* (Kierkegaard 1983, p. 44). In *Khma Idumali*, the individual feels that his prayers do not reach the heavens—this becomes the poetic counterpart to the tension between belief and disillusionment.

Merani, on the other hand, is situated on a plane of unwavering and active faith. The lyrical subject has fully undergone ethical subjectivation and is prepared to sacrifice himself for the nation in God's name. This figure aligns with Kierkegaard's typology of the "knight of faith", who assumes ethical responsibility not only on a personal level but also as a form of collective atonement.

Pikrni Mtkvris Piras occupies an intermediate phase between belief and doubt. The lyrical subject has neither fully reached God nor entirely severed ties with Him. The metaphorical flow of the river symbolizes both intellectual ambiguity and a confrontation with faith. This subject represents a consciousness approaching Kierkegaard's "ethical subject", standing at the threshold of the leap.

8.3. National Memory and the Religious Form of Collective Redemption

Beyond individual metaphysical experience, Baratashvili's poems offer poetic formulations of national memory, historical trauma, and longing for collective redemption. *Merani* glorifies messianic self-sacrifice united with personal faith. The lyrical subject becomes the spiritual representative and sacrificial figure of the nation; the poem reads as a sacred narrative of Georgian salvation.

Pikrni Mtkvris Piras expresses national mourning through poetic imagery of the river. The traumatic continuity of the past becomes part of the collective memory. The poem symbolizes both a metaphysical drift and the melancholic relationship the people maintain with their past.

Sulo Boroto depicts the traumatic repression of national memory and the withdrawal of God from the historical scene. In this poem, the lyrical subject is not entirely alone, yet he can no longer hear the voice of the nation. In this sense, the poem becomes an esthetic representation of postcolonial epistemic rupture and national silence.

Khma Idumali, in turn, serves as a poetic form of resistance to this silence. The lyrical subject carries the inner echo of the people's lost voice. Silence becomes the poetic terrain of both repressed historical memory and inner intuition. Said's theory of "silenced subjects" and cultural hegemony is concretized in this poem (Said 1993, p. 247). Table 1 provides a

comparative overview of these four poems, illustrating their distinct approaches to divine representation, typologies of faith, and national symbolism.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of religious poetic elements in Nikoloz Baratashvili’s four poems in terms of divine representation, typologies of faith, and national representation.

Dimension/Poem	Sulo Boroto (<i>Empty Soul</i>)	Pikrni Mtkvris Piras (<i>Thoughts on the Banks of the Kura</i>)	Merani	Khma Idumali (<i>Silent Voice</i>)
Representation of God	Absence, silence, distance (Barth 1928)	Imperceptible yet existentially intuited	Active, directive, call to action (Kierkegaard 1987b)	Silent but perceptible, mystical invocation (Ricoeur 1970)
Typology of Faith	Disbelief, loss, metaphysical void (Kierkegaard 1983)	Intellectual search, questioning, and intuitive recognition	Leap of faith, absolute sacrifice (Kierkegaard 1987a)	Hesitant belief, mystical intuition
National Representation	Colonial suppression, historical solitude (Said 1993)	Contemplation of national memory	National redemption through a messianic figure	Shared suffering within a collective national silence
Religious Symbol/Image	Empty soul, prayer, inability to hear God	River, time, reflection	Horseman, eternity	Silence, inner echo, sealed sky
Religious Background	Negative theology, divine absence	Orthodox memorial thought	Messianic figure, sacrificial act for God	Mysticism, divine intuition in silence
Poetic Stance	Melancholic and somber	Meditative and historical	Epic and action-oriented	Mystical and intuitive

This comparative evaluation demonstrates how Georgian Romanticism constructs a profound metaphysical and religious discourse through religious representations at both individual and collective levels. It also reveals how this discourse is interwoven with the experience of postcolonial suppression.

9. Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that the religious symbols and metaphysical images in Baratashvili’s poetry function not merely as expressions of individual quests for faith but also as poetic instruments enabling the religious reconstruction of national identity. Themes such as silence, prayer, sacrifice, river, and the cross—prominently featured in poems like *Sulo Boroto*, *Pikrni Mtkvris Piras*, *Merani*, and *Khma Idumali*—transform into poetic codes that acquire meaning not only metaphorically but also within historical and political contexts. Baratashvili’s poetic universe thus serves as the vehicle for a multilayered metaphysical discourse that extends from individual crises of faith to visions of national destiny.

This analysis of the poems has been framed through the theoretical lenses of Said’s theory of cultural representation, Ricoeur’s symbolic hermeneutics, and Kierkegaard’s ethical–esthetic distinction of existence. Said’s (1993) emphasis on the historical-political function of images contributes to an understanding of how national traumas are represented through religious symbols in these poems. Ricoeur’s (1970) theory of multilayered symbolic meaning reveals that images such as river, silence, and cry carry not only esthetic but also religious and epistemological weight. Kierkegaard’s (1987a, 1983) concepts of the “leap of faith” and “despair” offer theoretical depth in interpreting the poetic forms of individual spiritual dissolution.

As Jaliashvili (2020) emphasizes, Baratashvili’s poetry develops a poetic language that codes the silence of God not as absence but as a form of presence, poetically articulating the

modern experience of unbelief. This silence is not only a religious expression in the context of negative theology but also a metaphysical articulation of national collapse under colonial oppression. The lyrical subject evolves from a solitary figure unable to communicate with God into a messianic intermediary bearing the historical burden of the nation, thereby fusing the personal dimension of Romantic poetry with collective memory.

In this context, this study also underscores the need for a comparative analysis of the poetic approaches of Baratashvili and Grigol Orbeliani in order to highlight the diversity within Georgian Romanticism. While Orbeliani presents a vision of the nation that aligns with traditional Orthodox faith and historical-epic continuity, Baratashvili replaces this vision with unbelief, metaphysical silence, and ontological rupture. Thus, whereas religion represents the continuity of a sacred past in Orbeliani's work, in Baratashvili's text, the absence of God becomes both the tragic and poetic condition for a new possibility of being.

Baratashvili's poems not only trace the contours of an individual's journey of faith but also serve as poetic records of a nation's confrontation with historical trauma and its struggle for self-reconstruction. In this context, religious representations operate not solely on metaphysical grounds but also epistemologically, esthetically, and politically. This perspective resonates with Michel Foucault's concept of genealogy, which does not seek to recover an origin, but rather to trace the historical formation of discursive regimes through which knowledge and identity are constructed. In this sense, religious memory—as it appears in Baratashvili's poetry—can be seen not as a static metaphysical truth but as a historically produced field shaped by power, silence, and cultural negotiation. The sacred, here, is not outside history; it is embedded in systems of representation that are themselves products of colonial and epistemological rupture.

Baratashvili's poetics offer a powerful theoretical and esthetic foundation for rethinking the relationship between religion, identity, and esthetics in the process of Georgian literary modernization. Accordingly, this study positions Georgian Romanticism as not merely a local literary phenomenon but also a poetic space for negotiating universal religious crises and postcolonial identity struggles.

By offering a multilayered reading of Georgian Romanticism—especially Baratashvili's poetry—through the lens of religious representation and national identity formation, this study contributes original insights to the fields of literature and postcolonial theology. Its revelation that religious imagery encodes not only individual metaphysical experiences but also narratives of historical and cultural resistance provides a fresh perspective for the scholarly literature. However, considering the limitations of this research, comparative analyses of works by different poets should be undertaken in future studies to explore the interactions of Georgian religious poetics with other local and global Romantic movements. Furthermore, large-scale thematic analyses based on an expanded corpus could investigate the diachronic transformation of religious motifs across Baratashvili's oeuvre. Finally, a systematic exploration of the influence of Georgian Orthodox mystical and religious sources—alongside Western thinkers such as Barth, Kierkegaard, and Ricoeur—would enrich the theoretical depth of future scholarship and open new avenues of inquiry.

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