

Georgian Literature since the Rose Revolution: Old Traumas and New Agendas

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Abstract

Georgia's Rose Revolution of November 2003 was a demonstration of the Georgian people's desire for fundamental change. More specifically, it expressed their aspiration to overcome their post-Soviet status and to establish a fully functioning state and a fully competitive developed society. These ambitions took strength from a decades-long experience of cultural resistance to Soviet totalitarianism and Russian domination. Thus, the revolution had national-cultural causes and origins as well as political ones. The resistance to Russian dominance, which has been an issue in Georgian culture for the last two centuries, has gained new ground in the post-Soviet period, and the Rose Revolution was a clear symbol of Georgia's desire to develop a new identity based on a free and democratic state. Despite the cultural aspects of the Rose Revolution, it was primarily a social movement. Therefore, post-Soviet Georgian literature was not found in the center of the political upheavals. However, the revolutionary process was supported by young Georgian writers, practicing a predominantly postmodernist style and thus maintaining the ideas of pluralism and Westernization through their texts. The Revolution as a socio-political event has had a significant impact on the development of literature. The establishment of well-functioning state institutions, improved safety, increased social responsibility, and the attempt to integrate elements of Western culture into the fabric of society all provided new impulses to Georgian literature. Georgian literature of the 2000s still has made its contribution to the development of the narrative of liberalization and to rehabilitation in the face of historical traumas. However, the tendency toward elitism remained in Georgian literature; it was unable to influence the whole of Georgian society, part of which has maintained its ambivalent and dualistic outlook on the past and the future of the Georgian nation.

Keywords

Georgia, Rose Revolution, Georgian literature, transition, cultural paradigm

Georgia's November 2003 Rose Revolution is generally seen as a "soft revolution" that changed a great deal of the political and societal reality of that country and in fact the whole Caucasus region, while also making an impact on international politics and Russian-Western relations. The Revolution arose out of disputed parliamentary elections and the widespread protests against the government that followed. But its origins also lay in Georgia's historical experience of dependency on Russia and of later being part of the USSR, as well as in its troubled post-Soviet period. For this reason the Revolution has been described as the result of activities of "postcolonialist reformers" (Manning, "The Epoch" 924). The Rose Revolution demanded, and indeed achieved, a shift of power as well as systemic transformations; it brought into a power a new leadership, which, after serving two terms, ensured the democratic transfer of power to the opposition party in October 2012.¹

After seven decades of its existence, the totalitarian/authoritarian state which the USSR established as a result of the Russian Revolution collapsed. According to Francis Fukuyama, the victory of liberalism, after the fall of the USSR, was realized only on the level of ideas and consciousness, and did not fully materialize at economic and societal levels. Ideology in this sense is not restricted to the secular and explicit political doctrines we usually associate with the term, but can include religion, culture, and the complex of moral values underlying any society as well (5).

Because of these uncompleted processes of liberalization, the developments known as "color revolutions" took place in the 2000s in the former Soviet Union and the Balkans (former Yugoslavia's Bulldozer Revolution, 2000; Georgia's Rose Revolution, 2003; Ukraine's Orange Revolution, 2004; Kirgizia's Tulip Revolution, 2005). While each of the movements has its own political and social causes, all these revolutions share such features as being peaceful, involving unforced forms of protest, and targeting a corrupted state system. The resistance to the Soviet legacy is also a highly important factor when discussing the logic of these post-Soviet revolutions. Paul Manning suggests that the Georgian Rose Revolution of 2003 be seen as a point of transition from Socialism, though, as he points out, it was also a "transition" from Georgia's chaotic early 1990s ("Rose-Colored" 194). He thinks that the Revolution "brought with it a radical, almost millenarian epochalism, a desire to wipe the old Georgia from the face of the earth and erect a new Georgia in its place" ("Rose-Colored" 194).

¹ For more detailed observations of reasons and results of the Rose Revolution, see Kandelaki.

Georgia's Rose Revolution was as a demonstration of the Georgian people's desire for fundamental change. More specifically, it expressed their aspiration to overcome their post-Soviet status and to establish a fully functioning state and a fully competitive developed society. These ambitions took strength from a decades-long experience of cultural resistance to Soviet totalitarianism and Russian domination. Thus, the revolution had national-cultural causes and origins as well as political ones. The resistance to Russian dominance, which has been an issue in Georgian culture for the last two centuries, has gained new ground in the post-Soviet period, and the Rose Revolution was a clear symbol of Georgia's desire to develop a new identity based on a free and democratic state. Georgia had spent two centuries as a part of the Russian state: the Russian Empire between 1801 and 1921, and the USSR between 1921 and 1991. Georgia became a part of the Russian-led state, the USSR, after the annexation of the short-lived free Georgian Democratic Republic (1918-21) by Russian Bolsheviks. This dependence was still felt to be traumatic in the post-Soviet era.

Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution, during which a government was replaced through peaceful revolution, has been viewed from two main global historical perspectives. According to the first perspective, the Rose Revolution was the first of its kind and remains unique; according to the second perspective, it was not the first of its kind and so cannot be considered unique. The term Rose Revolution brands the Georgian Revolution as being unique (this "branding" being part of the "bourgeois repackaging" of the revolution discussed below), but at the same time creates a forward-looking intertextual series of successive color revolutions. By contrast, the term "velvet revolution" creates an intertextual series that links the events of 2003 to those of 2001 and separates both of these from other bloody revolutions in Georgia. Repackaged as the "Rose Revolution," the revolution of 2003 belongs to the intertextual series of "color revolutions" rather than to a late addition of another intertextual series of post-Socialist "velvet revolutions." At the same time, this rebranding of revolution itself in glossy color packages speaks to a broader change in revolutionary rhetoric from earlier revolutions, because this color revolution was indeed more colorful than all those that preceded it (Manning, "Rose-Colored" 172). Thus, colorful revolutions are considered the steps towards the democratization of countries. The democratization at the political, social, and cultural levels involves a breaking down of the hierarchy and closed structures. The goal is to investigate how the Rose Revolution affected the formation of the new cultural paradigm and what role Georgian literature played in this process.

After the Rose Revolution, the Georgian state openly declared its goals of detaching itself from Russia's field of influence and integrating into Western structures—i.e. the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. At the same time, as a result of these revolutionary ambitions, within a few years after the Rose Revolution, Georgia faced a Russian military invasion and the ensuing armed conflict with Russia that began in August 2008. The Revolution not only produced important political and social changes within the state but also led many Georgian people to reevaluate their country's dependence on Soviet Russia in a way that took account of the experiences of other post-Socialist countries.²

The post-Soviet era of Georgian political and cultural life, especially after the Rose Revolution, has been a time of rethinking the country's own national and cultural identities, of detaching from the Russian-Soviet legacy, and of identifying Georgia as a part of the free world practicing Western values. The West, in Georgian politics and culture, is typically seen as a desirable space into which Georgia must strive to be integrated. As Giorgi Maisuradze analyzes the matter, in Georgia the

² It is notable that many post-Socialist countries started to use postcolonial theory in order to rethink their own past. As Gayatri Spivak suggests, "postcoloniality is situated, and therefore different" (828). In literary and cultural studies, there is tendency to consider Eastern Europe's post/Communist countries as post/colonial. In his book *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization* (2007), Vitaly Chernetsky maps out the new cultural developments in Russia and Ukraine and argues that "postmodernism, postcolonialism, and postcommunism have not been the exclusive property of the First, the Third, and the Second Worlds respectively, but have overlapped and diffused into each other on a great number of levels" (265). The relation of the Eastern European problematic to postcolonial critical practice is widely discussed in Nataša Kovačević's book *Narrating Post/Communism: Colonial Discourse and Europe's Borderline Civilization* (2008). Another author to have observed post-Communism as a specific form of postcolonialism in relation to (i.e. emancipation from) Soviet and Russian domination is Anca Parvulescu ("Old Europe, New Europe, Eastern Europe: Reflections on a Minor Character in Fassbinder's *Ali, Fear Eats the Soul*"). In the case of Baltic States this tendency is also demonstrated in the collection of articles, *Baltic Postcolonialism* (2006); in the case of Poland, "post-colonial theory appears to be recontextualized in two parallel distinct ways in the two sectors of the Polish academic field. . . . Clair Cavanagh is credited among the first to point to the ambiguous position of Poland in the context of post-colonial theory" (Zarycki 91). Russia's colonial experience and its relation with its (ex)-colonies are analyzed from different perspectives by Alexander Etkind and Madina Tlostanova. In his monograph *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience*, Etkind offers a cultural interpretation of imperial history in the light of the concept of "internal colonization" and enriches postcolonial theory by introducing the specific Russian case (both the subject and object of colonization), while Tlostanova points out Russia's colonial and imperial differences from Western capitalist empires (*A Janus-Faced Empire: Notes on the Russian Empire in Modernity, Written from the Border* [2003]). Recent discussions on this topic are provided in the special issue, *On Colonialism, Communism and East-Central Europe: Some Reflections*, of *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48.2 (2012).

negative acceptance of the West and the branding of U.S. an imperialist power are associated with an outdated Soviet discourse: *modern* post-Soviet discourse in Georgia usually represents Europe, in particular, in a positive light (27).

Both this spirit of sovereignty and the desire to disengage from Russian dominance are reflected in, and, in fact, put to the forefront by Georgian literature. Numerous texts produced in this period continue discussions on the ongoing role of Georgian culture, specifically literature, in Georgia's national identity, and demonstrate their contribution to the revolutionary moods of Georgian society. Post-revolutionary Georgian literature indeed shows that the Rose Revolution and the August 2008 War contributed to the changes in identity and social values because of the impact they had on the Georgian national cultural "paradigm."

At the same time, Georgian society still had to undergo a transitional period in which new cultural priorities were shaped. Georgian Revolutionary messages were soon transformed into the discourse of reforms maintained by the leadership of the country. It was a mission of Georgian culture to introduce the narrative of liberalization to Georgian society and so insulate itself from the influence of Russian political discourse. At the same time, it was clear that some parts of Georgian society did not yet adhere publicly or privately to the process of change, while the border with Russia still opened up Georgia to its powerful neighbor's expansionist ambitions.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries under Russian domination, Georgia's national "ideal" revolved around the struggle for national freedom. This ideal was given the following formulation by Ilia Chavchavadze, the nineteenth century writer and national leader: "We were the masters of ourselves." It is significant that the worldview of the actors of the 2003 Rose Revolution relied upon the thoughts of Ilia Chavchavadze, as the founder and propagator of liberal views and values in Georgian society. However, despite this, the analysis of the history of Georgian writing reveals that immediately after Georgia's gaining freedom and political independence the fear of being alone (without a "patron") produced an identity crisis both in the country's literature and the society more generally. After the Bolshevik annexation in 1921 and the failure of the 1924 national rebellion, Georgian Modernists started the process of cultural reorientation and directed their creative interests toward the national issue. On the one hand, they had to adapt to Soviet estheticism; on the other hand, almost implicitly, their creative goals were to stimulate the pathos of struggle for freedom in the society by means of symbolic images, while the source of inspiration was Georgian history. Already in the nineteenth century Georgian poets—Grigol Orbeliani, Ilia Chavchavadze, and Akaki Tsereteli—started referring to the historical past, depicting in their epic poems

glorious historical figures, thereby suggesting the idea of Georgia's continuous existence in the history and consolidating the nation. This approach to the nation's history was further developed in the twentieth-century Georgian historical novel, in works by Vasil Barnov, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, Levan Gotua, and Levan Sanikidze.

In Soviet times the historical novel became one of the most popular genres in Georgia, as readers wanted to see romanticized pictures of Georgia's historical past—strong king, well-protected kingdom, and brave warriors—in a form that was opposed to the reality of the country under Soviet/Russian domination. This was one of the forms of protest against Russia as a colonizer. Therefore, the idea of liberty was the basic ideal shared by everybody both at a societal level and among the cultural circles. The process of nationalistic idealization turned Georgian culture and literature into a closed system. While analyzing this period, Lela Iakobashvili argues that during the Bolshevik times Georgian culture found its survival in archaic forms and became petrified. Petrification in this case meant survival, while survival was achieved through seizing communication with the environment (9). Consequently, because of colonization the interest of national culture in the past formed a certain type of closed space, blocking any external ideology, value or esthetics out of a belief that the ideal national culture would be threatened by them.

During the period of Russian/Soviet domination, Georgian literature developed an entire cultural space based on the narrative of Georgia's continuous existence in history, and the prospect of its liberation in the future. The narrative was supported through Realist aestheticism, and was widely asserted in Georgian literature, as well as film and theatre, painting and sculpture. Soviet culture was perceived by the Georgian society as a facade culture. The resistant attitudes towards Soviet ideological and state system were formed as well at the socio-cultural level. Anti-Soviet feelings were expressed in allegorical, indirect forms at the cultural level, and also had an indirect impact at the societal level (Tsipuria16). In post-Soviet period, as Tsipuria suggests, two cultural spaces can be identified in Georgian culture: a National Narrative Cultural Space and an Alternative Cultural Space. The latter clearly was based on the Western postmodernist cultural style. On the one hand, the postmodernist aestheticism of the alternative cultural space has been supported by the legacy of Georgian modernism, which was suppressed within the Soviet cultural policy, but still continued to influence Georgian culture, and was activated in post-Soviet period. On the other hand, the engagement with the postmodern style was based on Georgians' strong desire to forge a synchronization with Western culture hidden beyond the Soviet Iron Curtain. Thus, we can observe the consistent

appearance of postmodernist narrative techniques in Georgian literature of post-Soviet period (Tshipuria 20-23). Georgian literary critics—Zurab Karumidze, Levan Bregadze, Nugzar Muzashvili, Ana Imnaishvili, and Sofia Dzneladze—agree on the essential role of postmodernist aestheticism in forming new tendencies in Georgian literature. It may be said that the majority of Georgian literary production in the twenty-first century is based on postmodernist techniques,³ while the rhetoric of the National Narrative Culture is better delivered by the later adherents in public essays, speeches, and amateur poetry. In some cases the skepticism toward Georgia's European perspectives and the loyalty to “authentic” Georgian values are expressed by the representatives of this cultural space (Kharchilava 22).

The earlier cohort of writers still continues to apply the cultural paradigm of National Narrative Culture through the medium of Georgian national myths which were effective in shaping national identity within the Soviet space but became less relevant in the context of the independent state. By contrast, the later generation of writers exercising a postmodernist style appears to be better skilled for the demands of the free and competitive market economy while maintaining independent literary magazines, publishing houses, literary cafes, and a variety of other customer-oriented cultural undertakings. Thus, the generation gap still occurs in post-Soviet Georgian literature, and it has become more tangible in the period after the Rose Revolution.

In the first post-Soviet decade, Georgian literature had to face a significant challenge. While in the Soviet period it had been one of the main actors of identity formation and an important fighting tool in the struggle for independence, the new political and social reality required entirely different functions from it. On the one hand, it had to find its position in the global context, and on the other hand, it had to reveal new means and techniques to reflect and evaluate the reality into which Georgia had stumbled as a result of the civil war, ethnic conflicts and the economic crisis. In this very period, a new trend emerged. The literary product generated within this particular cultural space failed to address the needs of the society of this historic period. The discord triggered an estrangement of the cultural elite from its audience.

³ Since the late 1990s Georgian writers have been practicing a postmodernist narrative style developed decades earlier in European and American fiction which involved the following techniques: e.g. representation of unreliable reality by unreliable narrator is definitely the result of the acceptance of Western-developed approach, however this also reflects the sense of unreliability as experienced by Georgians during the collapse of old (Soviet) order and Soviet narrative (which was itself seen as unreliable), and the troubles in establishing a new order; the interest towards the detective genre can be the influence of postmodernist style, as well as the reaction to high crime rates in Georgia. The use of double coding, parody, intertextuality, and fragmentation becomes characteristic to Georgian prose.

On the face of it, the process whereby pressures from ex-Soviet Russia were overcome should have led to the popularization of literature based on postmodernist aestheticism; however, at that stage this aestheticism was acceptable in only very narrow intellectual circles. The crucial factor in this is that the process of value formation in the society during the colonial, Soviet past generated the fear of everything that did not aim at worshipping Georgian national identity. This characteristic enables us to speak about a cultural trauma in Georgian reality. According to one theorist's definition, trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways (Alexander 3). In addition to traumas from the Soviet past, traumatic worldviews in post-Soviet Georgia were triggered by the civil war in the 1990s, followed by the war in Abkhazia. The literature of the 1990s and culture as a whole refused to reflect these facts, because in this case it would have to break down those hyperbolized identity-related myths created during the Soviet period. Giorgi Maisuradze argues that in the current postcolonial phase the hardest thing for Georgia to do is escape its hybrid existence and more specifically its psychological dependence upon the Soviet past.⁴

Before the Rose Revolution, postmodernist aestheticism already prevailed in the Georgian literature and culture, in general. Literature no longer had the role and function that was common to its preceding narrative during the national movement activation and gaining the independence. However, after the Rose Revolution, these trends in national cultural life intensified. The anthropologist Paul Manning provides an interesting observation about value and identity alternation within the national cultural paradigm, pointing out that the rhetoric of political meetings was completely different from that of equivalent meetings in the 1990s: "The student use of visual images from *Dardubala* [a famous animation series] instead of textual citations of canonical classical nationalist authors in their rhetoric was in itself seen as indexing an absence of culture" ("Rose-Colored" 190-91). This fact confirms that the early mission of the literature was replaced by postmodernist functions.

From this point on, authors were expected to address themes considered attractive from a marketing standpoint and empty of ideology (including the national ideology). Lasha Bugadze's novel *Literaturuli ekspresi* (*Literary Express* [2009]) and Guram Megrelishvili's story "Mtserali" ("The Writer" [2011]) are good

⁴ Notable literary texts, also distinguished by the popular literary prize Saba, refer to the problems of adaptation to a new reality and overcoming the crisis in self-identification.

examples of responses to this challenge. In these texts, the author-characters depicted there stand for the authors themselves in that they are not different from “ordinary” citizens; the protagonists of both works regard writing as a profession, a job, and a source of income. In a way that contrasts with the traditions of the National Narrative Culture discussed earlier in this article, the writer is now no longer a leader of the nation, an advanced figure with special character traits. He/she is an ordinary member of the society facing the common problems of human existence. The characters of these texts make self-advertisements using different means in different spaces. The space of action for Guram Megrelishvili’s character Dato is Georgian post-Soviet reality. As a writer, he is focused on himself and not on his work, as in the story his writings are not even mentioned. Dato’s profession as a writer is revealed only through his search for a job: “A young, talented writer seeks for an adequately paid job. Tel: 722514”; “A young, talented and attractive writer seeks for a job. Please, don’t respond from network marketing. Tel: 722514”; “A writer looks for a job, Tel: 722514, Dato.” The story offers a double irony. On the one hand, the author describes the character of the writer ironically, in a way that stresses the absurdity of the inertial survival of the Soviet tradition according to which “writer” was a social status, and loyalty to the Soviet ideology fully compensated against the lack of writing skills and talent. On the other hand, the irony refers to the society’s attitude towards the writer. His wife calls him Natsarkekia, the famous character of Georgian fairy tales, while the employer gives him strange and offensive tasks to perform and simultaneously points out his vulnerability to the competition: “if you are not willing to do this, there are other writers ready to do; tell me, and I’ll hire somebody else” (24).

In Bugadze’s *Literary Express* we encounter the characters Zaza and Zviad who are trying to survive in a competitive literary scene. They take part in a cultural project and travel across the Europe together with other writers. The novel embodies almost all the character traits of the young post-Soviet writer and the poet. It shows an ambivalent attitude toward the unknown and attractive West—fear and distance, on the one hand, and longing for communication, on the other. The protagonists seem to have the inferiority complex of the small, oppressed country subject to language barriers. They doubt their own skills and capabilities, have conflicts with writers of older generation, and try to find their own place in the contemporary cultural context. The novel underlines the painful issue that Georgia and small countries in general face: how can writer enter the broader market so that his or her local works become interesting to global readers? The main character of the novel, Zaza, provides a definite answer to this question: what is authentic and topical is also attractive in marketing terms.

The Rose Revolution was a social project, rather than a cultural one. Post-Soviet Georgian literature did not create revolutionary attitudes and nor did it provoke revolutionary activities. Later, it did not turn the Revolution into thematic material. The Revolution as a socio-political event has had a significant impact on the development of literature. The establishment of well-functioning state institutions, improved safety, increased social responsibility and the attempt to integrate elements of Western culture into the fabric of society all provided new impulses to Georgian literature.⁵

It is noteworthy that there has been a major change in the priorities of Georgian literature over the last two decades. In post-Soviet times it has become more oriented toward reflecting social problems, depicting men who lost their roles as providers due to economic crisis, and women forced to adapt to the new reality of providing for their families. All kinds of themes restricted in Soviet times—marginalized people, drugs, sex, violence, sexual minorities, as well as religion—entered Georgian literature during the post-Soviet decades. Georgian writer Aka Morchiladze applies postmodern narrative styles in his works. The novel *Maid in Tiflis* (2007) is an eclectic fusion of melodramatic and detective genres, as well as the fusion of times and spaces. Stories about Georgia's historic past are mixed with the pictures from post-Soviet Georgia and a fictional country called Santa Esperance. Beyond the ironic storytelling style the problems of early post-Soviet Georgia can be identified, including corruption and gaps in education; the author shows the importance of rethinking the myths of the past in order to face the reality. Instead of following the tradition of explaining Georgians' moral dichotomy by the Soviet influence, he tries to deconstruct the concept of Georgian colonial identity from the earlier phase, i.e. the late medieval period. He tells a comic story with elements of fantasy, recalling, for instance, how the seventeenth-century Georgian king was reincarnated in the figure of Lavrentiy Beria, the ethnically Georgian Soviet politician of the Stalin era; thus, the problem of identity and moral crisis in the Georgian character is relocated to medieval times, when another super state, Persia, was trying to dominate the Georgian kingdom. The problem of Russia's domination in Georgia's social and cultural life is seen from the perspective of the long historical *durée*.

In post-revolutionary texts, the idea of transition to a new, modern, and Westernized reality emerges. As a result, literature starts evaluating the traumatic

⁵ The positive impacts of the Rose Revolution on Georgian literary and cultural processes as well as some negative tendencies characteristic of the post-revolution period are dealt with in Irma Ratiani's wide-ranging article "Revolutsia da shemokmedebiti protsesi. Kartuli literaturuli gamotsdileba" ("Creativity and Revolution: Experience in Georgian Literature").

events not only from the Soviet past, but also from the disordered first post-Soviet decade in the 1990s. It becomes clear that for Georgian writers, and for Georgian society as a whole, the Rose Revolution, thanks to political and economic stability achieved since then, has indeed become a demarcation line between the chaotic, failed state of the first post-Soviet/post-colonial decade and the more stable and rapidly developing state of modern Georgia.

In so-called “civil lyrics,” Zviad Ratiani, a Georgian poet and translator active since the 1990s, provides a critical reflection upon the first post-Soviet decade. One of the lyrics contains a tribute to “those severe years, which are hard burden for all of us, who lived then.” In his poems “Negativi 20 tslis shemdeg” (“Negative 20 Years Later” [2010]) and “Rekviemi tsotskhlebisvis” (“Requiem for the Living” [2005]), he accepts moral responsibility on behalf of his generation for the turbulent 1990s: “This is us, who ruined Georgia, / by our faithful and superficial love. . . / And we’ll never go out, never mingle with our voices to the mad phantoms, / we’ll spend the entire eternity on silence and leave marks nowhere except for dreams” (Ratiani, *Negativi* 37). The readiness to share responsibility for the recent past is presented in the poems as a challenge to modern Georgians, since the spirit of romantic nationalism and aspirations of breaking Soviet boundaries actually lead to disorder, ethnic and civic conflicts inside the country.

Attempts at assessing the civic/political conflicts of the 1990s are to be found in Davit Kartvelishvili’s stories “Ramdenime minishneba” (“Few Allusions” [2008]) and “Shvilze meti da sikvarulis akhsna” (“More Than a Son and Love Confession” [2005]), and also in Dato Turashvili’s novel *Iko da ara iko ra* (*Once Upon a Time* [2012]). In each of these texts a narrator speaks about the transitions going on around them: attitudes and expectations are being changed as the country starts its journey from struggles for independence to the reality of a failed state in the 1990s and then to the rapid developments beginning in the 2000s. The protagonists of Davit Kartvelishvili’s stories represent different generations, with different approaches to the ideas of patriotism and faith, and moral duties towards the country: the elderly man, Uncle Sandro, from *More Than a Son and Love Confession*, tries to assure his young friend that he should not be naively idealistic, and should not sacrifice himself to his motherland; however, in the end of the story the reader realizes that the elderly man shares the same patriotic feelings, and through his skepticism he only wants to protect the young friend.

The traumatic experience of ethnic conflicts in the early 1990s is consistently reflected in Georgian literature of the 2000s: Tamri Pkhakadze’s “Shinaberas monologi zetsiuri sakartvelodan” (“The Monologue of a Bachelor Girl from a

Heavenly Georgia” [2008]), Tea Topuria’s stories “Piraketa saikio” (“The Other World on This Side” [2008]) and “Sakhli” (“The Home” [2010]), Nugzar Shataidze’s “Mogzauroba afrikashi” (“The Trip to Africa” [2004]), Tamaz Ekvimishvili’s “. . . Ertkhel davkali mamali” (“. . . I Killed the Cock Once” [2005]). In all these texts the emphasis is on the fates of ordinary people who have been separated from each other as a result of the conflicts. The outcome of these conflicts was that the Georgian state lost its authority over the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are now de facto controlled by Russia, and hundreds of thousands of Georgians were forced to leave their homes and are still internally displaced in their own country. But Georgian writers, like Georgian people more generally, are trying to reach a moral balance while reflecting on this reality. The image of an enemy is not clearly represented in these stories: both parties of the ethnic conflicts—Georgians/Abkhazians and Georgians/Ossetians—are seen as victims, though there are hints of Russia’s provoking role. The protagonists of Tea Topuria’s stories still suffer from memories of their wartime experiences, although their hope of going back to their hometowns remains. In “The Home” Topuria impressively and dramatically depicts the town beyond the conflict border, which is now occupied by newcomers, while ghosts inhabit some empty houses left by Georgians; although the newcomers of various ethnic backgrounds insist they are all Abkhazians, they are not ready to sacrifice themselves to their country, saying at a certain moment that this is not their motherland.

The popular film of 2013, *Grdzeli nateli dgheebi (In Bloom)*, with an original screenplay by Nana Ekvimishvili and depicting the life of Tbilisi of the 1990s, can be discussed in the same prism. The main character of this film is Eka, a 14-year-old girl who suffers from and makes an assessment of the historical events unfolding around her. Against the background of the war, hostility and intolerance, Eka manages to distinguish pseudo and genuine values from one another. She marks herself off the violence. The final part of the film can be compared with the attitudes of Georgian literature toward the traumatic experiences of the country’s recent history. Eka goes to speak to her imprisoned father whom she has been avoiding to meet for years.

In this context, we should also consider that Georgia’s early post-revolutionary years were characterized by the emergence of euphoric dispositions and optimistic perceptions. However, later on, when these perceptions changed to a certain extent, some ambivalent attitudes can be observed in Georgian literature. In one of his essays, the contemporary Georgian writer Zurab Karumidze defines the Rose Revolution as “the supreme manifestation of Georgian Democracy at its formation stage” and “the

end of post-Soviet Georgia” (“Postsabchota”). Karumidze also started using postmodern simulations in his stories from the early 1990s onwards, judging them a suitable means to reflect the chaos, deconstruction, and value alternation of the period. An example of this technique is the story “Parodosi” (“Parodos” [1992-93]). However, in his novel published later in 2011 *Melia-Tulefia: Foxtrot (Fox-Fecund-Trot)* future prospects are not so hopeful. The novel reflects the Georgian reality of the early twentieth century and again makes use of postmodernist techniques. The novel is mainly interesting to us because it gives a clear illustration of how the existing cultural structure is ruined as a result of revolution and rebellion. The novel’s protagonist, Shakro Karmeli—a symbol of the national traits—is described by the author as “lion and flea, devil and angel, something grown together and thrown away, scattered. Shakro Karmeli is a decadence rather than man—decadence of the seizure of the damaged time links, when ghosts lose their objects” (Karumidze, *Melia-Tulefia* 6-7). The writer connects the reality of the 1920s with the post-revolutionary reality of the twenty-first century and unfortunately gives an identical picture. The Georgian national worldview has changed neither in terms of self-identification nor in the sense that any insight into the political environment has been gained.

Through the influences of European Romanticism, Realism, and Modernism on Georgian culture, the formation of the national cultural paradigm was achieved through a cultural synthesis of Georgian traditional culture, Eastern aesthetical legacy, and Western cultural tendencies. This perception was formulated by Titsian Tabidze, Georgian modernist/Symbolist poet of the first half of the twentieth century thus: “I put Hafiz’s rose in Prudhomme’s vase.” The generation of Georgian modernists in the first decades of the twentieth century indeed changed the cultural atmosphere and turned Tbilisi into a vibrant scene for modernist/avant-garde artistic activities. The Symbolist group *Tsisperi Qantsebi (Blue Horns)* was, in 1916, the first modernist grouping to be established. Russian poets in exile were joining them in the years Russian Revolution and Civil War, while Georgia was enjoying free years of Georgian Democratic Republic in 1918-21 until the Sovietization of the country in February 1921. In the 1920s the first Georgian modernist novels appeared, and the Georgian Futurist group H₂SO₄ was established. Although this strong tendency toward modernization and Westernization was suppressed in the 1930s by the Soviet power, it still played an important role during Georgia’s cultural self-identification in the post-Soviet years, just as the political legacy of the Georgian Democratic Republic served as a basis for the new independent state of Georgia. However, Zurab Karumidze refers to this cultural legacy in postmodernist manner. His response to the self-identification of twenty-first-century postmodernist and post-revolutionary

Georgian literature is as follows: “Georgian, this is a Hafiz Rose in Prudhomme’s posterior” (Karumidze, *Melia-Tulefia* 201). The aspirations of our country to the West is allegorically represented through the story to the hopeless love of the character Shakro Karmeli for French Marion Wasserstein, who is the wife of the American businessmen. Georgian critics have praised this novel for the authenticity of its reaction to its cultural moment and more specifically for its powerful expression of the sorrow of being peripheral, provincial, and late—the sense, that is, “that we live in a corner of the world without father and grandfather, without Graal, Europe, connections, without wishes and hopes” (Shatirishvili, “Zurab Karumidzis”).

Changes in public attitudes towards the Rose Revolution are reflected in Dato Kardava’s story “Vin aris varskeni” (“Who Is Varsken” [2009]). The original story was first published in 2008, five years after the Rose Revolution. The protagonist of the story, Nugzar, who emigrates to the USA after the Revolution, grounds his decision to do so on a lack of essential changes in Georgian Society; although the Revolution was based on slogan “Liberté, égalité, fraternité,” the same figures dominate in the country and these values are not shared in practice (Kardava, “Vin aris” 145). Koka Archvadze, in his story “Tavgasebis saidumlo tskhovreba” (“The Secret Life of Bigheads” [2010]), recalls the forced dispersal of protestors on November 7, 2007. The writer is critical of both sides—the Rose Revolution Government and also the protestors. The protagonist of the story explains protestors’ actions as the outcome of a revolutionary instinct present in Georgian society since the late 1980s. In his cataloging of this history of protest, from the anti-Soviet demonstrations, through various anti-government protests in the post-Soviet decades, including the Rose Revolution, and up to the later activities against the Revolutionary government, Archvadze’s protagonist is sarcastic about an era that he sees as dominated by various forms of ochlocracy.⁶

Despite the frustration of Georgian society toward the Rose Revolution government, the attitudes towards the Russian/Soviet past remain unchanged. In the literature of the 2000s, this past is always represented/mentioned with negative connotation (see Lasha Bugadze, “Sashinao davaleba rostom khani” (“Homework: Rostom Khan” [2009])); Irma Tavelidze, “Es satskali kurdgheli” (“This Poor Rabbit [2008]); Davit Kartvelishvili, “Ramdenime minishneba” (“Few Allusions” [2008]); Maka Mikeladze, “Flash!” (2004); Paata Berikashvili, “Shavi peplebis serenada” (“The Serenade of Black Butterflies” [2005])). As a continuation of the noted

⁶ Mob rule; government by the masses; mobocracy. Originated 1475-85, from Middle French ochlocratie, from Ancient Greek ὀχλοκρατία (okhlokratía), from ὄχλος (ókhlos, “multitude, crowd”) + κράτος (krátos, “power”).

tendencies, post-revolutionary Georgian literature diversely portrayed one more result of the Rose Revolution: the ten-day Russian-Georgian war of August 2008 and the reactions to it. A journal titled *Syndrome* (2008, editor Elene Phasuri) was specifically devoted to the August War. It included prose, poetry, non-fiction, and war journalism. The texts included there are notable for the way that they reveal Georgia's cultural tendencies and societal attitudes. In their speculations about the direct and indirect effects of Russian-Georgian conflicts and especially of the August War, the authors included in this journal tend to express a negative attitude toward what they see as Russian aggression; at the same time, they point out and analyze the main mistakes and challenges of Georgia's governance and society in the period of transition. Another topic of the journal is the issue of refugees. Drawing on their expertise from their different professional backgrounds (writer, poet, journalist, psychologist, sociologist, etc.) the authors discuss various aspects of the traumatic experiences of refugees while examining from a variety of points of view the difficulties these refugees faced during the war and in adapting to the new environment. Along with the problems caused by the war, the authors also discuss some of the main obstacles faced by the Georgian society, such as low levels of literacy, environmental pollution, well-established clichés, pseudo patriotism, religious manipulation, and the lack of social responsibility.

In his interview, "Kitkhvari: tanamedrove kartuli proza" ("Questionnaire: Contemporary Georgian Fiction"), Georgian publisher Bakur Sulakauri draws our attention to the difference between the Georgian literature of the 1990s and that of the 2000s. In the first post-Soviet decade, he suggests, Georgian writers were not really quick in reflecting the turmoil of 1991-92, while within just a few months after the August 2008 War, five or six novels reflecting upon the war appeared (25). It is certainly the case that the civic/ethnic conflicts of the early 1990s were not eagerly represented in Georgian literature. Bacho Kvirtia in his story "Qva" ("The Stone" [2008]) points out that he does not really want to depict the things that happened in the 1990s (71). This reluctance may be explained by the fact that the ethnic and civic conflicts of the early 1990s, although supported from the Russian center, were seen as having been caused by controversies inside the Georgian society: a sense of moral clarity in relation to these events remained to be achieved. By contrast, during the August 2008 War it was clear to Georgians that the two opposing sides were Georgia and its former colonizer, Russia, which was bombing Georgian towns and invading the country with its tanks. Moral clarity having been reached within Georgian society on this later episode, writers felt able to approach the theme more easily and more quickly. They were also very definite in the way they applied postmodern techniques,

since by this time postmodern narrative style had already become dominant in Georgian literature.

Tamar Pkhakadze's *Bostani konfliktis zonashi* (*Garden in the Conflict Zone* [2010]) was initially written as a play in 2004. The writer added new details after the war in 2008 and published it as a short story. The text tells the story of a Georgian farmer, Robinson. His fate presents him with two challenges: his brother has sold their father's land and property for the sake of a better future; and the village that contains this land has turned into a conflict zone. For Robinson the land is a source of self-identification and expression; he starts a garden near his former home and thus establishes a mini-fatherland. "You blessed land, why do you require constant protection, why are you so fatally sweet?" (Pkhakadze, *Bostani* 89)—Robinson addresses these words to the land in his garden, a garden that he does not own any more. He cannot abandon it during a military attack and dies there. Pkhahadze emphasizes the ambiguous status of modern reality and traditional Georgian national values through the fact that Robinson protects an imaginary fatherland, the garden that has a symbolic meaning for him.

Some other texts dedicated to the war issue include Tamta Melashvili's *Gatvla* (*Counting Out*), Basa Janikashvili's *Omobana* (*Playing War*) and Zaza Burchuladze's *Adibas*. These texts also contain some interesting material for analyzing the post-revolutionary tendencies of Georgian literature. They demonstrate how Georgian writers managed to reflect upon the August War and emphasize characteristics that are impulses of the Rose Revolution and consequent processes. Tamta Melashvili's story *Gatvla*, published in 2010, is a story of people living in the conflict zone: "This is a book about war where no shots are heard, only several lazy soldiers are noticed, but it fully shows us horrors of war because it deals with children" (Kharbedia). The author claims that the story was inspired by the August War, though in fact its characters and fictional time are generalized. The plot concerns the experience of women and children living on the Russian border during the war. Melashvili makes use of an expressive writing style and fragmented dialogues and syntactical constructions that are not typical of Georgian literature as a way of emphasizing the tragic aspects of the events she evokes.

Zaza Burchuladze's *Adibas* was published in 2009 and has been described as exhibiting a "prose free of Georgian limits" (Kevanishvili). The war is the main axis of the novel, which is fragmented and semi-imaginary in its treatment of the historical situation. Sex is the second axis, specifically "overly-natural pornographic recklessness" (Kevanishvili). The novel is ironic, as expressed in the title. Its author defines *Adibas* as "any false thing: object, situation, event, etc." Tbilisi elite life is

fake, like Adibas (an obvious substitution for the brand Adidas), with façade brightness that belies its imitated and low-quality reality. War is also Adibas, in the sense that it has become emptied of its genuine meaning. Tbilisi hears about war, but it does not disturb the ordinary rhythm of the city. An alternative to Adibas is Western second-hand clothing: it is used and old, but real and high-quality. The novel's protagonist chooses secondhand products over Adibas, since original clothing (culture) is either scarce or costly. The novel ironically reflects the post-revolutionary desire to recreate the country's image, and to re-orient itself toward the West.⁷

Basa Janikashvili's novel *Omobana (Playing War [2009])* also emphasizes war and reveals existing problems, phobias, and inner struggles. The text does not describe the conflict zone, but touches upon reflections of people who are away from it—namely visitors to Sioni village and their hosts. These two groups live in parallel realities. Their story develops against the backdrop of the Russian-Georgian war and a marital conflict. The protagonists live in three worlds: reality, hallucinations and virtual. Reality and imagination are so entangled in the text that the reader risks being lost in a maze of interpretations. However, casting aside postmodern simulations, *Playing War* is a typical post-Soviet family story. All components are present: an unlucky head of the family, Guram Darchia, who chose sport journalism over a successful sport career and could not achieve his potential; a housewife, Vera Kekelidze, tired by monotony and unemotional toward her husband; their only son Giviko, pride of the family; and Guram's mistress, single parent Lali.

Two real and one fictional wars take place in the novel: the Russian-Georgian August War, which distantly echoes amongst Sioni visitors; a marital “war,” a result of years of frustration; and a virtual war, namely Giviko's computer game or Guram

⁷ A similar approach can be observed in Andrzej Stasiuk's essay “W cieniu” (“In the Shadow”), *Sarmackie krajobrazy. Glosy z Litwy, Bialorusi, Ukrainy, Niemiec i Polski (Sarmatian Landscapes: Voices from Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Germany, and Poland [2006])*. This Polish text describes the widespread business throughout the region known as “sekendhend” trade. Visitors of the secondhand stores resemble the politicians and intellectuals of the post-Communist states and their aspirations toward Westernization. These shoppers aspire to look like the women from Paris, the women from Milan, the women from television. Real life mixes with virtual life and the world of phantasms. Dreams reach us appearing a little used. They smell of cheap detergent. The observation comes from an article by Wład Godzich (“*Sekend-Hend Europe*”) and is his own translation of a quotation from Stasiuk's essay. In his article Godzich indicates difficulties and achievements of former Communist countries during the painful period of liberalization and Westernization. He argues, that “the form of democracy practiced in the post-Communist states of Central and Eastern Europe does Plato's *Republic* one better [sic]. The dwellers of the cave do not see the play of shadows that they might take for reality. They are given an account, a representation of this reality, by those who claim to know what this reality is. Their knowledge of the simulacrum is second-hand knowledge” (“*Sekend-Hend*” 13).

Darchia's anti-stress medication effect. All three take place at the same time and form a background from which to address the main problems of the Georgian national character: the country's ambivalent attitude toward Russia (friend and enemy simultaneously); an absence of civil responsibility (represented by a public bathroom with no doors); traditions that have lost true meaning (the housewife lays the table for Russian pilots who bomb Sioni, while their hosts murder them after dinner, as military hostages); false theatricality and hypocrisy, laconically expressed in one chapter title, "We Should Not Stay Invisible."

Another significant part of the novel includes reminiscences of the 1921 Soviet occupation of Georgia and the 1980s Georgian national liberation movement. Janikashvili *places*—that is, moves—these two major events of twentieth-century Georgian history into the time frame of the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008. This time-shift facilitates the identification of similarities in three different historical experiences of Russian intervention and evaluation of its negative impact on the development of independent Georgian state.

The 2008 war proved to be the most vivid experience for Georgian society after the Rose Revolution, and it was almost immediately reflected in fictional texts. This time Georgian literature avoided the National Narrative Cultural paradigm and chose new forms of expression. Postmodern approaches provided opportunities to not only use the August War events as material for fictional texts, but also to reflect upon traumatic experiences of recent history, by asserting a sense of distance from them and, in some instances, assessing them; this may be considered a positive characteristic.

The direct impact of the Rose Revolution is more visible in Georgia's societal and political reality, although we may see that, within the cultural area, the Revolution really wrought changes. The Georgian culture, as well as Georgian state, now can be defined as post-Rose-Revolution, rather than just post-Soviet.

Post-revolution Georgian literature is a diverse field but several distinct and overlapping tendencies can be identified. Self-identification based on postmodernist principles has been the dominant discourse of Georgian literature after the Rose Revolution. Despite the fact that the Revolution activated Georgian literature that was oriented towards postmodern esthetics, public opinion still regards this culture as forced. We have mentioned that past traumas determined Georgian culture's (literature's) careful attitude toward values that come from outside and are not created within the national body. It is a safeguard against imperial ideology. The society is doubtful about liberalism, presuming that there is an imperial agenda behind the veil of liberal values and democracy. This conclusion is compatible with Lela

Iakobashvili, who argues that “Georgian society is very careful with ideologies that come from strong states. This is the reason why [a] new culture cannot accept forms that are forced on it” (Iakobashvili 10).

Having reflected on the literary texts produced in the past decade, we are able to declare that the Rose Revolution has had a considerable impact on Georgian literature, and this impact can be assessed as positive: it activated artistic searches, and this brought diversity of themes and genres into Georgian literature. As a result of the Revolution, the Georgian state and its society became more open to changes, more oriented toward accepting Western models of development, and Georgian literature also intensified its tendency toward cultural openness and synchronization with the dominant postmodern cultural processes. During the period following the Revolution Georgian literature started representing local, as well as global realities in a more analytical manner, and it became more oriented towards the representation of the present, instead of repeating the romantic idealization of the past. Thus, the analytical representation of the current challenges by Georgian authors may be supportive of the process of cultural, as well as societal development in present-day Georgia.

Georgian literature of the 2000s made and continues to make a contribution to the development of the narrative of liberalization and to rehabilitation in the face of historical traumas. However, the new tendencies of Georgian literature remained elitist and could not influence the whole of Georgian society, part of which has maintained its ambivalent and dualistic outlook on the past and the future of the Georgian nation.

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