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The Relationship between Literary Generations: Tradition and Rebellion

Abstract: *This article examines the relationship between literary generations in nineteenth-century Georgia through the well-known confrontation between the “fathers” and the “sons” during the 1860s–1870s. Focusing on the literary, cultural, and ideological debates between representatives of the older generation, most notably the romantic poet Grigol Orbeliani, and the younger generation led by the realist writer Ilia Chavchavadze, the study explores how generational conflict became a catalyst for broader social and cultural transformation. Particular attention is paid to disputes over language reform, literary aesthetics, education, and the future development of Georgian society. Drawing on literary works, publicistic writings, and contemporary debates, the article argues that the victory of the younger generation contributed to the democratization of the Georgian literary language, the strengthening of realist literature, and the formation of a modern national consciousness. The study demonstrates that the conflict between literary generations reflected wider processes of modernization and Georgia’s integration into contemporary European intellectual and cultural currents.*

Keywords: *literary generations; fathers and sons; Ilia Chavchavadze; Georgian literature; cultural modernization; nineteenth-century Georgia.*

Introduction

The issue of the relationship between literary generations is known in the Georgian reality of the second half of the 19th century as the confrontation between “fathers” and “sons”, or the battle of generations. In the second half of the 19th century, young people returned to Georgia from abroad, who, under the leadership of Ilia Chavchavadze¹.

¹ Ilia Chavchavadze is the most remarkable person of the 19th century. All his poetry, creativity, as a poet, publicist, orator, is imbued with the patriotic spirit. The conservative part of the nobility at first fiercely resisted Chavchavadze's radical ideas, but he was able to achieve success when a large number of like-minded people gathered (Wardrop 2015).

They declared a struggle against everything outdated and the awakening of the Georgian people, as well as the fight for their better future, set as their goal.

The new generation, which had received education in Europe, did not agree with the ideology of the older generation. The striving for progress, the introduction of new, innovative approaches to everyday life and society, were deemed by the representatives of the older generation as a rejection of traditions and rebellion.

Russian tsarism severely persecuted the Georgian language, and Anton Pirveli's scholastic-archaic style further aggravated it. Artificially complex and rigid phrases were incomprehensible to the ordinary reader. Socio-political changes made it necessary to carry out new reforms and the process of democratization of the language.

Theoretical foundations

A considerable number of scientific works have been dedicated to this issue; the issue is topical and widely discussed in Georgian literary studies. In our research, we rely on the scientific works of specific scientists, namely A. Urushadze, V. Kotetishvili, D. Gamezardashvili, E. Vardoshvili, as well as, based on the specifics of the issue, the original works of Gr. Orbeliani, I. Chavchavadze, and I. Chavchavadze's literary-critical and publicistic writings, which we consider important in discussing this issue.

Analysis and discussion

The issue of the relationship between literary generations is one of the topical issues in the Georgian reality of the 19th century, which, on the one hand, determined involvement of Georgia in the common European space, and on the other hand, made it necessary to carry out reforms in both the language and social and cultural spheres. It should be noted that the new Georgian literary language was born in the secular poetry of the 12th century, in the literary works of Shota Rustaveli, Chakhrukhadze, Shavteli, and others. Its formation was completed in the 18th century. This is noticeable in the works of David Guramishvili and Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani. The natural development of literary Georgian was hindered by the school of Anton I for a century. According to his theory of three styles, it was unacceptable to discuss all subjects in the same language. For "high matter", for example, theology, the "high style" was suitable; for historical narration, the "medium style"; for everyday events, the ordinary colloquial language "low style" was used.

The “high style” tried to approach the language of Ioane Petritsi. It should be noted that Ioane Petritsi is one of the prominent representatives of Georgian philosophical thought of the 11th–12th centuries, who worked for a certain period in the Petritsoni i.e. Bachkovo monastery in Bulgaria, before King David the Builder founded the Gelati Academy in 1106. “The Petritsoni Monastery of the Most Holy Theotokos was founded in 1083 by prominent state and public figures, Taoist eristavi who rose to the court of the Byzantine emperor Alexios Komnenos (1081-1118) - the great domestic of the West Grigol Bakurianisdze and his brother Magistros Abbas” (Urushadze, 1969, p.23). Since the 1860s, there have been differences of opinion among the followers of the theory of three styles. In 1860, Alexander Jambakur-Orbeliani published a letter in the journal “Tsiskari” entitled “Georgian Subdistrict or Writing”, in which he preferred the “middle style”.

A radical position was held by Ilia Chavchavadze, who rejected Anton Catholicos’s demands regarding three styles and recognized that the language of the people, or the third style, should become the basis of the Georgian literary language. In his works, Ilia Chavchavadze did not adhere to artificial norms considered mandatory, did not use unnecessary letters, and did not avoid using simple words.

Socio-political changes made the process of democratization of the language necessary. Language is one of the important foundations of cultural integration and relations between peoples. Language is a living thing, constantly changing and developing. Each language expresses the spirit, psychology, and moral values of a nation. Language is one of the main characteristics of identity.

Since the 19th century, the interest of foreign researchers and scientists in Georgia has been growing considerably. This is evidenced by the works of M. Brose, O. Wardrop, A. Leist, Jules Klaproth, and others. In their works, they consider Georgia as part of European culture and civilization. Therefore, it became necessary to carry out reforms that would bring Georgia even closer to the European world. “European literary and intellectual traditions and forms of figurative language were reflected in the works of Georgian classicists of the 19th century” (Vardoshvili, 2022, p. 155).

We should also take into account that “in the 19th century, the national issue became acute in the minds of Georgian society. The preservation of statehood and national identity, and the inclusion of the country in global processes, had to take place in the conditions of a country acting as a province of Russia” (Vardoshvili, 2018, p.148). It is

noteworthy that all issues in the work of the 1860s are related to the problems facing the nation, its present and future.

Ilia Chavchavadze first confronted the representatives of the older generation of Georgian writers exactly on issues of language. In 1861, the young writer in the magazine "Tsiskari", published a publicistic article: "A Few Words on Prince Revaz Shalva Eristavi's Translation of Kozlov's 'The Madman'", in which he mercilessly exposed the translator's low literary taste. He disapproved both the work and the translation, noting that, in its content and idea, the work was not valuable for Georgian society. He defined the political and universal significance of language: "Three divine treasures have been left to us from our ancestors: homeland, language, faith. If we do not take care of these, what kind of men will we be, what kind of answer will we give to posterity? Language is a sacred thing; it is public property" (Chavchavadze, 1991, p. 30). Ilia Chavchavadze's letter served as a literary manifesto. Three letters against him were published in "Tsiskari": Barbara Jorjadze's "On the Criticism of P. Ilia Chavchavadze", Revaz Eristavi's "Response to the Criticism of Prince Ilia Chavchavadze," and Giorgi Baratashvili's "Letter to the Editor". The letters of representatives of the "New Generation" were also published in the contemporary press. These are: K. Lortkipanidze's "Book Addressed to the Editor Ekv. Tsereteli", G. Tsereteli's "A Few Words on the Article by Zemouri Imereli Goriseli" and A. Tsereteli's "A Capricious Page". Ilia Chavchavadze's "Response", where he defends his position on issues of language and literature, is important; he responds to the debate against him in "Tsiskar", justifies the necessity of removing obsolete letters, simplifying the language, and simplifying spelling. He explains the importance of criticism in the process of conducting literary processes and notes: "When the pseudo-classical direction was declining in Europe and the romantic direction was slowly emerging, whose representative was finally the great Schiller; when Goethe appeared with his "Werther", Bernardin de Saint-Pierre with his "Paul and the Virgin", Jean-Jacques Rousseau with his "Héloïse", then Europe was first given a sweetening ray of poetry; At that time, writers who were oppressed by the pseudo-classical direction rushed like hungry to the newborns direction of poetry" (Chavchavadze, 1991, p. 58). As we can see, Ilia does not limit himself only to Georgian reality and tries to connect the events developing in Georgia with those of Europe.

The name of the "Tergdaleulebi", i.e. the new generation, is also associated with the revival of literary criticism in the the 1860s–1870s.

The “Tergdaleulebi” invaded our literature as true revolutionaries and boldly attacked the “idols” that their fathers worshiped. The “fathers”, of course, took such a naivety of the “sons” as offence, and a struggle was broken out” (Kotetishvili, 1959, p. 284). The “sons” demanded the creation of works not carrying sentimental and romantic tendencies, but a realistic vision of the present, which would be aimed at awakening the nation and fighting against the Russian imperialist regime. At the same time, it would raise national self-consciousness. It would show society the vicious sides of the political and social system. “In the course of the ideological-literary struggle, I. Chavchavadze and his associates exposed the ideological backwardness and weakness of the artistic abilities of the writers who had gathered in “Tsiskari”, but this was only one side of the “Tergdaleulebi” program. They should also ensure the final dominance of critical realism in Georgian literature (Gamezardashvili, 1957, p. 355). This would lead to the establishment of democratic values in society.

The relationship between “fathers” and “sons” became even more tense when, in January 1863, the “sons” published their own magazine, “Sakartalos Moambe”. In the program letter “Sakartalos Moambe”, Ilia Chavchavadze addresses “the relationship between existence and consciousness, the issue of the necessity of the development of public life, the relationship between art and science and their relationship to objective reality, the purpose of literature and its place in the process of the development of society” (Gamezardashvili, 1957, p. 365). In the letter, he wrote: “If the journal is to conscientiously fulfill its difficult task, it must closely follow the current life, to keep an eye and mind on every emerging fact; to give way to every beneficial movement of thought, to notice everything and to respond to everything. In this difficult task, the journal must lead forward the light of science and the pen of art” (Chavchavadze, 1991, p. 130-131).

The new generation also demanded the protection of the purity of the language and the realization of its significance. In the letter “Here is History”, Ilia Chavchavadze wrote: “The language of man, his speech, is the entire unwritten history of the nation separately and of humanity in general” (Chavchavadze, 1955, p. 29). Ilia considered the significance of language from a historical and general human phenomenon perspective.

Ilia Chavchavadze’s letters disturbed the conservative-reactionary “fathers” camp, accustomed to comfort. They felt that under the leadership of Ilia Chavchavadze, a force was coming that would never

be reconciled with the outdated and reactionary. The struggle over the issues of the new Georgian literary language ended with the victory of Ilia Chavchavadze and his like-minded followers. In the the 1860s–1870s, they were able to restore the natural development of the Georgian language. The Georgian literary language, oriented towards colloquial folk speech, became the literary language. This completed the process of democratization of the language.

The works of 19th-century classicists Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli, Vazha-Pshavela, and others were created in the new Georgian literary language. Many generations were brought up on Iakob Gogebashvili's "Mother Language" and "The Door of Nature".

The battle between the generations took on an even more principled character when the Russian emperor arrived in Georgia in 1871. The Georgian nobility decided to appeal to the emperor, and a special commission was created, which included representatives of the old and new generations. The new generation wanted to ask the king to open a university. The old generation demanded the establishment of a military academy. Ilia Chavchavadze and his associates dreamed of establishing a Georgian university. Grigol Orbeliani and his supporters dreamed of a military academy, the latter being a desire of the Russian emperor himself, and of course, the older generation achieved its goal.

The sons did not forgive their fathers for this unworthy act, and in 1871, Ilia Chavchavadze created epigrams about the representatives of the older generation, which were called "Riddles" and "More Riddles." In "Riddles," he mentioned the brave Marshal Revaz Andronikashvili, Senator Giorgi Mukhran-Batoni, General and famous reactionary Ivane Mukhran-Batoni, Platon Ioseliani, writer and public figure, Dimitri Jorjadze, member of the Council of the Crown Prince of the Caucasus, Iase Chavchavadze, member of the provincial administration, Besarion Ghoghoberidze, former "Tergdaleuli," and Grigol Orbeliani, poet-general. In "More Riddles," Ilia also criticized the head of the Tergi region, later the Chancellor of the Russian Empire, Mikhail Loris-Melikov, Adjutant General Ioseb Tarkhnishvili, the romantic poet Mikhail Tumanishvili, and the writer and public figure Dimitri Kipiani. The writer did not spare those people who did not care about the country and public affairs, thinking only about personal advancement and medals. He called them flatterers and hypocrites.

He was more lenient towards the famous romantic poet Grigol Orbeliani, whom he called a bridge connecting the old and new gener-

ations. Ilia Chavchavadze accused him of cowardice. The riddles unsettled the romantic Grigol Orbeliani, and in 1872, he created a very harsh and extensive poem, "Answer to the Children." According to the poet, the "sons" traveled around Russia in vain and became ignorant, and they also lost their national dignity. They do not appreciate the merits and services of the "fathers" to the nation. He accused the new generation of degenerating the language.

*Those uneducated, false Rustavis,
have completely desecrated our rich language...
Whatever language perishes,
the nation also falls,
and the pus spreads over the holy temple.*

(Orbeliani, 1989, p. 166)

Of course, this was a big mistake, because the "sons" had made great contributions to the restoration and development of the unified Georgian literary language. Orbeliani calls the "sons" godless, false liberals. As we can see, Orbeliani fails to properly appreciate the merits of the "sons."

Ilia Chavchavadze gave a strict and fair answer to Orbeliani with his poem "Reply to a Reply." It is true, Ilia notes, that we have also visited Russia, but we have not behaved like you; we have not exchanged our country, which was dead to you, for ranks and personal well-being. Ilia accused the older generation of being idle, hypocritical, and slandering their own language and people. As for the accusation of the loss of the language, Ilia convincingly declares to the older generation an indifferent attitude towards their native language.

*Are you not the very ones who,
by decree, abandoned your native tongue to be eradicated?
Out of fear,
You no longer use it either in public or at home,
to your own disgrace." (Chavchavadze, 1987, p. 144)*

Like Ilia Chavchavadze, epigrams about the representatives of the older generation were also created by the representative of the new generation, the famous classicist of the 19th century, Akaki Tsereteli.

Conclusion

Scientific research has shown us that, the battle of "fathers" and "sons", which aimed to restore and renew the literary language, strengthen realism in writing, form a new philosophical-aesthetic and socio-political worldview, which was to become the basis for social

equality, moral unity, and national integrity, ended with the victory of the new generation. Because a society that does not have the desire to strive for novelty and clings only to old and outdated traditions cannot develop, cannot create lasting cultural values, and cannot support a democratic system. All this was aimed at the inclusion of Georgia in common global processes. The conflict between the “fathers” and the “sons” demonstrates how generational change may become a driving force of cultural modernization. In the Georgian case, the debate extended beyond literary questions and reflected broader transformations in language, education, public life, and national self-awareness. The study therefore illustrates how literary generations may serve as agents of social and cultural change.

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