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<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-06381-8>

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Translation, adaptation and identity: the role of literature in Georgia's Europeanization process (19th-century perspective)

Gül Mükerrerem Öztürk^{1,2}✉

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Georgia experienced a complex process of Europeanization that reshaped its cultural and literary landscape. In this period, marked by the country's incorporation into the Russian Empire, Georgian writers engaged with French and Russian literary traditions through translation, adaptation, and rewriting. This article examines how three key figures—Aleksandre Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani, and Grigol Rcheulishvili—used translation not simply as a means of linguistic transfer but also as a tool for negotiating identity and cultural autonomy under imperial pressure. Drawing on post-colonial theory, comparative literature, and contextual analysis, this study explores how translated texts were creatively reconfigured to reflect local historical consciousness and ideological priorities. The findings show that translation functioned as a form of cultural resistance and hybrid expression, enabling Georgian authors to incorporate Enlightenment ideals, Romantic esthetics, and new genres while embedding them in native literary forms. Aleksandre Chavchavadze's engagement with French classics, Grigol Orbeliani's national rewriting of Russian poetry, and Grigol Rcheulishvili's localization of European prose all exemplify how foreign influences were rearticulated through a distinctly Georgian lens. The article argues that these practices contributed to the emergence of a modern literary language and national subjectivity in Georgia. Rather than passive reception, the Europeanization of Georgian literature was shaped by active strategies of adaptation and ideological reinterpretation. This study contributes to postcolonial literary scholarship by demonstrating how peripheral literary systems employed translation as a medium of cultural self-determination during periods of asymmetrical power relations.

¹ Department of Georgian Language and Literature, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, Rize, Turkey. ² Oxford School of Global and Area Studies, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK. ✉email: gul.ozturk@erdogan.edu.tr

Introduction

Georgia is a country with a multi-layered historical memory and is situated between East and West, both geographically and culturally. This unique positioning is also evident in the country's literature. The evolution of Georgian literature has been shaped by a confluence of political and cultural influences, ranging from ancient Christian heritage to the Persian, Ottoman, and eventually, the Russian Empire. Notably, during the first half of the nineteenth century, profound social and political transformations contributed to a shift in literary function, transforming it from an exclusively esthetic domain to an ideological platform for the construction of national identity. Consequently, literature transcended its role as an individual medium of expression and served instead as both a medium for collective memory and a foundational element in the formation of national identity.

The nineteenth century was a period of profound change in Georgia, encompassing not only political shifts but also cultural and literary developments. This transformation, which transpired under the dominion of Tsarist Russia, was influenced by external pressures and facilitated the flourishing of novel intellectual tendencies and literary orientations. The period also marked the genesis of Georgia's Europeanization, which, in conjunction with modernization discourses, assumed significance through responses to the crisis of cultural identity. The process of Europeanization in Georgia did not follow a straightforward adoption of Western values or literary forms. Rather, it involved selective and imaginative engagement with foreign texts, often filtered through Russian cultural intermediaries. Georgian authors did not merely assimilate these external influences; instead, they reinterpreted them through literary translation and adaptation. This simultaneous process of appropriation and resistance gave rise to hybrid forms deeply rooted in local history, cultural values, and linguistic traditions. In this complex and dynamic context, where local traditions and external influences converged, literary production emerged as a pivotal site for the construction of identity.

In this framework, Georgian literature went beyond being a mere field of reception and interacted with European and Russian literature through tools such as translation, adaptation, and creative rewriting. Russian culture, in particular, served as an intermediary channel for opening up to Europe, and this indirect orientation was strongly felt in the intellectual circles of the period. The interaction is obvious not only in thematic diversification but also on a formal level. Georgian writers created a unique synthesis by blending the narrative forms, character structures, and themes that they encountered in European and Russian literature with their own literary traditions. This synthesis led to the redefinition of concepts such as nation, identity, individual, and freedom in the literature. Although the Europeanization of Georgian literature has been addressed in previous scholarship, the role of translation and adaptation as instruments of cultural resistance and identity formation remains insufficiently examined—particularly from a postcolonial theoretical perspective. In contrast to Tamar Sharabidze's primarily descriptive mapping of literary influences, this study foregrounds the ideological dimensions of translation practices within postcolonial and comparative frameworks. In this way, it reconceptualizes literary interactions not as passive acts of cultural borrowing but as active processes of self-representation and cultural negotiation.

By focusing on the interplay among translation, adaptation, and identity formation, this article aims to reconceptualize Europeanization as a negotiated and localized cultural process within nineteenth-century Georgian literature. Furthermore, the contributions of figures such as Aleksandre Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani, and Grigol Rcheulishvili have rarely been analyzed as

deliberate strategies of ideological rewriting. The primary objective of this study is to explore how the process of Europeanization manifested in Georgian literature during the first half of the nineteenth century. It focuses on how this process was internalized through translation and literary adaptation and how it ultimately enriched the thematic and structural complexity of Georgian literature. Within this framework, particular attention is given to the translational practices and creative works of prominent literary figures of the period, including Aleksandre Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani, and Grigol Rcheulishvili.

This study analyzes the stylistic influences of European literature on Georgian literature. It also discusses how this influence was nationalized and embedded in the local discourse. In this context, the influences of romantic literature, traces of "dark romanticism," early examples of detective narratives, and fiction focusing on individual psychological conflicts are evaluated.

Rather than direct cultural assimilation, this orientation observed in Georgian literature developed within the framework of a multi-layered, indirect, and selective model of interaction as envisioned by postcolonial thought. In this context, Russian culture functioned as a transitional space; Georgian writers were inspired by European and Russian literature but reproduced these influences in accordance with local historical and cultural contexts. When examined through the lens of Edward Said's (1993) theory of cultural representation and counter-narrative, it becomes clear that the local subject actively constructed its own cultural discourse, despite occupying a seemingly passive position.

Intellectuals such as Aleksandre Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani, Nikoloz Baratashvili, Solomon Razmadze, Mikheil Tumanishvili, Vakhtang Orbeliani, and Giorgi Eristavi contributed to this transformation process by introducing not only texts but also forms and themes into local literature through their translations from Russian. These translations and adaptations, as posited by Tamar Sharabidze (2014a), expanded the boundaries of local literature, thereby allowing the emergence of new genres, narrative techniques, and thematic expansions. As previously noted by Tamar Sharabidze, these translational interactions were especially evident in poetic form, rhythmic innovation, and thematic diversity, positioning literature as a powerful tool for articulating national consciousness and collective memory. Although these works draw on foreign literary traditions, they are marked by a distinctive synthesis with the historical experiences of the Georgian people, culminating in the emergence of a unique narrative form (Damrosch, 2003, p 281).

This study investigates the manifestation of Europeanization in Georgian literature by analyzing the works of three key writers—Aleksandre Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani, and Grigol Rcheulishvili—through postcolonial and comparative frameworks. Drawing on postcolonial theory and the discipline of comparative literature, this study examines the processes of authentication in Georgian literature through concepts such as hybridization, rewriting, and "resistant translation". The theoretical foundation of this analysis is grounded in Edward Said's (1993) theory of cultural representation, alongside Susan Bassnett's (1993) emphasis on evaluating intertextual relations within their historical and cultural contexts. The framework is further enriched by Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "third space," Lawrence Venuti's (1995) notion of resistant translation, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1993) critique of subjectivation and representation.

Accordingly, this study first presents the historical-cultural background of the period, then analyzes the literary reflections of the Europeanization process, and finally discusses the genre, thematic, and structural contributions of this interaction in

Georgian literature. Among the methods used, comparative literary analysis, intertextuality, and postcolonial discourse analysis are considered together. This process shows that translation and literary adaptation are not only artistic but also cultural and ideological fields of action.

By employing postcolonial theory, intertextual analysis, and methods from comparative literature, this study examines selected works by the aforementioned writers. By analyzing how practices of translation, adaptation, and rewriting contributed to the hybridization of Georgian literary identity, the study positions literature as a central agent in the construction of national selfhood.

Theoretical background

This study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that brings together postcolonial theory, translation studies, and world literature approaches to analyze the role of translation and adaptation in nineteenth-century Georgian literature. The combination of these perspectives makes it possible to understand both the power asymmetries between imperial and peripheral cultures and the creative strategies by which Georgian writers redefined European and Russian models in the process of nation-building.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) established a foundational critique of how cultural representations sustain political domination, showing how empires construct "the other" to legitimize their power. Although Georgia was not colonized in the same way as many Asian or African territories, the Russian imperial context placed Georgian literature in a subordinate cultural position that parallels other postcolonial cases. Building on Said, Homi Bhabha (1994) introduced concepts such as hybridity, mimicry, and the third space, which describe how marginalized cultures negotiate identity in the "in-between" of domination and resistance. These concepts are especially relevant to Georgian writers like Ilia Chavchavadze and Grigol Orbeliani, who appropriated foreign literary forms while simultaneously inscribing them with local national meanings. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1993) reflections on the politics of translation highlight how voices from the periphery are often muted when mediated through dominant languages and cultures. Her framework helps to explain the dual challenge faced by Georgian intellectuals: resisting the silencing imposed by Russian imperial discourse while also translating themselves into a European literary idiom. Julia Kristeva's (1980) notion of intertextuality further illuminates how meaning and identity are produced through the interaction of multiple texts within a cultural system. Drawing on her psycho-semiotic theory, Kristeva argues that the subject of discourse is constituted through the dynamic interplay between the semiotic and the symbolic dimensions of language—between the pre-verbal rhythms of emotion and the structured order of signification (Kristeva 1980). Poetic and translational acts thus reveal the tension between these two forces, generating new meanings through rhythm, rupture, and reconfiguration. Within this framework, nineteenth-century Georgian writers' engagement with foreign literary forms can be interpreted as a semiotic reactivation of suppressed cultural energies within a newly codified national language.

Within translation studies, Lawrence Venuti (1995) emphasized the cultural and political dimensions of translation through the contrast between domestication and foreignization, arguing for a strategy of resistant translation that exposes rather than erases cultural difference. This notion resonates strongly with the way Georgian writers indigenized European Romantic motifs to construct a distinct national voice. Antoine Berman's (1985) critique of the "deforming tendencies" of translation likewise

provides an ethical lens, emphasizing the importance of preserving alterity and resisting cultural homogenization. These insights make it possible to interpret nineteenth-century Georgian adaptations not as derivative borrowings but as active interventions in cultural politics.

Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* (2004) offers a complementary macro-perspective, mapping the unequal relations of power in the global literary field. Her distinction between "center" and "periphery" helps to situate Georgian literature in the nineteenth century as a peripheral tradition negotiating recognition from the dominant centers of St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Western Europe. Casanova's framework clarifies how translation and adaptation functioned as tools for both dependency and autonomy: Georgian intellectuals sought legitimacy by engaging with European models, yet simultaneously transformed those models into statements of cultural independence.

Taken together, these theoretical approaches provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how nineteenth-century Georgian writers recontextualized Russian and European literary works. Said and Bhabha underscore the postcolonial dynamics of cultural negotiation; Spivak highlights the risks of silenced voices; Venuti and Berman reveal translation as an ideological practice of resistance; Casanova situates Georgian literature within the broader global literary hierarchy. This combined framework will guide the textual analysis that follows, allowing us to read Georgian adaptations not simply as literary borrowings but as creative acts of national self-definition.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research strategy to elucidate the literary interactions and cultural transformations that occurred in Georgia during the first half of the 19th century, particularly in the context of the Europeanization process. The methodological framework builds on the theoretical perspectives outlined in Section "Theoretical background" and is informed by critical engagement with primary sources such as poetry, short stories, and translated texts. A qualitative approach is especially appropriate for this research, as it enables a nuanced understanding of how literature interacts with cultural, historical, and social dynamics. Rather than relying on quantitative data, this method facilitates the close reading of texts to uncover structural patterns, semantic layers, cultural messages, and embedded ideological codes.

Intertextual comparative analysis. This section explores how Georgian literary texts draw on European and Russian sources by emphasizing their creative transformation through intertextuality. Intertextual analysis in this study investigates the relationships between Georgian literary texts and their Russian and European counterparts. The analysis focuses on thematic and stylistic connections and explores how quotations, inspirations, and adaptations function not only as literary strategies but also as vehicles for cultural and ideological transmission.

This study also examines translation and adaptation processes, with attention given to both the content conveyed and the mechanisms of its transmission. Particular emphasis is placed on how these literary practices are interpreted and reshaped within their specific cultural contexts. Through a series of illustrative examples, the analysis demonstrates how external influences—especially from Russian and European sources—are localized, internalized, and transformed within Georgian literature.

Sample applications:

1. **Aleksandre Chavchavadze:** through his translations of French classics such as Voltaire and Racine, Aleksandre Chavchavadze not only facilitated linguistic transfer but

also incorporated the esthetic conventions of French Enlightenment literature into the Georgian literary tradition. The individualistic and moral themes characteristic of Enlightenment thought—exemplified in works such as Voltaire’s *Zaire* and La Fontaine’s *Fables*—were effectively recontextualized within Georgian cultural narratives.

2. **Grigol Orbeliani:** in his poem *The Toast*, which stylistically echoes Zhukovsky’s *A Singer in the Camp of Russian Warriors*, Grigol Orbeliani undertook a form of cultural rewriting that transcends mere imitation. By refashioning the Russian source text to resonate with Georgian national identity, he achieved a transformation at both the formal and thematic levels. This instance illustrates the dynamic interplay between translation and adaptation as tools of cultural negotiation and literary self-fashioning.
3. **Grigol Rcheulishvili:** in the short stories *Anuka Batonishvili* and *Tamar Batonishvili*, Rcheulishvili adopted a reconstructionist approach by reconfiguring structural motifs from French and Italian novels within a Georgian historical and cultural framework. Specifically, *Anuka Batonishvili* draws inspiration from Fiorentino’s *Isabel Orsini*, but its narrative structure is reimagined to align with the values and social dynamics of Georgian society. This literary strategy exemplifies both the localization of European influences and the articulation of cultural identity through narrative innovation.

Although intertextual analysis reveals the formal and thematic correspondence between texts, such relationships must be contextualized within the broader historical and sociocultural milieu in which they are produced. Accordingly, the method of contextual reading constitutes a central analytical lens in this study and enables a deeper engagement with the multilayered meanings embedded in texts.

Contextual reading. In this section, texts are placed within their historical and political environments to illuminate how literature functioned ideologically in 19th-century Georgia. Contextual reading interprets literary texts within their historical, political, and sociocultural frameworks. Within this approach, works of 19th-century Georgian literature are examined against the backdrop of the Europeanization process, the imposition of Russian cultural hegemony, and the evolving discourse of national identity. This analytical lens highlights how literary texts function not only as esthetic artefacts but also as ideological expressions shaped by the tensions of their time.

Once the historical and cultural underpinnings of the texts are established through contextual reading, it becomes essential to engage more deeply with the embedded power dynamics, identity negotiations, and strategies of cultural representation. At this stage, postcolonial literary discourse analysis becomes a crucial methodological tool that offers insights into how these texts articulate resistance, hybridity, and reconfigured identities within an uneven colonial encounter.

Postcolonial discourse analysis. This part analyzes how translated and adapted texts acted as tools for negotiating identity under imperial influence. Postcolonial discourse analysis is employed to investigate the ways in which literary texts engage with questions of cultural identity, power asymmetries, and ideological positioning. Informed by concepts such as hybridity, counter-narrative, and the politics of translation (see Section “Theoretical background”), this approach highlights how Georgian authors embedded resistance and national subjectivity into their works. Within this framework, texts such as Grigol Orbeliani’s *Confession* and Grigol Rcheulishvili’s adaptation-based

narratives are interpreted not as passive borrowings but as active processes of cultural negotiation and literary rewriting.

Source usage and text selection. This section outlines the criteria used to select key texts for analysis, with a focus on literary innovation, translation, and historical significance. The primary corpus of this study consists of selected poems, short stories, and translated texts from 19th-century Georgian literature, which are chosen for their relevance to both literary innovation and cultural transformation. These texts exemplify the key dynamics in the interplay between local literary production and foreign literary traditions.

The selection of texts is guided by the following criteria:

1. Demonstrable influence from French and Russian literary models;
2. Engagement with processes of translation, adaptation, and rewriting; and
3. Evidence of structural transformation through the adoption of new literary genres and forms (e.g., free verse, dark romanticism, and the romantic tale).

A principal reference for the identification and contextualization of these texts is Tamar Sharabidze’s (2014b) seminal work, *Influences or Literary Relations in the Georgian Literary Process of the First Half of the 19th-Century*. This study provides a foundational overview of the intertextual dynamics and cultural interactions during this period.

The selected texts align closely with the study’s theoretical framework not only in terms of literary influence but also in their capacity to support postcolonial and intertextual analyzes. The subsequent sections demonstrate how the theoretical perspectives are applied to the textual material.

Application of the theoretical approach. This section compares Georgian literary works with their European counterparts to highlight how genres were transformed and localized. The methodological framework of this study combines intertextual analysis, postcolonial discourse analysis, and comparative literature (see Section “Theoretical background”). This approach allows us to trace how texts interact structurally and thematically across languages and cultures, while also revealing how Georgian authors recontextualized foreign models through processes of adaptation and rewriting. For instance, as Tamar Sharabidze (2014a) emphasizes, Aleksandre Chavchavadze’s translations of French classics such as Voltaire’s *Zaire* and La Fontaine’s *Fables* were not only linguistic transfers but also ideological reinterpretations shaped by Georgian cultural codes. In this way, the study applies the theoretical perspectives outlined in Section “Theoretical background” to concrete literary examples, demonstrating how external influences were localized and transformed into expressions of Georgian identity.

Practicing comparative literature: transformation of form and genre. This section compares Georgian literary works with their European counterparts to show how genres were transformed and localized. Another significant methodological approach adopted in this study is the comparative literature perspective. The objective of comparative literature is to identify thematic, stylistic, and cultural parallels between disparate cultures and literary works, thereby facilitating a nuanced comprehension of the interactions among these texts. Susan Bassnett’s (1993) conceptualization of comparative literature as a “multi-dimensional method” accounts for both the similarities between texts and the sociopolitical conditions under which they were produced. In this context, an analysis of the relations of Georgian

writers with Russian and European literature is conducted from the perspectives of esthetics, ideology, and society.

Tamar Sharabidze's (2014a) analysis demonstrates that Grigol Orbeliani's poem *The Toast* compared with Vasily Zhukovsky's poem *A Singer in the Camp of Russian Warriors* reveals clear formal similarities; however, it is rewritten with a distinct national sensibility. In this context, formal transformation can be interpreted as a process of reproduction shaped not only by the poets' technical proficiency but also by the prevailing social structures and the broader quest for national identity. Grigol Rcheulishvili's adaptations of French and Italian novels to Georgian historical and cultural contexts exemplify a significant form of comparative literary practice. These adaptations underscore the multifaceted role of poets and writers in the literary landscape who transcend being mere translators to emerge as creative agents who substantively reshape the literary terrain.

Taken together, the methodological approaches presented above make it possible to address creative interactions in Georgian literature in a multidimensional way. They facilitate a more comprehensive account of how literary texts are transformed across languages and cultures and illuminate the deeper ideological and esthetic forces at play. However, the scope and potential contributions of this research should also be considered.

Scope and contributions of the study. This section reflects the study's scope and theoretical originality while suggesting future directions for Georgian literary research. The main objective of this study is to analyze not only how texts are reconstructed in cultural contexts but also the impact of translation/adaptation on identity production. Although some of these texts have been previously analyzed, this study aims to make a new methodological contribution through in-depth analysis from a postcolonial and comparative literature perspective. The innovative approach in this study involves an examination of cultural interactions in Georgian literature from a distinctive theoretical standpoint, offering a novel perspective on the subject.

In accordance with this methodological and theoretical framework, the findings obtained through the literary examples selected in this study are presented systematically below. These findings aim to demonstrate how translation, adaptation, and rewriting function as critical tools of cultural negotiation and identity construction in 19th-century Georgian literature.

This period in Georgian literary history is distinguished by significant formal and thematic transformations driven by the process of Europeanization. These changes extended beyond mere translation and encompassed the creative reinterpretation of local literary traditions and the development of new expressive modes through adaptation. In the following section, the literary impact of the Europeanization process is explored through the works of three key figures of the period—Aleksandre Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani, and Grigol Rcheulishvili—by examining their practices of translation, adaptation, and rewriting.

Analysis: translation and literary adaptation in 19th-century Georgian literature

This section examines how translation and literary adaptation operated as pivotal mechanisms in shaping the thematic, structural, and ideological contours of 19th-century Georgian literature. Far from being passive imitations, translated and adapted texts became active instruments for negotiating identity, resisting imperial dominance, and asserting cultural autonomy. Through close readings of selected works by Aleksandre Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani, and Grigol Rcheulishvili, this analysis reveals how Georgian authors internalized and rearticulated foreign literary models—primarily from French, Russian, and broader

European traditions—within the framework of local esthetics and historical consciousness. Drawing on postcolonial theory, intertextuality, and comparative literary methods, this section highlights the creative transformations that enabled Georgian literature to modernize while preserving its distinct cultural identity.

Aleksandre Chavchavadze: translation as cultural innovation. As Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (1990) emphasize, “The act of translation in postcolonial contexts is rarely neutral but deeply enmeshed in ideological struggles.” Aleksandre Chavchavadze's translations should thus be viewed as both esthetic practices and as ideological interventions that challenge and reshape cultural authority.

Aleksandre Chavchavadze's translations of French Enlightenment authors such as Voltaire, Racine, and La Fontaine reflect not only a linguistic transfer but also a deliberate cultural recontextualization. His adaptations preserve Georgian poetic traditions while introducing rationalist and moral dimensions emblematic of Enlightenment literature. For example, *Dear Yar* and his adaptation of *Zaire* embody this fusion of foreign form with native sentiment. These acts of rewriting align with Venuti's concept of resistant translation and Damrosch's idea of world literature as cross-cultural dialog.

Grigol Orbeliani: romantic forms recontextualized. Grigol Orbeliani's poetry demonstrates a transformation of European Romantic themes into expressions of Georgian national sentiment. *The Toast*, inspired by Zhukovsky's *A Singer in the Camp of Russian Warriors* and indirectly by Thomas Gray's elegiac mode, reveals how external poetic structures are appropriated to reflect local ideological concerns. Orbeliani reworks the martial imagery and collective ethos of Zhukovsky's text into a distinctly Georgian context, replacing the Russian military setting with a symbolic scene of Georgian conviviality, where the act of toasting becomes an emblem of solidarity and resistance. Similarly, *Confession*, adapted from Ryleev's *Nalivaiko*, reconfigures the original narrative within a Georgian national framework (see Section “Localization and the rewriting of historical codes” for detailed analysis). These cases illustrate Bhabha's notion of hybridity, where meaning emerges in the cultural “in-between,” as borrowed Romantic forms are infused with local political symbolism and national sentiment.

Grigol Rcheulishvili: the localization of narrative genres. According to Lawrence Venuti (1995), resistant translation disrupts the transparency of cultural appropriation and asserts the translator's agency. Grigol Rcheulishvili's adaptive narratives reflect this resistance, as they reframe imported genres to critique local hierarchies and assert national identity.

Grigol Rcheulishvili's literary works, particularly *Anuka Batonishvili* and *Tamar Batonishvili*, show how narrative elements from European novels are embedded in Georgian historical settings. Rather than direct imitation, his adaptations exhibit genre blending, psychological depth, and sociopolitical critique. These transformations resist colonial literary hierarchies by constructing localized modern narratives. Hutcheon's theory of parody as critical reappropriation frames his work not as plagiarism but as ideological reinterpretation.

Circulation and transformation in the Europe–Russia–Georgia triangle. The intercultural dynamics observed in Georgian literature during the 19th century are not confined to direct transfers from Russian sources such as Vasily Zhukovsky. Rather, these dynamics reveal a broader network of literary circulation

that spans Europe, Russia, and Georgia. A case in point is Vasily Zhukovsky's *A Singer in the Camp of Russian Warriors*, which itself draws inspiration from Thomas Gray's English poem *The Bard*. Following Zhirmunsky's (1937) comparative-typological approach, the transformation of literary forms across the Europe–Russia–Georgia triangle can be understood as a dialectical process shaped by both internal evolution and external interaction. Zhirmunsky emphasized that shifts in literary movements arise not merely from direct influence but from the interplay between social ideology and artistic development, where typological convergence enables the circulation and hybridization of forms across cultural boundaries. David Damrosch (2003) argues that world literature emerges through processes of circulation and transformation. The Europe–Russia–Georgia literary triangle exemplifies this model, where texts traverse borders and accrue new meanings in each cultural context.

“Vasily Zhukovsky's poem traces its origins back to Thomas Gray's *The Bard*, demonstrating how literary structures circulated within the Europe–Russia–Georgia triangle.” (Sharabidze 2014a, p 7).

This observation highlights the multilayered nature of intercultural literary exchange, where texts are not merely translated or imitated but reinterpreted and reformulated according to new ideological and esthetic imperatives. The trajectory from Thomas Gray to Vasily Zhukovsky to Grigol Orbeliani reflects a chain of creative adaptation and illustrates how literary forms acquire new meanings as they are embedded in different sociopolitical and cultural contexts.

These examples underscore the necessity of understanding literary influence not as a linear process but as a complex, multidirectional network of circulation and transformation. Within this framework, the Europe–Russia–Georgia triangle emerges as a dynamic site of literary mobility, where texts traverse borders and are reshaped through processes of cultural negotiation. This perspective allows us to reconsider the role of Georgian literature as both a peripheral recipient of European forms and an active participant in the transnational production of meaning.

Localization and the rewriting of historical codes. Grigol Orbeliani's *Confession* illustrates a further dimension of literary adaptation: the localization and ideological transformation of existing narrative structures. The poem draws its inspiration from Kondraty Ryleev's *Nalivaiko's Confession* but reconfigures both its setting and its protagonist. Orbeliani shifts the scene from Warsaw to Mtskheta and replaces the Ukrainian national hero with a Georgian one. In this way, he not only appropriates a Russian literary model but also reorients its historical narrative to align with Georgian cultural memory and national discourse. As Sharabidze (2014a, p 8) notes, “this verse does not merely recount the past but functions as a presentist reflection.” The solemn, confessional tone of the poem—structured around penitential motifs and the voice of the condemned—enables Orbeliani to link personal suffering with collective sacrifice, turning a borrowed Romantic form into a vehicle for Georgian self-expression.

This transformation reflects the process of indigenization, in which foreign forms, themes, and narrative structures are appropriated and refashioned to serve the needs of the local culture. The substitution of place and character functions as an act of symbolic reterritorialization, while the evocation of Mtskheta—a sacred and historical center of Georgian identity—imbues the poem with religious and national resonance absent from Ryleev's original. By inserting Georgian identity into a structure originally designed to express another national

experience, Orbeliani reclaims the narrative space and imbues it with new ideological significance.

This practice closely aligns with postcolonial theories of cultural resistance and identity reconstruction. Rewriting historical codes becomes a mechanism through which subaltern cultures assert agency over inherited narratives. Through this lens, Orbeliani's adaptation is both a literary maneuver and a political gesture—one that reconfigures memory, history, and identity through the esthetic framework of localized storytelling.

Postcolonial resistance and creative rewriting. Grigol Orbeliani's translation and adaptation practices are closely aligned with the postcolonial concepts of rewriting and resistant translation (see Section “Theoretical background”). Rather than functioning as neutral acts of linguistic transfer, these practices became political and cultural strategies of resistance, negotiation, and identity construction. Although Orbeliani openly acknowledged Russian and European influences, his literary strategies were far from imitative. He consistently reworked these sources within Georgian ideological and cultural codes. For instance, *The Toast* (1830), inspired by Vasily Zhukovsky's *A Singer in the Camp of Russian Warriors*, is rewritten in a way that centers Georgian national sentiment and cultural values (Sharabidze 2014a). Similarly, Orbeliani's translations of works such as Voltaire's *Zaire* and La Fontaine's *Fables* were reshaped according to the moral and narrative frameworks of Georgian literature, embedding Enlightenment ideals within localized forms.

As discussed in Section “Localization and the rewriting of historical codes”, Orbeliani's *Confession* exemplifies both resistant translation and rewriting, showing how Georgian literature appropriated foreign texts to articulate its own national identity. These acts of localization and reterritorialization transformed imported narratives into vehicles of cultural memory and political agency. Through such creative resistance, Orbeliani's poetic practice demonstrates how Georgian literature internalized external influences while strategically restructuring them to articulate national self-definition.

Grigol Rcheulishvili: adaptation of romantic and dark genres to the Georgian context. Grigol Rcheulishvili's contributions to 19th-century Georgian prose are significant. The 19th-century Georgian literary tradition was characterized by the introduction of novelistic European structures, which were adapted and transformed rather than translated. Through the creative processes of adaptation and localization, Grigol Rcheulishvili established an original literary form by adapting the structural elements of European literature to the Georgian historical and cultural context. This adaptation process, therefore, represents more than a mere formal change; it is also a process of reproduction in accordance with the prevailing social and cultural contexts. Grigol Rcheulishvili's oeuvre is not only a reflection of European influences but also a blend of Georgian identities that result in the creation of a unique local identity. This type of localization can be seen as both a means of cultural transmission and a process of cultural resistance and identity construction.

In *Anuka Batonishvili*, for example, Grigol Rcheulishvili draws on structural elements from Italo Fiorentino's historical novel *Isabel Orsini*, but he reimagines the narrative within the social and historical realities of Georgian society. Through the deepening of character psychology and thematic specificity, he transforms the text into an original and localized form, as noted in earlier literary analysis. This mode of creative rewriting exemplifies what postcolonial theory refers to as localization—the strategic adaptation of foreign texts in ways that reinforce indigenous identity.

Table 1 Comparative adaptation strategies in the Georgian literature (1830–1850): key authors, source influences, and theoretical frameworks.

Author	Sources	Influenced author/work	Influence	Theoretical lens
A. Chavchavadze	French classics	Voltaire, La Fontaine	Lyrical form, enlightenment	Hybridization
G. Orbeliani	Russian/European	Zhukovsky, Gray	National rewriting	Resistant translation
G. Rcheulishvili	French/Italian prose	Fiorentino, Dumas	Dark romanticism	Indigenization

The short story *The Seduced at the Masquerade* further demonstrates Rcheulishvili’s innovative engagement with European literary forms. Drawing on the *Schauerromantik* and *roman-feuilleton* traditions of 19th-century French and German literature, the story introduces elements of dark romanticism into Georgian prose. The themes of psychological tension and forbidden passion and, the critique of social norms, position the story as both an esthetic experiment and a vehicle for social commentary.¹

Critics have occasionally accused Grigol Rcheulishvili of plagiarism. However, when approached through a postcolonial lens, these accusations invite a reconsideration of rewriting as a practice of strategic reappropriation. As Linda Hutcheon (1985) argues, parody can be understood as “repetition with critical distance,” reframing such borrowings as acts of formal innovation rather than literary theft. Grigol Rcheulishvili’s adaptations do not merely mirror existing forms but rather break with generic conventions and recompose narrative structures to express local cultural realities. His work exemplifies creative agency and transforms imported literary frameworks into vessels for indigenous esthetics, psychological nuance, and sociopolitical critique. In this way, his adaptations emerge as bold statements of cultural authorship rather than as passive derivations.

Grigol Rcheulishvili’s text, *Tamar Batonishvili*, inspired by Alexandre Dumas’s *The Two Dianas*, merges French romantic plotlines with elements from Georgian royal history (*Kartli History*), thus establishing an original narrative structure. Similarly, *The Sleepwalker* and *The Madman*—translations or adaptations of European models—integrate psychological depth, emotional conflict, and social critique, contributing to the formation of a modern literary language in Georgian prose.

Grigol Rcheulishvili is also credited with introducing dark romanticism to Georgian literature, a genre that had been well developed in Germany and France through themes of horror, madness, passion, and death. His short detective fiction can be regarded as one of the earliest examples of this genre in Georgian writing.

In addition to artistic originality, Grigol Rcheulishvili’s work embodies a broader project of cultural and social reconstruction. His prose functions as a vehicle for cultural criticism and offers new modes of narrative expression that challenge social hierarchies and redefine Georgian identity. In this way, literature becomes both a medium of resistance and a tool for shaping collective consciousness.

The dynamics evident in Grigol Rcheulishvili’s work—adaptation, transformation, and localization—resonate with the broader literary practices of the 19th-century Georgian canon. They reflect not only personal esthetic preferences but also a collective response to the pressures and possibilities of intercultural literary exchange.

General tendency: quotation or creative adaptation? The foreign influences that shaped Georgian literature in the first half of the 19th century are best understood not as passive imports but as the result of dynamic, creative adaptation. Rather than merely replicating European literary forms, Georgian writers actively reconfigured

them to align with local cultural, ideological, and historical contexts. As emphasized in a previous literary analysis, “Our task is to show the literary relations established in the era of Georgia’s Europeanisation... These trends acquire national character and differ from the previous literature by the peculiarities of representation.”

Such transformations should be read as part of a broader cultural and political project: the construction of a modern Georgian identity during a time of geopolitical tension and colonial encounter. Although new esthetic paradigms were introduced in the Europeanization of the early 19th century, they also activated local responses that asserted cultural distinctiveness. Literature thus served as both an esthetic form and a critical platform for negotiating between colonial pressures and national self-definition.

In light of this, the literary contributions of Aleksandre Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani, and Grigol Rcheulishvili can be viewed as case studies of how Georgian authors engaged with European and Russian literary models through strategies of resistant translation, localization, and cultural rewriting. These strategies not only transformed imported literary structures but also reshaped the Georgian literary landscape itself.

The table below presents the core findings of this study by summarizing the distinctive features of these three authors in relation to the foreign influences they engaged with, their strategies of transformation, and the theoretical concepts relevant to their literary production.

Table 1 summarizes the primary sources of influence for three major authors who contributed to the Europeanization process of Georgian literature in the first half of the 19th century. It illustrates what literary traditions they engaged with and how they transformed these influences through various strategies of adaptation, localization, and cultural rewriting. The data were compiled by the author based on Tamar Sharabidze’s (2014b) extensive analysis of literary developments during this period.

Crucially, Georgian writers did not adopt foreign literary and cultural influences in a straightforward or passive manner. Instead, they engaged in a creative and often critical transformation of these influences, producing works that were deeply embedded in Georgian historical experience, cultural values, and social structures. In this sense, literature functioned as a cultural mediator—a medium through which external forms were rearticulated to shape local identity.

For example, Aleksandre Chavchavadze’s translation of Voltaire’s *Zaire* and La Fontaine’s *Fables* exemplifies the transformation of Enlightenment literature into Georgian poetic discourse. His work represents both a formal transfer and an ideological reinterpretation aligned with local esthetics and values. Similarly, Grigol Orbeliani’s poem *The Toast*, inspired by Vasily Zhukovsky’s *A Singer in the Camp of Russian Warriors*, is reshaped through Georgian national sentiment and cultural symbolism.

In Grigol Rcheulishvili’s prose, especially in texts such as *Anuka Batonishvili* and *Tamar Batonishvili*, the influence of Italian and French novels is recontextualized through Kartli’s history and Georgian social dynamics. His use of Gothic motifs

and dark romantic elements—as in *The Seduced at the Masquerade*¹—demonstrates how new literary genres were introduced and redefined within a local frame of meaning.

This transformative process was not merely literary; it was part of a broader cultural and ideological project. The creative adaptations enacted by these authors laid the foundation for a Georgian national literature that resisted colonial pressures and asserted cultural autonomy. These acts of rewriting can be interpreted through Edward Said's (1993) theory of representation, in which literary language becomes a site of political and cultural counter-narrative. Similarly, Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of the third space offers a useful framework for understanding the hybrid identities produced through such intercultural literary exchanges.

These examples collectively demonstrate that the Georgian literature during this period was not merely receptive but also played a productive and transformative role. Translations and adaptations emerged as creative acts of resistance and redefinition, through which local values were affirmed, new genres were developed, and inherited literary traditions were reconfigured. Moreover, the evolution from creative adaptation towards explicit nationalism, as seen in the later *Tergdaleulebi* movement, highlights how literary practices gradually acquired more overt ideological significance. In this context, translation evolved from an esthetic activity into a politically charged act of cultural self-assertion. Thus, the development of 19th-century Georgian literature was not simply an esthetic trajectory but a complex process of identity construction, cultural survival, and ideological negotiation.

The transformation of language and construction of identity through literary language. The cultural and literary exchanges that occurred in Georgia during the first half of the 19th century resulted in a multi-layered transformation, extending beyond thematic or generic innovation. These interactions had a significant impact on the Georgian literary language and introduced not only new vocabulary but also new syntactic forms, discursive styles, and conceptual frameworks. Translations and adaptations from French and Russian literature laid the groundwork for a novel literary language that became instrumental in shaping both esthetic sensibilities and national identity.

As Tamar Gotsiridze (2012, p 113) emphasizes, translation during this period functioned as both a vehicle for the transmission of foreign ideas and a stylistic reconfiguration of Georgian culture itself. The transformation of literary language must thus be understood not solely as an esthetic evolution but also as a foundational element in the cultural and ideological reconstruction of Georgian identity.

From the perspective of Edward Said's (1993) theory of *cultural representation and hegemony*, the discursive patterns embedded in language are not neutral; they actively participate in the construction of subjectivity and national imaginaries. Within this framework, Georgian literary language, shaped by translation, facilitated the emergence of new modes of thinking and expression, thereby enabling both narrative and ideological subjectivation.

Particularly in the works of Aleksandre Chavchavadze, the stylistic hybridization of French classicism with the Georgian lyrical tradition marks a turning point in the formal and conceptual evolution of literary expression. His translations blend rational and moral discourse with traditional poetic sensibilities and produce a hybrid literary voice that reflects the tension between European influence and local identity. Similarly, in the writings of Grigol Orbeliani and Grigol Rcheulishvili, translation introduces novel concepts and forms that reshape not only individual texts but also the collective imagination of nationhood.

When analyzed through the lens of Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept of imagined communities, the emergence of a modern literary language in Georgia can be seen as instrumental in constructing a shared sense of national belonging. A common lexicon, a shared historical consciousness, and a vision of collective futurity were established through written texts. In this sense, translation was not merely linguistic labor but also a political act that mediated the transition from cultural fragmentation to national cohesion.

Moreover, this linguistic and literary transformation must be approached through a gendered lens. Although the past contributions of women remain largely invisible in traditional literary historiography, there is increasing evidence that women played important roles—particularly in translation and editorial processes. As cultural norms were reconstructed through literary exchange, the participation of women in these processes—often behind anonymous or male pseudonyms—opens new avenues for revisionist historiography. Future studies that examine archival sources, correspondence, and attribution practices will be vital in reclaiming women's roles in the production of literary modernity in Georgia.

Accordingly, the Europeanization of 19th-century Georgian literature constituted more than a formal or thematic transformation. It also marked the emergence of a new literary subjectivity rooted in the hybridization of language and culture. In this context, language served as both a site of resistance and a medium of ideological negotiation. Literature must therefore be understood not only as a reflection of this transformation but also as a dynamic agent in its own right. As seen in Rcheulishvili's *Tamar Batonishvili*, literary adaptation does not merely replicate foreign narratives but also actively reconfigures them to serve local ideological purposes, which demonstrates how literature itself can become a driver of cultural transformation. These insights call for an interdisciplinary methodology that bridges literary analysis with the conceptual frameworks of postcolonial theory, translation studies, and cultural historiography.

For example, archival documents held at the Giorgi Kekelidze National Library (Fonds 23, Correspondence, 1852) reveal a French-to-Georgian translation draft written in a distinctive cursive script, which archivists have suggested likely belonged to a woman based on the handwriting style and accompanying correspondence. This type of indirect evidence underscores the need for future research into anonymous or pseudonymous female contributors to 19th-century Georgian literary culture.

Although the identity of the translator remains unconfirmed, some scholars have speculated that it could be Ekaterine Gabashvili, who was known to be active in the educational and literary circles during this period. As Museridze (2015) argues, the modernization of Georgian prose was inseparable from structural innovations in narrative form that reflected broader shifts in literary identity.

Discussion

In the first half of the 19th century, Georgian literature underwent a profound restructuring not only in formal terms but also in its modes of meaning production and identity formation. This transformation occurred within a unique postcolonial context shaped not by direct colonization but by cultural mediation under the dominion of the Russian Empire.

Reframing postcolonial theory: Georgia as a case study. Georgia's case may encourage a reconsideration of certain aspects of traditional postcolonial models. The transformation experienced under Russian rule introduces a distinct form of imperial hegemony that operated more through cultural absorption than

Table 2 Adaptation pathways and intertextual rewriting in 19th-century Georgian literature: comparative source-text dynamics.

Source Author	Georgian Author	Textual Interaction	Mode of Engagement	Resulting Innovation
Voltaire	A. Chavchavadze	<i>Zaire-Alzira</i>	Thematic and formal adaptation	Introduction of enlightenment moral tragedy
Zhukovsky	G. Orbeliani	<i>A singer in the Camp of Russian Warriors- The Toast</i>	National rewriting	Development of patriotic poetic form
Fiorentino	G. Rcheulishvili	<i>Isabel Orsini- Anuka Batonishvili</i>	Historical-cultural adaptation	Emergence of localized historical prose

military conquest. In this light, Edward Said’s (1978) theory of cultural hegemony finds a new application, as Georgian writers were subjected to the symbolic power of a dominant imperial culture while they simultaneously developed strategies to subvert and localize it.

Georgian literary production during this period illustrates Homi Bhabha’s (1994) concept of the third space—a hybrid discursive zone where dominant and subaltern cultures intersect and negotiate meaning. This means that the writers of Georgian literature did not simply adopt foreign influences but reinterpreted them to express their own cultural voice. The literary texts produced by Aleksandre Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani, and Grigol Rcheulishvili do not merely reflect the imposition of Russian and European influences; they also reshape these influences through a localized esthetic and ideological lens.

Creative transmitters, not passive transporters. As Tamar Sharabidze (2014b) observes, Georgian writers of this period sought “not only to be carriers but to enrich their country and their literature” (p 19). This statement challenges the notion of translation as a neutral process. Instead, it aligns with Lawrence Venuti’s (1995) idea of resistant translation, where the act of translation is framed as ideological intervention.

Aleksandre Chavchavadze’s engagement with French classics exemplifies this stance. His translations—particularly those of Voltaire’s *Zaire* and La Fontaine’s *Fables*—did not merely import foreign literary forms; they also adapted these forms to align with Georgian cultural codes, reshaping the intellectual and esthetic sensibilities of the Georgian readership.

Europeanization and autonomous assimilation. Georgia’s increasing contact with European culture during this period did not result in simple emulation. Rather, it manifested as filtered appropriation—a deliberate and selective process of integrating foreign ideas into a local matrix. Grigol Orbeliani’s poem *The Toast*, although structurally echoing Vasily Zhukovsky’s *A Singer in the Camp of Russian Warriors*, reconfigures its content and emotional tone to reflect Georgian national consciousness.

This act of selective appropriation can be viewed as corresponding to certain elements of Gayatri Spivak’s critique of assimilation, wherein the subaltern subject reclaims its agency in shaping cultural representation. This dynamic reflects Spivak’s concern that subaltern voices are mediated through dominant languages, yet the Georgian case reveals how translation can simultaneously operate as a channel of self-articulation.

Dark romanticism as esthetic resistance. The introduction of dark romanticism into Georgian literature by Grigol Rcheulishvili reveals a different yet complementary dimension of cultural resistance. Drawing on the Schauerromantik and roman-feuilleton genres of European literature, Grigol Rcheulishvili’s short stories—such as *The Seduced at the Masquerade*—incorporate themes of passion, infidelity, deviation, and death. These elements not only violated social taboos but also questioned collective morality and identity.

From literary interaction to identity formation. This study suggests that 19th-century Georgian literature may be understood as both an esthetic realm and a dynamic space for cultural negotiation and ideological positioning. Translation, adaptation, and rewriting served not merely as literary strategies but also as vital tools for constructing identity. Georgian authors did not passively reflect European literary paradigms; rather, they engaged with them critically and creatively to forge a literary modernity grounded in hybridization, resistance, and national self-assertion.

The following comparative table synthesizes these processes and maps how the three principal authors of this study engaged with foreign influences and recast them within the ideological and esthetic structures of Georgian culture (See Table 2 for details).

This comparative perspective indicates that Georgian literary production may have operated under foreign influence while simultaneously engaging in selective and strategic forms of creative transformation. Cross-border literary practices *can be interpreted* both as acts shaped by cultural dependency and as potential strategic tools in broader processes of national identity formation.

Within this context, the comparative literature framework enables scholars to move beyond simplistic notions of resemblance and towards more nuanced understandings of transformation, adoption, and localization (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990). The Georgian case suggests that literary influence is not necessarily unidirectional; instead, it appears to be shaped by acts of cultural reinterpretation and creative agency.

Tamar Sharabidze’s (2014a) analysis strongly supports this view, emphasizing that Georgian authors were not merely cultural transmitters but also active literary agents who modernized and redefined the contours of their national literature. Her observation that “These trends acquire national character and differ from the previous literature by the peculiarities of representation” (Sharabidze 2014b, p 19) highlights the dynamic and localized nature of literary transformation in Georgia.

This insight proposes that Georgian writers did not simply incorporate European and Russian literary models but may have restructured and resemanticized them according to local cultural logics. The synthesis of theoretical frameworks and close textual readings in this study thus leads to its central conclusion: The findings of this study indicate that 19th-century Georgian literature was influenced by external literary currents while also exhibiting internal dynamics that may have contributed to emerging forms of national literary identity.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that nineteenth-century Georgian literature engaged with Europeanization not as a passive cultural reception but as a selective, negotiated, and ideologically charged process of adaptation. Drawing on this perspective, the study examined how translation and literary adaptation functioned as mechanisms for constructing cultural and national identity. Georgian writers and translators actively negotiated foreign influences and incorporated them into emerging forms of national self-representation.

Rather than offering a definitive historical account, the findings indicate that translation operated as an important cultural mechanism through which political aspirations, ideological debates, and esthetic preferences were articulated. Literature, in this context, functioned not only as a reflection of broader social change but also as an active agent in shaping modern Georgian national consciousness.

Overall, the study contributes to ongoing discussions in translation studies, cultural history, and identity formation by providing a historically grounded perspective on how small nations engage with dominant literary cultures. It also highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of the complex interactions between translation, adaptation, and cultural negotiation in nineteenth-century Eastern Europe. Additionally, by foregrounding translation as a cultural practice, this study offers insights that may contribute to contemporary discussions on Georgia's ongoing Europeanization and cultural diplomacy.

Limitations of the study. This study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is based on a selective corpus of literary works, primarily those of Aleksandre Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani, and Grigol Rcheulishvili. While these figures are central to nineteenth-century Georgian literature, they do not comprehensively represent the full literary landscape of the period. Second, the qualitative nature of the methodology—particularly its reliance on close reading and intertextual interpretation—limits the generalizability of the findings. Third, the study is constrained by archival gaps, especially concerning anonymous or pseudonymous translations and the underrepresentation of women's contributions to literary production. These gaps restrict the ability to reconstruct a fully inclusive account of the mechanisms of translation and adaptation in 19th-century Georgia.

Finally, although postcolonial and translation-theoretical frameworks offer valuable insights, their application to the Georgian context requires conceptual adaptation, which may limit the broader transferability of the study's conclusions. Future research would benefit from expanded archival work, comparative regional analysis, and a wider range of primary texts. Due to its selective corpus and interpretive orientation, the findings of this study should not be generalized as a totalizing representation of Georgian literary culture; rather, they offer one possible analytical pathway within a broader and still understudied field.

Data availability

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this article.

Received: 30 May 2025; Accepted: 26 November 2025;

Published online: 09 December 2025

Note

1 *The Seduced at the Masquerade* is a short story by Grigol Rcheulishvili published in the early 1850s in a Tbilisi-based literary periodical. It is considered one of the earliest examples of Gothic romanticism in Georgian prose, blending suspense, psychological tension, and a critique of social norms.

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Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University Development Foundation (grant no. 02025005015492).

Author contributions

The author Gül Mükerrerem Öztürk solely conceived the research idea, conducted the analysis, and wrote the manuscript.

Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

Ethical approval

This study did not involve human participants or the use of personal data.

Informed consent

Informed consent was not applicable as the research focused exclusively on published literary and historical materials.

Additional information

Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to Gül Mükerrerem. Öztürk.

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