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## THE PSEUDONYMOUS CODE OF G. CHKHARTISHVILI

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**Abstract.** This paper sets out to systematize the multiple pseudonyms used by the contemporary writer G. Chkhartishvili. These are B. Akunin (*The Adventures of Erast Fandorin*, *The Adventures of Sister Pelagia*, a series of novels *The Adventures of the Master*, the project *Genres*, the plays *The Seagull*, *Yin and Yang*, the project *The History of the Russian State*), Boris Akunin and Grigory Chkhartishvili (*Cemetery Stories*), Akunin-Chkhartishvili (*Aristonomy*, *Another Way*), Grigory Chkhartishvili (*The Writer and Suicide*), Anatoly Brusnikin (*Devyatny Spas*, *Hero of Another Time*, *Bellona*) and Anna Borisova (*Kreativschik*, *There*, *The Seasons*). We investigate reasons for the multiplicity of Akuninian pseudonyms, a strategically honed system of which contributes to his authorial image. It is shown that, while the commercial pseudonyms are aimed at promoting his new literary projects and are implemented through a conspiracy game played with the reader, the creative ones serve to manifest the author's breadth of interests and philological knowledge such that every new pen name triggers a new writing strategy and a new creative tactic. The analysis of various literary masks' influence on the author's creative outcome shows that each pseudonym is 'placed' in the literary, genre or artistic time of the text. B. Akunin is primarily the author of historical retro-detective stories, whereas adventure novels are signed by the pen name of A. Brusnikin. A. Borisova 'writes' prose set in the present day. From the very beginning, the author's real name has been always assigned to his serious literature. The authorial system of names is being constantly refined, distinguishing B. Akunin, the fiction writer, from G. Chkhartishvili, the elite literature writer, in the novels *Aristonomy* and *Another Way* the twinned name Akunin-Chkhartishvili deliver another conceptual image. In conclusion it is stated that the abundance of Chkhartishvili's pen names evinces the author's intellectual and personal intrigue, which points to multiconceptual character of their pseudonymous code, being auto- and self-marketing, creative auto- and self-identification.

**Key words:** B. Akunin, pseudonym, pseudonymous game, writing strategy, author's self-identification.

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## ПСЕВДОНИМНЫЙ КОД Г. ЧХАРТИШВИЛИ

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**Аннотация.** Современный писатель Г. Чхартишвили выступает под рядом псевдонимов, которые систематизированы в статье: *Б. Акунин* («Приключения Эраста Фандорина», «Приключения сестры Пелагии», серия романов «Приключения магистра», проекты «История Российского государства», «Жанры», сборник «Сказки для идиотов»), пьесы «Чайка», «Инь и Янь»); *Борис Акунин*, *Григорий Чхартишвили* («Кладбищенские истории»); *Акунин-Чхартишвили* («Аристонмия», «Другой Путь»); *Григорий Чхартишвили* («Писатель и самоубийство»); *Анатолий Брусникин* («Девятный Спас», «Герой иного времени», «Беллона»); *Анна Борисова* («Креативщик», «Там», «Vremena goda»). Исследованы причины множественности псевдонимов, которые, составляя стратегически выверенную систему, используются для создания писательского имиджа: коммерческие, направленные на успешное продвижение нового литературного проекта, реализуемые путем своеобразной конспирологической игры с читателем, и собственно творческие, связанные с авторской широтой интересов и филологическим знанием того, что новый псевдоним инициирует новую писательскую стратегию и иную художественную тактику. Проанализированы художественные результаты обращения писателя к разным псевдонимам: каждый из них связан с тем или иным литературным и художественным временем текста или жанра. Б. Акунин – прежде всего автор исторических ретродетективов, А. Брусникин – приключенческих романов и повестей. Перу А. Борисовой принадлежит проза, описывающая современность. Свою фамилию писатель изначально отдал «серьезному творчеству» и последовательно продолжает уточнять систему имен, разделяя Б. Акунина как беллетриста и Г. Чхартишвили как автора элитарной литературы, что закреплено романами «Аристонмия» и «Другой путь», где на обложке значится Акунин-Чхартишвили. Сделан вывод о том, что интенсивность псевдонимного речетворчества Г. Чхартишвили является знаком интеллектуально-личностной интриги автора, в которой все проблемнее и значительнее встает вопрос не столько об авто- / самомаркетинге писателя, сколько о его творческой авто- / самоидентификации.

**Ключевые слова:** Б. Акунин, псевдоним, псевдонимная игра, писательская стратегия, авторская самоидентификация.

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### Emergence of a new phenomenon in contemporary Russian literature

There exists a widespread version explaining how G. Chkhartishvili, the Deputy Editor of the *Foreign Literature* journal, a degreed philologist, a specialist in Japanese literature, a famous translator and the author of various critical and publicistic articles, became an author of popular detective stories. Once, prior to setting off to work, his wife started covering a glossy book in newspaper.

When asked why G. Chkhartishvili decided to start writing detective stories, she set forward the following supposition: highly-educated people might love detective stories, though they could feel inappropriate to read books with naked blond girls and bloody knives in public places. She joked then – in order to satisfy his friends Chkhartashvili gave them the books which they would not need to hide behind a newspaper [Verbieva, 1999].

It is under the pseudonym of B. Akunin that G. Chkhartishvili became a successful writer. He

offered the Russian reader a retro-detective story, featuring a charming main character, which refers to a whole body of classical literature.

It is interesting that the emergence of this new authorial figure also resembles a detective story. In the context of a highly volatile book publishing market and intensive information exchange, the personality and biography of the author remained hidden behind a pseudonym for a very long time. The game of the writer and his publisher being played on the reader escalated at the end of 2000, when two more writers appeared under the pseudonyms of A. Brusnikin and A. Borisova. Although the anagrams of these authors, as well as the specifics of their writing style, could not but raise doubts, the true personality behind them again remained secret. Right in the middle of heated public discussions around the mystery of the name triggered by A. Brusnikin's *Devyatny Spas*, B. Akunin, as if stirring up the intrigue, dropped an ironical remark that any writer whose name may be abbreviated

into B.A. or A.B. might be hiding under - B. Akunin, Alexander Blok and Agnia Barto [Vandenko, 2007].

In parallel with these conspiracy pseudonym stories, Chkhartishvili was writing a blog under the name of B. Akunin, where the boundary between Chkhartishvili, the philologist and Akunin, the detective story writer was completely blurred. Moreover, he published a number of novels under either a double authorship (G. Chkhartishvili and B. Akunin), or under a twinned name (G. Chkhartishvili – B. Akunin). In other words, he created one additional compound pseudonym, reminiscent of Saltykov–Shchedrin, Mamin–Sibiriyak, Sukhovo–Kobylin or Sergeev–Tsensky.

All these pseudonyms aroused a lot of interest among critics who tended to ascribe commercial or political motives to all Akunin's strategic and tactical moves. Thus, the authors of these reviews fell victim to the game imposed by Akunin. In a paper entitled *Dance with the Head and the Legs* (Plyaska golovoy i nogami), Lev Danilkin posed a question about the mystery of Anatoly Brusnikin. He wondered if it might be a real name or a pseudonym, a real person or it is referred to the disgusting word 'project'. There are still some journalists, professional critics and uncountable bloggers who are trying to surmise on it [Danilkin, 2007].

Ekaterina Krongauz conducted an original study *Brusnikin, Akunin, Other?* based on a telephone interview with a person who introduced himself as A. Brusnikin. She asked a series of indirect questions, supposing if it might be a pseudonym or an anagram, and wondering why the author did not publish novels under his real name. Then she asked for a guess on the growing popularity of writing under pseudonyms or creating virtual personalities. She inquired whose idea it might be to use multiple pseudonyms - the idea of the author or his publisher. Although Ekaterina Krongauz was doing her best to make her respondent to disclose the name mystery, he kept giving rather evasive answers and called himself an another unknown exile [Krongauz].

In a note *The Mysterious Stranger*, A. Narinskaya concludes with dismay that the author of *Devyatny Spas* is most likely to be Akunin, since there are too few writers in contemporary Russia capable of creating a good, strong historical novel. She stated that there was no abundance of

authors who had mastered the art of developing intrigue and intertwining with a historical context as skillfully as the author of *Devyatny Spas* did. In addition, she mentioned Akunin's 'advertising' claim, that he could hardly do better than Brusnikin, and called it a charade full of Akuninian irony [Narinskaya, 2007]. In referring to the straightforward 'pseudonymity' of the name of A. Brusnikin, one of the journalists made a pun suggesting that *Devyatny Spas* should be entitled *Brusnichny Spas* (Cowberry Spas), which presupposes the possibility of unfolding an ironic semantic series: cowberry – berry – cranberry.

Today, when the real name behind all these pseudonyms has been disclosed, it is obvious that the author has developed a carefully honed system of communicating with the reader through various pen names. This system has various sub-types, determined by the relationship 'author – text'. Here are his major works written under different pseudonyms:

**B. Akunin:** *The New Detective (The Adventures of Erast Fandorin)*; the *Provincial Detective Story* series (*The Adventures of Sister Pelagia*); the *Adventures of the Master* series (in this cycle, the main characters are descendants and ancestors of Erast Fandorin); *Genres* (in this cycle, the main characters are descendants and ancestors of Erast Fandorin); *Tales for Idiots*; the plays *The Seagull* and *Yin and Yan* (1882); the book *Photo as a Haiku* (co-authored with the readers of Akunin's LJ blog); *Love of History*; *The History of the Russian State* project; *Ognenny Perst*; *Boh and Shelma*;

**Boris Akunin, Grigory Chkhartishvili:** *Cemetery Stories*;

**Akunin-Chkhartishvili:** *Aristonomy, Another Way*;

**Grigory Chkhartishvili:** *The Writer and Suicide*;

**Anatoly Brusnikin:** *Devyatny Spas, Hero of Another Time, Bellona*;

**Anna Borisova:** *Kreativschik, There, The Seasons*.

#### Chkhartishvili's system of pseudonyms as his communicative and marketing strategy

Reflecting on the multiplicity of Stendhal's pseudonyms, J. Starobinsky noted that a personality when it is hidden under a pseudonym

could arise a strong desire to find out why somebody wishes to put on a mask and elude the interest in the meaning of such new image [Starobinskiy, 2002, p. 395]. It seems necessary to pay tribute to Akunin, who repeatedly prompted and even explained the reasons for writing under multiple pseudonyms. Specifically, in his Live Journal Boris Akunin stated once that the mask of a detective story writer promises his readers some narration, that is full of action, moderately educational, invariably playful. And if he tried to change the rules of the game, the readers would get astonished, because instead of entertainment they would get upset and pinched. Therefore, B. Akunin came to the respective conclusion – if he wished to write something entirely distinct from the Akuninian style, he needed to refer to a different name [Akunin, 2012a].

In an interview *Grigory Dashevsky – Grigory Chkhartishvili: A New Name is Identical to a New Personality*, Akunin explains the reasons for differentiating his pseudonyms. The choice of one or another helps to set out the rules of his game with the reader: being signed as Akunin the text promises entertainment, whereas the name of Chkhartishvili points to a nonfiction style [Dashevskiy, 2007]. However, there seemed to be one more reason for the phenomenon of Akuninian masks, that is, the multi-vector nature of the writer's challenge, his perpetual desire not to be boring to either the reader or, and that is even more important, to himself, every new name is identical to a new personality.

Therefore, a pseudonym appears there and then, where and when the direction and perspective of his narration change. In this sense, Akunin reveals his multiplied writing skills, emphasizing that a new pseudonym means another focus (range of problems) and another artistic tactics (genre and style). For example, the book *Cemetery Stories* contains a foreword that introduces two authors – Boris Akunin and Grigory Chkhartishvili, thus giving the reader the possibility of forming two hypotheses (however, it seems, written by one hand). An abstract provided by his publisher said that the book *Cemetery Stories* should be viewed as a product of the collective creativity and equal co-authorship of two writer's masks – one real and the other fictional, which reflects a new trend in contemporary Russian literature. The reader is

offered an exciting game. The documentary essays authored by Grigory Chkhartishvili are dedicated to six of the world's most famous necropolises and they alternate with fictional detective novels written by Boris Akunin's hand, that are set in these cemeteries [Akunin, Chkhartishvili, 2005, p. 3].

The author himself provided the explanation on it, stating that while he was writing *Cemetery Stories* he had to change the general conception and split into a reasoner, Grigory Chkhartishvili, and a mass-entertainer, Boris Akunin, the former was engaged with essayistic fragments, while the latter – with the fictional ones – [Akunin, Chkhartishvili, 2005, p. 5]. In his article *Life as a project*, G. Tulchinsky offered a number of reasons for today's urge to change names. Thus, a person's attempt at socializing in a group might fail and it makes him/ her an imposter, so taking advantage of a flexible personality mask they might respond to an ever-changing world [Tulchinskiy, 2012, p. 175]. In the context of this concept, the pseudonymous play of B. Akunin can be considered as an example of person-marketing, within which both the internal psychological attitudes of the creative personality and the reader's expectations successfully co-exist. Having chosen his first and still main pseudonym for the authorship of detective stories, G. Chkhartishvili 'hits the top ten', 'kills two birds with one stone'. In this sense, 'B. Akunin' should be treated as the first prosaic line concealing the possibility of unfolding several meanings. Firstly, entering the Russian detective space in the late 1990s with a clearly Georgian surname would have been an almost certain failure. Secondly, if read and pronounced together, the pseudonym 'Bakunin' becomes an explicit reference to the fraught Russian history. Thirdly, the decoding of Akunin (from the Japanese 'evil man') is the starting position in a game played with sophisticated readers. Fourthly, the appearance of the first pseudonym (let us repeat that, for quite some time, the secrecy of the author's identity was preserved, which gave rise to many speculations from the publishing project to the existence of a group of ghostwriters) is the beginning of a conspiracy plotline, the atmosphere of suspense and system of guesses, persistently and consistently supported by the author both in his creative attitude and in his texts for almost twenty years.

### Realization of Chkhartishvili's principle of play in his first literary characters

It should be mentioned that this play with names, emotionally 'loaded' and bearing an echo of several nationalities, is characteristic not only of the authorial pseudonyms, but is also applied to his most famous character Erast Petrovich Fandorin, as well as to his faithful servant Masa. The genealogy of the name Fandorin is bizarre and branched, originating from the depths of history (von Dorn), and from literature – Erasmus (or Rotterdam, as Zhurov calls it). And Masa or Masahiro also acquires a patronymic after baptism (in the novel *The Whole World is a Theatre*), becoming Mikhail Erastovich Fandorin. In the project *Provincial Detective*, the main character of the nun Pelagia plays the part of Madame Lisicina in her profane worldly life. In *Spy Detective*, the main character, also being a von Dorn descendant (similar to all main characters in Akunin's projects), from Romanov becomes Oktyabrsky, by the will of the revolutionary government.

The principle of play is also applied to peripheral, background, episodic characters, such as Velde–Ahimas and Timothy in the novel *Azazel*. The former is one of the most powerful Fandorin antagonists, a man with white eyes, a professional assassin who becomes the main lever in the transformation of a naïve, pink cheeked teenager into a man with a young face but gray temples, a great and secret Russian detective in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The latter is Timofey the janitor, who transforms from Timofey to Timofaey, and then to Timothy, in the same novel. Finally, Akunin uses one more – and very elegant – means of ironic play with his pseudonyms, which is disguised under one character, the English butler Freyby, in the novel *Coronation*. When typed using Russian keyboard, the word Freyby gives Akunin. Moreover, the portrait of the English butler reminds us – and very clearly – of the author of one of the most brilliant novels in the Fandorin cycle written (let us mention) on behalf of the butler Zyukin: "I approached the carriage. There, on a velvet seat, crossing his legs, sat a full-fledged gentleman of a very important kind. He was bald, had bushy eyebrows and a neatly trimmed beard – in short, he did not resemble an English butler, and, indeed,

no butler at all. He was silently looking at me through his golden glasses with his calm blue eyes..." [Akunin, 2000, p. 29] (Translation is our. – T. S., A. P., A. S.). Freyby / Akunin is always surrounded by books and countless dictionaries, which fact continues the play. In the hustle and bustle of events, he is avidly reading Trollope (whose name does not say anything to Zyukin, unlike the ingenious reader) and even presents a dictionary to Zyukin (Russian–English dictionary with the pronunciation of English words). Moreover, Akunin gives his passport surname to one of his most charming female adventurers, who plays the part of the Georgian princess Sofiko Chkhartishvili in *The Jack of Diamonds*.

Therefore, by adopting his first pseudonym, Chkhartishvili starts (consciously or unconsciously) a brand, which is defined today as a magical promise for the readers [Tulchinskiy, 2012, p. 176].

### Elaboration of Chkhartishvili's pseudonymous play

The development of the Akuninian writing style received a new turn at the end of 2000s with the appearance of two new pen names – A. Brusnikin and A. Borisova. The author motivated this phenomenon with a number of reasons: a certain fatigue from Fandorin, the need to find a way out of creative crisis, a challenging experiment. Yet the question of why the author of such a successful project took on two more literary masks, which sparked heated debates, has remained unsolved. It seems likely that the answer should be sought not in the commercial or personal biography of the writer, but rather in the sphere of creativity. It is interesting to note that Akunin, playing with the reader again, successfully manages not to overplay. Commenting on the appearance of A. Brusnikin, Akunin noted in his LJ blog, that it had been his long dream to write a historical novel without any contextual detective intrigue. Moreover, as both Chkhartishvili and Akunin are cosmopolitans in terms of their way of thinking, A. Brusnikin's novel presented some episodes from Russian history from the Slavophile standpoint. It turned to be an intrigue publishing experiment [Reitblat, 2006].

Although the pseudonym of Anatoly Brusnikin looked like a direct anagram of Boris

Akunin, which was stated in a sarcastic remark by A. Latynina, it turned to be playful in character (the ‘swampy’ neighborhood of cranberries and cowberries) [Latynina, 2012, p. 172-173]). A. Latynina expresses her high appreciation of *Devyatny Spas*, pointing to its entertaining but not empty or stupid style. Similar to many Akuninian works, the new novel contained several layers of meaning, and sophisticated readers might be amused by a post-modernistic play with folklore, history and literature, whereas simple-minded readers would be carried away by adventure. The Brusnikin’ text is both stylish and fun. It is also stated that with time, the novel might become children’s reading. A. Latynina considered it to be the best fate for that genre as in the course of time such works would either be forgotten or moved to the children’s bookshelf, like Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* or Dumas’ *Three Musketeers*, which initially were written not for children [Latynina, 2012, p. 174].

V. Kuritsyn, in a response to the second novel published under the pseudonym of A. Brusnikin (*Hero of Another Time*), although being unable to refrain from commenting on the ‘cowberry – cranberry’ semantic series mentioned above, noted that while reading *Hero* he could feel a familiar hand, though the copyright owner there was listed as A.O. Brusnikin. V. Kuritsyn called that phenomenon some ‘co-authorship joint-stock company’ [Kuritsyn].

The critic also gives an extraordinarily perceptive account of Akunin’s pseudonym replication, considering it to be a signal for the production of various textual complexes, like Akunin being the first project of Chkhartishvili, and Brusnikin being a project of Akunin [Kuritsyn].

Brusnikin’ Slavophile position provoked R. Arbitman (after the mystery of the name had been revealed) to a rather tough review, but written under a very subtle, Akuninian-style title – *A Strange Story of Mr. A. and Mr. B.* R. Arbitman expressed his admiration on a pluralism in the head of one writer, pointing to Chkhartishvili’s ambiguity: while the Westernized Akunin defends the ideals of freedom in his fiery speeches, Brusnikin the Slavophile gives the reader a hint that those ‘freedoms’ are paid for by the ‘vile’ West and are beneficial to the West. Such writing techniques definitely goes beyond the scope of a literary game or a purely commercial

project, and most of all resembles the clinical history described by Robert Lewis Stevenson [Arbitman, 2012].

Unfortunately, in his review, R. Arbitman ignores the fact that, in parallel with the pseudonym of A. Brusnikin (Chkhartishvili never thinks by oppositions), the third pseudonym – Anna Borisova – appears. The writer gives two reasons for the appearance of a female pseudonym, which is deliberately simple and typical of female detective literature in Russia (Daria Dontsova, Tatyana Ustinova, Polina Dashkova, Tatyana Polyakova, etc.). The first reason is very straightforward – it might seem a fun for Chkhartishvili to fancy being an authoress [Akunin, 2012b]. Moreover, following the example of one of the most successful contemporary writers Stephen King, who created not only a mythical author R. Bachman for own controversial early works but also his biography, Chkhartishvili even outlines the life of A. Borisova, presenting her as an educated lady, who enjoys the age of freedom, her children are already grown up, the mind is matured and the character is formed. As she has a wealthy husband, in other words, does not need to worry about sustaining basic needs, she is said to take the pen partly out of boredom (similar to Japanese court ladies during the Heian period), and partly because she wants to share with the world feelings and thoughts that have accumulated in her over years [Akunin, 2012b]. However, the second reason given by Akunin goes beyond the gender stereotype. He himself unveiled the internal content of the pseudonym as not being commercial, but stated that his personal objective was not in achieving a great market success. He wish to try another style of fiction that comes very close to a new boundary, beyond which serious literature begins.

The range of problems posed in the novels signed by Anna Borisova – death, life, love, memory, old age – seems to be more in tune with the author of *The Writer and Suicide* than with the creator of other literary projects. It is in this conceptual aspect that the novels of Anna Borisova are presented, completely excluding the gender element. Thus, the novel *Kreativschik* is announced to be rich in plotlines, styles and author techniques, that would be enough for several books of different genres. *Kreativschik* is unique for its two, rarely combined, qualities: it is quick to read, but long to forget. There is one distinct

feature: it is difficult to determine whether this is serious literature, pretending to be a joke, or just the other way around [Borisova, 2009, p. 4]. The novel *There* is presented as a literary excursion to the afterlife, an artistic but encyclopedically accurate description of all the main hypotheses, beliefs and fantasies present in the ‘life after life’ discourse [Borisova, 2009, p. 351].

Undoubtedly, the novels signed by A. Borisova are written in a male, not female, writing style. And yet the female pseudonym cannot but affects both the perception of *Kreativschik* and its gender context. First, the narrative is rather complicated, fancifully mixing gender roles. This novel is written from the first person, ‘I’, of a weird creature, who transforms bizarrely and unpleasantly from a very old man into a young boy. This boy ‘feeds’ on stories that are told, or, more accurately, guessed and reproduced by this creature. *Kreativschik* is mainly interested in women’s stories; while the male character, a professional historian-philologist, exemplifies with a high degree of irony and self-irony all eternally feminine in the Russian identity (‘soul’ as Russians say), particularly in the identity of a Russian ‘intelligent’ (immediately, Chkhartishvili’s profession comes to mind, as well as his evident portrait resemblance [Borisova, 2009, p. 167]).

The novel *There* is constructed as a stream of emphatically male and female consciousnesses. On the surface, *The Seasons* entirely fits into the female narrative (the stream of the consciousness of an old woman and a young girl), but its main characters, women with male characters, for various reasons are forced to go beyond ‘their physical body’. Secondly, novels written by a man’s hand and dedicated to purely ontological problems (such as *The Writer and Suicide*) apparently pursue sublimation purposes. As a result, these books are full of intense emotionality, confession, taboo topics, openness and sincerity on the verge of self-exposure, accentuated sentimentality, refusal to accept the concept of ultimate truth, readiness for forgiveness – in other words, those writing style qualities frequently perceived as femininity markers. It is to a woman’s instinct and mercy that the author trusts in his most intimate and important reflections. Evidence can be found in Akunin’s LJ blog that, as far as he is concerned, women play a more significant role in the history of civilization than men do.

Among critical reviews written about Chkhartishvili’s pseudonyms, A. Bitov’s shrewd remark in an interview to D. Bavylsky seems interesting. Bitov distinguishes the authorial Face and the Masks (or masks), pointing to the fact that Chkhartishvili is an intelligent person, a good ‘Japanese’ and a good philologist, but Akunin is referred to the time of Conan Doyle as the action of the crime stories is moved into the past, when this genre was born in England [Bitov].

### **Chkhartishvili’s pseudonymous play and the question of his auto- and self-identification**

Developing A. Bitov’s idea about Chkhartishvili’s creative game, one can say with certainty: each of his pseudonyms is ‘set’ in this or that literary, genre or artistic time of the respective text. ‘Anagrammatically’ multiplying letter combinations, Chkhartishvili gives A. Brusnikin adventure stories that continue the traditions of the folklore and literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while A. Borisova ‘writes’ prose that depicts the present day. Thus, for example, *There* begins with a terrorist attack at the airport committed by an Islamist suicide bomber. Chkhartishvili’s propensity for thoughtful systematization is manifested in his consistently refined system of names that distinguishes his various writing types: B. Akunin acts as a fiction writer, and G. Chkhartishvili writes serious literature. This can be seen in *Aristonomy* and *Another Way*, which are signed by the twinned name of Akunin-Chkhartishvili. Analyzing reasons for the failure of the former, M. Chernyak rightly notes that the vulnerability of *Aristonomy* lies in the specifics of the ‘double forward- and back-translation’ of mass culture texts into the language of the elite, and cultural semantics undergoes a significant and irreversible metamorphosis. In particular, the twinned authorship gives rise to an internal conflict between the ‘co-authors’, possibly pointing to a new turn of such a notable literary project in the history of contemporary literature [Chernyak, 2012, p. 93].

It is also symptomatic that the principle of pseudonymous play ‘with a pianist’s right and left hand’ (a fiction writer and a serious literature writer) found in *Cemetery Stories* has not been realized in those works where it could have been

expected, but instead has manifested itself in a text signed by a new pseudonym. Thus, both the documentary and literary sections of *The History of the Russian State* (the first and second volumes are accompanied by essays) were written ‘solely’ by B. Akunin. However, the novel *There* signed by A. Borisova, in terms of the concept of receiving ‘according to one’s faith’ (literally, all the characters find themselves in the afterlife world, in which they believed in), completely coincides not only with the fictional part of *Cemetery Stories* performed by B. Akunin in the genre of black humor, but also with the documentary travelogues of G. Chkhartishvili.

That is how numerous questions arise, requiring further elucidation of Chkhartishvili’s projects, in particular, it is worth considering new interpretation of the author’s play with pseudonyms, co-relation between Akunin’s or Borisova’s series, or some extra meaning of the twinned name of Chkhartishvili–Akunin.

In any case, the intensity of G. Chkhartishvili / B. Akunin’s creativity in terms of producing new pseudonyms can be seen as an indisputable sign of the author’s intellectual and personal intrigue, which poses the question not only of his auto- or self-marketing, but also of his creative auto- or self-identification.

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