

Using Geopoetic Strategies of Romanticists by Ilia Chavchavadze

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Abstract: The discussion on this paper concerns with geopoetic strategy in Ilia Chavchavadze's travelogue "Letters of a Traveler." He cites some strophes from Georgian romanticist G. Orbeliani's poems in the travelogue. According to a previous study, there are three types of geopoetic strategy in Georgian romanticism literature, that indicates different attitudes toward Russian colonialism. Considering these geopoetic strategies, it can be said that the writer notices the differences and use them in order to express his own geopoetic standpoint. Concretely, he cites Orbeliani's verse "Night of Farewell" ironically because it can be classified into the first type of the strategies which implies Georgian romanticists' complicity with Russian colonialism in North Caucasus. On the other hand, he cites Orbeliani's poem "Toast" without any ironic intention because the poem applauds the history of Georgia. Therefore, it can be said that Chavchavadze strategically recreates the national consciousness of the romanticists and use it as inspiration for his own works and actions.

Key words: *Ilia Chavchavadze, Geopoetic strategies, Georgian romanticism*

In the history of the development of Georgian literature, Ilia Chavchavadze (and his contemporaries) innovated their works by adopting the tenets of a new literary movement – realism. Chavchavadze's works like "Is He Human?!" and "On the Gallows" are masterpieces of Georgian realism that criticized the reality of late-19th-century Georgia, especially its colonization by Russian Empire. Through this social criticism, Chavchavadze attempted to mobilize the national emancipation movement.

Reviewed in detail, certainly, the history of literature is not clearly divided into two periods – romanticism and realism. Instead, it is a gradation. The same is true in Chavchavadze's case; he presents a new realistic attitude toward Georgian

literature while being a canonical inheritor of Georgian romanticism.

According to Russian orientalism studies, the period of romanticism was one of the epochs when many literary works about the Caucasus were written. S. Layton, in her book, discusses Pushkins, Lermontovs and Bestuzhev-Marlinsky's works and analyzes orientalist representation by these authors. According to researchers H. Ram and Z. Shatirishvili [8], Georgian romanticists apply themes of representation from Russian romantic literature to their own works with different kinds of strategies. However, Chavchavadze, as an inheritor of romanticism, changes and uses these strategies to accomplish his own aims. In this paper, Chavchavadze's above-mentioned strategy will be analyzed, especially in the way it relates to colonialism in late-19th-century Georgia.

First, it is important to highlight what Chavchavadze stated in his debut critical essay "Some words on the translation of "Mad Woman" by Prince Revaz Shalva-dze Eristavi." This essay is famous for its so-called "fight of fathers and children" in which the older generation is prone to romanticism, in agreement with the history of literature. However, Chavchavadze does not blame the older generation for their romanticism. In his opinion, the reasons why Shalva Eristavi's translation of "Mad Woman" was not good are as follows:

a) Kozlov does not have any poetic talent: "Some Russians see some kind of small talent, but we can not see anything in Kozlov at all" [2, p. 5]. Thus, in his poem, "almost at all place, there is feeling that is forced, i.e. brought by force. A tear brought by force is fanny, loathsome but not grievous to see" [2, pp. 5-6]. This is why, in Chavchavadze's opinion, one of the aims of translation—that is, to introduce foreign culture and literature—remained unfulfilled due to Kozlov's particular style of sentimentalism being outdated for the Georgian society of then. In other words, its introduction was no longer necessary.

b) Eristavi's translation was also of low-quality: "His translation is such a thing that a man must give it to his descendant because future writers should bear in mind it as the example of badness. The translation – as the translation is not good, prince Eristavi's language is worse" [2, p. 10]. Eristavi's translation destroyed the language which Rustaveli, A. Chavchavadze, and Baratashvili created. Given this point, it is understandable that Chavchavadze's criticism does not mention or criticize romanticism as a whole but rather the low-quality of Kozlov's poem and its translation, and here romanticism is understood as a literature movement which inherited the Georgian language, like Rustaveli. Shatirishvili thinks that Rustaveli's *The Man in the Panther's Skin* became the national narrative of Georgian literature from the 1860s to the 1870s [9, p. 4]. It is noteworthy to mention that not only Rustaveli but also the romantic poets already appeared in the Georgian literary canon of then.

With regard to Chavchavadze's attitude toward romanticism, Ingoroqva, a famous scholar of Georgian modern literature, emphasized the influence of the romantic poet Grigol Orbeliani on Chavchavadze. He writes, "Chavchavadze evaluates the poets of the first half of 19th century—A. Chavchavadze and G. Orbeliani from the modern Georgian literature. Especially G. Orbeliani's "deep national poetry" (— as Chavchavadze himself say) — has been Chavchavadze's lovely thing from the very early period" [4, p. 231]. According to Ingoroqva, this attitude toward Orbeliani appears in Chavchavadze's early prosaic and poetic works as well (for example, in "Ghost"). Ingoroqva concludes that "the kinship and the relationship of inheritance between them are indisputable" [4, p. 237].

However, Ingoroqva emphasizes the following: "This kinship does not exceed a particular sphere. Orbeliani's poetry, firstly, has an immensely narrow diapason, on the other hand what is main is that here we have two different epochs, two different worlds. In his first poem "Ghost" he already brought ideology of Georgian national-emancipation movement up to a completely new highness, depicted a new action program for people, fulfilled with new content a creative patriotic soul, which he received from the poetry of the former generation as inheritance" [4, pp. 237-238].

If Chavchavadze, as Ingoroqva says, brought Georgian national literature up to such a high level, the question "how did he manage it?" appears. Moreover, a question "what does the 'high' level mean in the context of the national emancipation movement — this 'different epoch and world'" accompanies this topic.

To answer these questions, attention should be paid to a prosaic work written in Chavchavadze's youth, "Letters of a traveler," in which we can see a relation with Orbeliani as well as in "Ghost." In this work, there is a particular segment cited from Orbeliani's verse "Night of Farewell" and the poem "Toast," and how Chavchavadze used these poetic works is important to discuss in detail.

In the second part of the prose, when a traveler leaves Vladikavkaz and heads for his own homeland—Georgia, he encounters the Terek River (Tergi in Georgian). Here, the author reminds us of Orbeliani's verse "Night of Farewell." The Terek is silent in front of the traveler in Vladikavkaz: "Our crazy Terek is no longer such Terek about that our poet has said:

"Terek runs, Terek howls,
Rocks give bass line..."

There, the Terek turns out to be sluggish and dead as if it is birched or has received a high rank. However, perhaps the Terek turns out to be quiet like that because the bass-singer rocks do not accompany next to them, the rocks, clouds of which:

"Clouds of rocky hearts

blackly lie down on
and threaten the land
with washing away by flood' [1, pp. 248-249].

As Ingoroqva stated, Chavchavadze's attitude toward Orbeliani appears here as well; in fact, he knows the works of Orbeliani well and highly evaluates them. However, on further inspection, these citations seem to be used with different meanings and are not inspired only by Chavchavadze's respect for Orbeliani.

As we touched above, here we must pay attention to the strategy employed by Georgian romanticist. According to scholars Ram and Shatirishvili, the strategy, which presupposes Russian colonialism, is of three types. These types are variations of the trichotomy—"Russia/Georgia/North Caucasus" that were present in the colonial situation in romanticists' poems.

Ram and Shatirishvili chose A. Chavchavadze's verse "Kavkazia" as an example of the first type and wrote that the poet gets material from different poetic works of Russian literature and creates the verse as patchwork. However, this is not just a simple imitation of Russian romanticism because the poet changes certain details. For instance, when Russian poets applaud Tsarism, they use two axes: vertical and horizontal. The former represents a panoramic perspective, which implies a width of territory conquered by the empire. The later, on the other hand, represents the highness of peaks, which implies the sublime of Tsar. According to Ram and Shatirishvili, the poet does not write obviously the horizontal axis in comparison with the vertical one, which means that the axes conflict with each other. Therefore, "[t]he vertical and the horizontal remain in conflict to the end, preventing the poet and the poem from identifying with the Russian Empire as a whole" [8, p. 13]. Conquered nations are not depicted here, what means that North Caucasus is already conquered. From this point of view, Ram and Shatirishvili conclude that "the poem initially accepts the 'trichotomy' of Russia/Georgia/North Caucasus, only to have Russia effectively abolish the Northern Caucasus and absorb Georgia" [8, p. 13].

According to the second type of Georgian romanticists' strategies, "Russia" is entirely erased from the trichotomy to create a dichotomy in its place: "Georgia/North Caucasus." This is the case in Baratashvili's verse "The Battle of Georgia's Princes, Noblemen, and Peasants against the Dagestanis and Chechens in 1844," which recalls a period when Georgia was independent yet, and there are voices of Erekle II in the verse. In fact, when this verse was written in the XIX century, Georgia had already been conquered by Russian Empire, and thus what is depicted in this verse and similar poetic works (such as "The Fate of Georgia" and "The Grave of King Irakli") are anachronistic representations that exemplify the second strategy: "By participating in Russia's subjugation of the

Caucasus, Georgians were thus not just exacting vengeance for past injuries, they were also resurrecting the political context in which those injuries were suffered" [8, p. 17]. Here, Georgia is the subject of conquest and not an object, as was the case in the first type of strategy.

The third type of Georgian romanticists' strategies is not even a dichotomy. In Baratashvili's verse "Merani," neither "Russia" nor "North Caucasus" is indicated. Although, in scholars' opinion, "Merani" is a kind of response to the captive of Baratashvili's uncle Ilia Orbeliani and a reaction to what occurred as well, however, the verse can be read without knowing this specific context. Compared to the above-mentioned works, "Merani" does not touch upon history or geography, not even that of Georgia. With this utopian view, "the poet's goal is to transcend the bounds of fate (or fatal boundary: *bedis samzghvari* can mean both) that keep him tied to his native soil. Only the natural world escapes the poem's strategy of despecification, taking on the rituals of burial and lamentation that would normally be performed by the hero's kinsmen" [8, p. 21]. This timeless and spaceless utopian strategy is even more unique than those of Polish poet A. Mickiewicz and Russian poet M. Lermontov.

Considering the "geopoetic" strategies of Georgian romanticists, it is important to discuss as to which type do G. Orbeliani's works cited in "Letters of a Traveler" belong to.

In comparison with A. Chavchavadze's verse "Kavkazia," the verse "Night of Farewell" does not pose political or geopolitical questions. For instance, A. Chavchavadze in his verse mentions "brave Tsitsishvili," which replaces Russian generals from the epilogue of A. Pushkin's "The Prisoner of Caucasus" and encourages the Georgian reader instead. In Orbeliani's verse, there is no such obvious picture.

However, the images of mountains, forests, the Terek, and rocks in the verse are more noteworthy. Among them, highness of mount Kazbeg as well, which is implied as the vertical axis in Russian poets' work, and the ferocious Terek are symbols of Eastern savagery [4, pp. 50-51] as well as a boundary, that divides Russia and the Caucasus¹ [5, p.150]. In A. Chavchavadze's verse, the following sentence can be found: "And the Terek, now checked, reverentially acknowledged its limits." As Ram and Z. Shatirishvili point out, A. Chavchavadze is an inheritor of Russian romanticism from this perspective and so is Orbeliani in his typical romantic representation of nature imbued with political and imperialistic meanings by Russian and Georgian poets. Moreover, special attention must

¹ A Japanese scholar Nakamura touches upon Eva Lisina's "On Swings before a War: A Chechnian Diary" in his referred article and writes: "In Caucasus mythology it is Terek river that has played a role to divide "here" and "there," and this river, in the "diary," obviously functions as the boundary as well." In a footnote to this sentence he names Pushkin's "The Prisoner of Caucasus" and Tolstoy's "Cossack" as examples of this tradition.

be paid to the fact that in “Night of Farewell” as well as “Kavkazia,” the local are not depicted before the scenery of nature anywhere and only “a voice of guard” is heard. This is completely different to the episode of “Letters of a Traveler” where the traveler listens to the local, Lelt Ghunia.² With this contextual point of view, it is fair to conclude that Orbeliani’s verse “Night of Farewell,” or at least the representation of nature in this verse, belongs to the first type of the romanticists’ strategies.

As previously noted, the “ferocious Terek” is the symbol of Eastern savagery and also reminds Chavchavadze (or the traveler) of Byron in “Letters of a Traveler.” However, Chavchavadze changes the Terek’s symbolic meaning when citing Orbeliani’s strophe: “Our crazy Terek is no longer such Terek about that our poet has said.” Here, the Terek is “our” because the traveler is going to Georgia, and at Lars, as mentioned in the work, “a color of my country is added to surrounding Nature, and turmoil and anxiety to Terek”. The color of the homeland and the turmoil and anxiety of the Terek are described similarly in this sentence. Therefore, it can be said that the turmoil of the Terek is synonymous to Georgianness. However, this turmoil is lost for the Terek at Vladikavkaz and becomes quiet as if “being birched or receiving a high rank.” If Terek is represented as the boundary dividing Russia and the Caucasus in the tradition of Russian literature, Vladikavkaz is situated on “this” side of Russia (as experienced from the Russian side). It is possible to observe this representation in “Letters of a Traveler” with the following lines: “I left Vladikavkaz and headed to my country with this state. I passed a bridge of Terek, ...” Here, the traveler arrives at the Caucasus by using a bridge to leave Russia and before then he was in Russia. Thus, we can understand this image as follow: Turmoil of Georgianness becomes quiet at Vladikavkaz, i.e. Russia, and this may mean Georgia’s Russification. Certainly, the metaphors of the Terek, “being birched or receiving a high rank,” are severe criticisms against Orbeliani and his father’s generation, as well as the colonial situation in general that implicitly implied that colonized people does not oppose colonization but rather received and accepted it.

If read from this point of view, it is possible to say that Chavchavadze’s criticism is aimed at Orbeliani’s “geopoetic” trichotomy. In Orbeliani’s verse, unlike A. Chavchavadze’s “Kavkazia,” a subject views a landscape is the first person as “I”. Ram and Z. Shatirishvili point out that a subject in A. Chavchavadze’s verse appears only in the end when Prometheus is mentioned: “As important as the omission of ethnographical detail is the absence in Chavchavadze of a romantic lyric hero who might bear witness to the sublime in nature and then be

² In “Letters of a Traveler” the depicted scenery is all the same romantic, but Lelt Ghunia’s representation is already realistic. Chavchavadze tries to exactly describe Ghunia’s dialect, showing his realistic attitude.

transported by it. Although we find traces of a human subject in references to “snowy avalanches that captivate the ear and eye,” we are unable to answer the question, “who sees or hears?” – precisely the question whose answer is the rhetorical basis of Derzhavin’s poem, which addresses Count Zubov in a series of apostrophes that begin ‘you saw’ (*ty zrel*)” [8, p. 11]. If this is a change from Russian literature by A. Chavchavadze, it is possible to say that Orbeliani is much closer to Russian literature; in his verse, the romantic lyric hero who sees nature as “inspired” and landscaped with/by imperialism and orientalism is revived. According to this understanding, it is not an exaggeration to say that the verse “Night of Farewell” more or less has the same character as that of Russian colonial literature. Chavchavadze discusses exactly this colonial and geopoetic scheme in his “Letters of a Traveler,” using the ironic citations from Orbeliani’s verse.

The verse “Toast” belongs to the second type – the dichotomic geopoetry of “Georgia/North Caucasus.” This text is dominated by Georgian heroes, – such as Parnavaz, Vakhtang Gorgasali, David IV the builder and Tamar, and to search them is a main theme in Chavchavadze’s poem “Ghost” because they have fought against Georgia’s enemies in each of their respective times. Therefore, the geopoetic dichotomic strategy is accomplished by their images.

However, it must be mentioned that in this verse, there still exist “landscaped” romantic images, as in “Night of Farewell”:

Where mountains climbing to the sky are with a freezing crown
And rivers throwing wave on waves with shout;
Abysses – darkened, rocks – bigger than eye can see,
Where a hunter chases ibex and clouds appear under him.
Where fields, emerald-colored, become verdant tenderly,
Delighted springs come running with laughing on them;
Flowers, with heads bowed, are astonished by their limpidity;
[Their] heart is glad to see them, eyes miss them again; [7, p. 88]

After the above-cited lines comes a strophe that Chavchavadze brings in his “Letters of a Traveler”: “Where is another Georgia,/ which corner of the world?” In this regard, the problem is that although it is possible to see some romantic scenery in these lines³, Chavchavadze does not imply any irony in this citation unlike when he cites from the verse “Night of Farewell.” This is because, despite the fact that the scenery of nature in

³ Among them attention must be paid to the strophe “Where a hunter chases ibex and clouds appear under him” because 1) as the scholars pointed out, such a contrast is interesting as this figure of a human does not appear in A. Chavchavadze’s verse “Kavkazia” and 2) the narrator of the verse must see the scenery “clouds appear under him” from a distance, otherwise he can not depict this kind of scenery. Naturally, we cannot see “a hunter and clouds under him” at the same time because a hunter is too small to see with normal eyesight from a distance. This means that this scenery is realized without realistic perspective like the one usually used by realism (photographic).

“Toast” inherits Russian and Georgian romanticism in a way, Orbeliani avoids the absorption of the scenery of nature into Russian imperialistic representation, i.e., the first type of strategy by writing this strophe (“where is other Georgia...”). It is important to remember that the first strategy implied that the North Caucasus was another object to conquer and Georgia an object to absorb. In this verse, nature and history of Georgia are never absorbed into the Russian Empire because they are a precondition of the existence of Georgia. As a result, Chavchavadze does not imbue the strophe with irony in order to criticize Russian imperialism and its supporters.

Chavchavadze acutely feels the geopoetic strategies of the former romanticists as well as the differences among them. He cites only the first type in the verse “Night of Farewell” ironically and criticizes it in his work “Letters of a Traveler,” whereas he does not do so in the second verse of “Toast.” The first type means Georgia’s colonial absorption into Russia and the identification with Russia, which is completely unacceptable for Chavchavadze and he devoted his life to fighting against it.

Therefore, it can be reasonably concluded that Chavchavadze, as the inheritor of Georgian romanticism⁴, strategically recreated the national consciousness of the romanticists and used it as inspiration for his own works and actions.

⁴ Regarding Tolstoy’s novel “Cossack,” Norimatsu discusses Eikhenbaum’s opinion that the novel is a parody of romanticism and thinks that the exposition of “illusion” and “falsity” of romanticism is also in the scheme of romanticism [6, pp. 268-275]. From this, it is possible to conclude that “Letters of a Traveler” is romantic.

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