Describing Dialect and Defining Civilization in an Early Georgian Nationalist Manifesto: Ilia Ch'avch'avadze’s “Letters of a Traveler”

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The Darial Pass through the Caucasus today, as in the nineteenth century, provides the main viable route between Russia and Georgia, along what is now called the Georgian Military Highway. The journey from Vladikavkaz in modern North Ossetia into Georgia follows the Terek River, which flows north from Mount Kazbek (Georgian: Qaz(i)begi, Mqinvari; lit. “Glacier”) into Russia, while the southern flanks of the route follow the Aragvi River, flowing south toward Tbilisi (Fig. 1). This journey from Vladikavkaz to Tbilisi and vice versa runs across some very well traveled literary terrain for European, Russian and Georgian Romantics, whose overlapping narratives in genres from fairy tale to travel account, lyric verse to adventure tale gave the landscape a peculiar ambivalence where fact and fancy were intertwined. Indeed, the Darial Gorge itself has sometimes

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been called “A fairy tale in twelve versts.” It is in this rugged and well-traversed piece of literary and geographical terrain that the noted Georgian nationalist Ilia Ch’avch’avadze (1837–1907) positioned his travelogue cum literary manifesto, “Letters of a Traveler” (“Mgzavris Ts’erilebi”).

Ch’avch’avadze’s “Letters of a Traveler” is perhaps the single most important political writing of the Georgian generation of the 1860s, who called themselves Terg-daleulebi (“those who have drunk from the Terek River”; singular, Terg-daleuli). This term has potentially ambiguous reference in this text, denoting at once a member of the Russian-educated Georgian gentry intelligentsia and a simple Georgian peasant. The former is represented by the narrator, who is Terg-daleuli because he has crossed (“drunk from”) the Terek, the boundary between Russia and Georgia, in search of enlightenment; the latter by Lelt Ghunia, a Mokhevian peasant who dwells beside the Terek River in Khevi and who could therefore implicitly be taken as a true Terg-daleuli. The term Terg-daleuli itself undergoes a transformation and revalorization in the course of the text from the first sense to the second, as Ch’avch’avadze becomes disenchanted with the promises of Russian civilization and discovers authentic culture instead among the Georgian folk. This transition is mirrored in the natural order through the changing character of the Terek River itself, from the placid, servile Terek in the Russian plains at Vladikavkaz to the torrential, free Terek in the Caucasus mountains.

In this paper I am primarily interested in exploring the rhetorical opposition between form and content in Lelt Ghunia’s speech, whose correct realistic representation Ch’avch’avadze presents, in his coda, as being the only project of the text. I argue that Ch’avch’avadze uses this opposition both to naturalize his own relationship to the peasant Lelt Ghunia as a member of the “intelligentsia” to the “people,” creating an organic unity of language, a nation. At the same time, the lack of relationship between form and content in the disjointed dialogue of a drunken Russian officer he meets along the way has the opposite effect, emphasizing the immense gap between the pretenses of Russian civilization (form) and its actual effects in the lives of the Georgian people (content). In this manner, as the partner in two very different dialogues, Ch’avch’avadze implicitly inserts himself between the Russian colonizing state and the colonized Georgian people as a mediating figure, as a Terg-daleuli in both the above senses. Educated in Russia, Ch’avch’avadze yet remains a Georgian, able to speak both languages and thus to bridge the gap between Russian civilization and Georgian folk culture.

It may seem odd that a Georgian movement for political and cultural reform would take its name (Terg-daleuli) from a river in the Caucasus Mountains (the Terek, Georgian Tergi), but here too Ch’avch’avadze was locating himself to an existing “geopoetic” tradition in which the political order was construed in terms of a natural order. Harsha Ram and Zaza Shatirishvili argue that Georgian gentry poets of an earlier generation used different “geopoetic” strategies to reduce the triadic opposition between Russia, Georgia, and the

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2Steven Graham, A Vagabond in the Caucasus (London, 1911), 164.
3Ch’avch’avadze began composing “Letters of a Traveler” in 1861. It was first published in 1871, and a fuller, uncensored version was published in 1892.
4Ghunia is the proper name. Lelt (lit. “of the reeds”) functions much as a surname.
Caucasus into a dualist opposition expressive of their new-found and ambivalent position as a relatively privileged colonial class under Russian rule. A central tendency of such “geopoetics” is to elide the opposition between Russia and Georgia over and against the Caucasus. In the text examined here, however, Ch'avech'avadze takes aim at this earlier generations’ geopoetics and proposes a new strategy, one that unites Georgia and the

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*Fig. 1* Map adapted from Douglas Freshfield, *Travels in the Caucasus and Bashan* (London, 1869). I, II, III, IV ... VIII: Stages (chapters) of Ch'avech'avadze's Journey. 1, 2, 3, 4 ... 8: Stages (chapters) of Griboedov's journey.

5See Ram and Shatirishvili, “Romantic Topography.”
Caucasus in opposition to Russian domination. He does so first of all by appropriating the Terek River as a multivalent symbol of Caucasian freedom and savagery, its untamed roar giving voice to the woes of his Georgian motherland. Second, moving from nature to culture, he finds his exemplary Georgian-speaker among the territorially most marginal speakers of Georgian, the Mokhevians, who dwell by the Terek in the Caucasus between Russia and Georgia. It is in their appropriated voice and dialect that the political ideology of Terg-daleuli gentry nationalism is delivered by proxy. Terg-daleuli mountaineer dialect paradoxically becomes the vehicle for Terg-daleuli gentry ideology.

In this respect, “Letters of a Traveler” represents a radical change in the role of language, and especially folk language, in the imagining of such larger social totalities as “nations” and “peoples.” In the nineteenth century, language increasingly came to be seen as a uniquely natural sign of social membership; hence a common linguistic heritage—however dialectically stratified—could suture together enlightened society and the unenlightened people. In contrast to older elites, in Georgia as elsewhere, these new elites increasingly resorted to language-based forms of legitimacy of social projects, seeing in these a kind of “authority of authenticity.” Like the texts of an earlier generation of Georgian romantics, “Letters of a Traveler” places Georgia and the elites who spoke for it in a geopoetic context in which the Caucasus and Russia are the crucial terms to which the text is related. Unlike these texts, however, in which intertextual relations are primarily with Russian antecedents, Ch'avch'avadze engages both Georgian and Russian literary antecedents, as well as the voice of the “people” which Ch'avch'avadze merely transcribes. Whereas Georgian and other Romantics represent the Caucasus as a moving, but silent, landscape, Ch'avch'avadze populates this landscape, positing a close, almost organic connection between the voice of nature, in the form of the Terek River, and the voice of the people, in the form of Lelt Ghunia. He thus at once humanizes the indigenous natural order (the Terek) and naturalizes the human order (Lelt Ghunia).

AUTHOR, TEXT, CONTEXT

Before addressing the main issue of this article—language as the basis for a national protest against Russian imperial civilization—a brief introduction of Ilia Ch'avch'avadze is in order. Ch'avch'avadze’s activities as writer, publicist, editor, and cultural reformer made him the most prominent Terg-daleuli and were instrumental in the development of Georgian print culture and the formulation of the ideological position of what may be

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6The fortunes of this “Caucasocentric” geopoetics in the political and cultural projects of early twentieth century Georgian elites, and in particular the maverick Georgian linguist Nikolaj Marr, are explored in detail in Marcello Cherchi and Paul Manning, Disciplines and Nations: Niko Marr vs. His Georgian Students on Tbilisi State University and the “Japhetidology”/“Caucasology” Schism, Carl Beck Papers (Pittsburgh, 2002). “Caucasocentrism” remains important among many sectors of the Georgian intelligentsia to this day, and was certainly characteristic of the political stance of the first postsocialist government in Georgia under the late Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

7Layton, Russian Literature and Empire.

called “gentry nationalism.” His assassination in 1907 by parties unknown provided this group with a martyr, bringing this somewhat marginal nationalist ideology into closer alignment with more popular movements for social justice, and thus helping to transform both in the wake of the disappointments of the 1905 Revolution. Known to Georgians simply as “Ilia,” Ch'avch'avadze was made a Georgian Orthodox saint in the last years of Soviet power, and to this day he remains the central authoritative figure for Georgian nationalism. Ch'avch'avadze was also a key figure in articulating the relations between older nobility and the emergent intelligentsia in Georgia, for he belonged to both classes. A noble by birth, he attended university in the Faculty of Law in St. Petersburg from 1857 to 1861 and returned a member of the nascent Georgian intelligentsia, that is, as a true Terg-daleuli. Writing at a time when a Georgian print culture and intelligentsia were emerging from the manuscript culture and court sociability of the nobility, he straddled both spheres as noble and writer of poetic manuscripts and printed prose. He engaged in debates with representatives of the older generation of the nobility like Grigol Orbeliani (1804–83) on the proper form of literary Georgian, arguing for a style closer to that of the spoken norms of the folk. Typical of the changes and contradictions of the period, these debates concerning the modernization and popularization of a Georgian print language and print culture were conducted in a typically classical and aristocratic form—an exchange of poetry in traditional meters, disseminated orally or in manuscript among the Georgian urban gentry, and only later publicized in print. The text of “Letters of a Traveler” shares many of these ambiguities, since it circulated in various manuscript forms through aristocratic urban networks, encountering a face-to-face public, over a period of ten years; it was eventually published for a potentially popular readership of anonymous contemporaries, in full, uncensored, and authoritative form thirty years later in 1892.

The text also witnesses other transformations as the Georgian gentry transformed itself into a Georgian intelligentsia. Just as the poetic debate on literary style between Orbeliani and Ch'avch'avadze revolved around the choice between an adherence to classicism (Orbeliani) and the need for a popular language (Ch'avch'avadze), so too we see in this text the first systematic attention to the description of a folk dialect in Georgian, the first application of the narodnik principles that were in the air in Russia (Ch'avch'avadze had met Chernyshevsky in Russia). More generally, it was the first Georgian evidence of the trans-European turn to popular language-based forms of legitimation for elites. This turn to the folk, of course, occurs on the eve of the Emancipation of the serfs in Georgia and a transformation in the role of the Georgian nobility. Originally a rural agrarian estate depending on the serfs, the Georgian elite would become an urban educated class of bureaucrats, court officials, writers, and nascent intelligentsia who would constitute themselves rhetorically as serving “the people,” in whose voice, and therefore, in whose language,

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9The term is from Ronald Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation (Bloomington, 1988), 133–34.
10Apropos here are Nikolai Marr’s observations of the transformation of the disappointed “social movement” in Georgia (associated in particular with the hopes inspired by the successes of the revolution in Guria in West Georgia) into a more nationalist one between the two revolutions of 1905 and 1917. See Cherchi and Manning, Disciplines and Nations; and Suny, Making of the Georgian Nation.
11Suny, Making of the Georgian Nation.
12For a characterization of this debate see ibid.; and Donald Rayfield, The Literature of Georgia: A History (Oxford, 1994).
they spoke. As a result, in this text, more than in any other of the period, the question of
linguistic form takes on immediately political content.

SYNOPSIS OF THE TEXT

“Letters of a Traveler” is a relatively short text divided into eight passages. In the first (I),
which was heavily censored in the first printing of 1871, we encounter Ch'avch'avadze in
Vladikavkaz, taking leave of his traveling companion, a Frenchman. This authentic
representative of Europe appears seemingly only to marvel at the inadequacy of the Russian
transportation system before he goes on his way. With a sideward glance at Russian artists’
idealization of their own folk (“The reality is twice as repulsive as their pictures are
beautiful”), Ch'avch'avadze gives us an unflattering and detailed description of a Russian
driver, who is presented as being coarse, ugly, and stupid.

In the second passage (II), Ch'avch'avadze leaves Vladikavkaz, and from this point
the Terek River becomes his constant traveling companion. As he crosses a bridge over
the Terek, he notes that it no longer resembles the madly rushing, “heroic-demonic Terek”
found in the Caucasus and celebrated by Orbeliani, whose poem Saghamo Gamosalmebisa
(“Night of Farewell”) he cites twice in this passage. In the first of a series of allegorical
meditations on the Terek, Ch'avch'avadze identifies this change in the nature of the Terek
from mountains to plains explicitly with the political subjugation of the peasantry and the
cooptation of the Georgian gentry under Russian rule. At the end of the passage he has
reached the post station at Lars, where he reflects on the value of his four years of education
in Petersburg, from which he is returning.

In the third section (III), Ch'avch'avadze’s random and confused reflections on what
he has seen, suffered, and learned at home and abroad undergo what he describes as a
“revolution,” and he wonders whether these same four years away will make him a stranger
to his land, unable to speak or understand its language and its complaints. His reverie is
interrupted by a drunken Russian officer, who engages him in a mockery of enlightened
discourse, first as an equal based on the fact that Ch'avch'avadze is an emissary from
civilization (Petersburg), then, when he finds that Ch'avch'avadze is actually a Georgian,
as a subaltern “local” in need of enlightenment. In the deranged conversation that ensues,
Russia’s pretenses to a civilizing mission are further deflated, as the drunken officer proves
unable to define the terminology of civilization except in the most vulgar and debased
terms.

The next two passages (IV–V) occur at the post station of Stepants'minda (also known
as Kazbek), the first Georgian village along the route. Ch'avch'avadze polemically engages
with Orbeliani once more at sunset at Kazbek post station (IV), citing another of Orbeliani’s
poems, Sadghegrdzelo (“Toast”), and covertly alluding to the description of nature contained
in Orbeliani’s “Night of Farewell,” which takes place at the same spot. Here Ch'avch'avadze
indulges in another series of allegorical ruminations, this time on the opposition between
Mount Kazbek and the rushing Terek River at its feet: he repudiates the gleaming
inaccessibility of the mountain, which he identifies with idealism, death, and stasis, for
the muddy raging torrents of the Terek, which represent materialism, life, and above all
motion. At nightfall in passage V, Ch'avch'avadze has an epiphany with the Terek River at its center—an epiphany which causes him to hear and identify with its voice. Here again he allegorizes the silence and darkness of night as ignorance and lack of enlightenment, while the “unsilenced complaint” of the Terek in the darkness embodies human life awakened to the promise of a new day.

Departing Kazbek at dawn the next day, Ch'avch'avadze then has two conversations with Lelt Ghunia (VI–VII), who as a local mountaineer “Terek-drinker” peasant stands in both physical and mental counterpoint to the Russian driver at Vladikavkaz: “In the end it appeared that he was an interested observer of that little land which fate had outlined around him and which she had appointed to vary his colorless life” (VI). Lelt Ghunia further clarifies the destruction actually wrought by Russian colonization, in counterpoint to its putative civilizing mission presented in the dialogue at Lars (III), particularly emphasizing the corrosive effects of Russian rule on the once-harmonious relations within and between estates. He concludes:

This I want you to understand, that formerly if we gave our lives in service there were rewards, there were great gifts; we found our livelihood in glory and in bravery, a man did not live in vain. Now we find our livelihood in lying, immorality, breaking oaths, and in betraying one another. (VII)

Finally, in the coda of the text (VIII), Ch'avch'avadze explains that his sole purpose has been to dutifully record the ethnographic text found in the two preceding passages realistically. That is, his focus has been only on the form, and not the factual veracity, of Ghunia’s speech:

Whether my Mokhevian spoke the truth or not I will not now inquire. And what business is it of mine? I merely mention in passing what I as a traveler heard from him. My one endeavor in this has been to give to his thoughts their own form and to his words his accent. If I have succeeded in this I have fulfilled my intention. (VIII)

For the remainder of this paper I will use Roman numerals to identify passages from Ch'avch'avadze’s text, whose relative locations in the Darial Pass are indicated on the map.

THE VOICE OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA AND THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Ch'avch'avadze presents “Letters of a Traveler” as a simple exercise in representational “realism,” an absolutely neutral transcription of an ethnographic reality, characteristic of the generation of the 1860s. Part of the central importance of the text, then, is that it represents an important first systematic attempt at the faithful description of the dialect and political institutions of the Georgian “people.”13 However, this serious attention to

13Ch'avch'avadze's attempt at realism, moreover, was partially grounded in actual empirical description, exhibiting a different level of intertextuality. According to Ch'avch'avadze's notebook of 1871, some of the terms glossed in
Ilia Ch'avch'avadze’s “Letters of a Traveler”

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correct representation of dialect form and ethnographic content is not merely motivated by
a new literary taste for “realism.” It is also a rhetorical device allowing Ch'avch'avadze to
covertly critique the Russian colonial state, the obscurantism of whose civilized pretenses
is represented by a systematic failure of the forms of words to match their content. At the
same time, while the form of Lelt Ghunia’s transcribed conversation is humble terg-daleuli
(Mokhevian) dialect, the content of Lelt Ghunia’s conversation is in effect the political
program of the terg-daleuli intelligentsia. Hence, the opposition between form and content,
while thematically central to the text, also becomes an organizing rhetorical opposition.

Presenting his work as an anonymous traveler’s simple act of transcription of the
voice of Lelt Ghunia, Ch'avch'avadze makes his text pivot around this central
identification—an elision which creates the “authority of authenticity” by which
Ch'avch'avadze identifies his own voice with the authentic voice of the terg-daleuli peasant.14
The text was composed from 1861 to 1871, at the same time the term “intelligentsiia” was
beginning to be used in Russian (and Georgian) society.15 Not surprisingly, then, it replicates
all of the ambiguities which characterized the position of the imperial intelligentsia during
the Great Reforms. This relation is made more complex, moreover, by the peculiarities of
Ch'avch'avadze’s position as a member of the Georgian gentry intelligentsia under Russian
colonialism.16 As an intelligentsia manifesto, the text replicates the very “gulf between
society and the people” that it seeks to mediate—that between a small educated reading
public, mostly composed of gentry, and an often illiterate people, mostly composed of
peasantry.17 This “society” of the “fathers” gave birth to a (still mostly gentry) “intelligentsia”

philological footnotes, as well as some whole phrases, were derived from a mountaineer named Ivane Gulashvili. See
V. Itonishvili, Ilia Ch'avch'avadze da Sakartvelos Etnograpia (Tbilisi, 1963), 70 n. This work was published the
same year as Pet're Umik'ashvili’s “Sakhaliko simgherebisa da zghap'rebis shek'reba” [The collection of folk songs
and tales], Droeba, no. 22 (1871): 1–2. This work issues a plea to members of Georgian society to begin collecting
folkloric specimens in their natal villages and represents the first explicitly methodological work on Georgian
dialectology.

15See Michael Confino, “On Intellectuals and Intellectual Traditions in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Russia,”
Daedalus 101:2 (1972): 117; and Jane Burbank, “Were the Russian Intelligenty Organic Intellectuals?” in Intellectuals
16Russian colonialism, like the responses of the colonized, varied widely across the empire at different times and
places, making difficult simple comparisons even with the empire, let alone with colonial situations elsewhere. For
perspectives on Russian colonialism see, for example, Daniel Brower and Edward Lazzeriali, eds., Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917 (Bloomington, 1997). For Russian colonialism in Georgia and the
North Caucasus see Austin Jersild, Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian
Frontier, 1845–1917 (Montreal, 2002). For the exceptionally privileged position of Georgian gentry see Ronald
Suny, “Russian Rule and Caucasian Society in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century: The Georgian Nobility and
the Armenian Bourgeoisie,” Nationality Papers 7 (1979): 53–78. For Russian colonial representations of Georgia
and the Caucasus see Layton, Russian Literature and Empire; and especially Ram and Shatirishvili, “Romantic
Topography.” Whereas the Russian intelligentsia traces its genealogy to an emergent group of déclassé intellectuals
(rassnochintsy), the Georgian intelligentsia arose out of a much more solidly urban gentry milieu, and to this day many
members of the postsocialist Georgian intelligentsia see their heritage as being essentially aristocratic.

17See Jeffrey Brooks, “Readers and Reading at the End of the Tsarist Era,” in Literature and Society in Imperial Russia, ed. William Mills Todd (Stanford, 1978), 282–92; William Mills Todd, Fiction and Society in the Age of
Social History,” in Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial
Russia, ed. Edith Clowes et al. (Princeton, 1991); and Cathy Frierson, Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural
People in Late Nineteenth Century Russia (New York, 1993).
of the “sons” in the 1860s in fierce intergenerational debates that characterized “the reality of intelligentsia culture—an ongoing, hence self-contested and self-refining culture based on personal and public statements about politics.”18 As this intelligentsia culture was founded on opposition to autocracy and a notion of service to the “people” (however imagined), so this text also opposes the discourses of the Russian colonizing state to those of the colonized Georgian people, using the ethnographic descriptions of the defunct political institutions of Georgian folk culture to critique the civilizing pretenses of the Russian state.19

The dialogism of the text replicates all of these well-known antinomies. In fact, the peculiarity of the text is the distinct form of the intertextual and intratextual strategies that Ch’avch’avadze uses to mediate them, as well as the distinct strategic functions of these forms.20 An intertextual dialogue involving both overt citation and covert structural imitation of prior Russian and Georgian Romantic texts addresses the text to a purely literary public of Georgian intelligentsia. This produces a literary filiation which locates this text within a retroactively imagined “intelligentsia tradition,” thus performatively creating a literary genealogy for the text.21 Because Ch’avch’avadze is a member of a colonial intelligentsia, this literary kinship is reckoned bilaterally, with both Russian and Georgian romantic antecedents. At the same time, the text reports an actual dialogue with the actually existing folk, who are not, it should be remembered, part of the audience of the text. The “people” are not yet a “public.”22 Juxtaposition of the differing dialects of intelligentsia and folk in dialogue reveals the essential linguistic relatedness of intelligentsia and folk, their fraternal membership in a speech (if not literary) community of “Georgians.” If the intertextual relationship creates a vertical, generational, and intertextual kinship of “fathers” and “sons” within Georgian gentry “society,” the textual dialogic relationship creates horizontal linguistic kinship between educated Georgians and uneducated mountaineers as “brothers” (VII). This dialogue of intelligentsia and people is paired with and opposed to the dialogue with the drunken officer, who represents the Russian state and Russian civilization, and who claims to be a writer, an emissary from the world of Russian letters, and a notable inventor—in other words, an agent of civilizational progress. While the dialogue with the Georgian people associates high concepts of authentic Georgian traditions with the low forms of folk dialect, the dialogue with the officer reveals Russian civilization to be a farcical rendition of its European model, high concepts that are glossed with vulgar referents.

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22 Gleason, “Terms of Russian Social History.” The turn to “folk language” in this text could not be for purposes of intelligibility and popular accessibility, but rather for its exemplary formal otherness. The extreme and self-conscious difficulty of Ghunia’s speech makes it an inadequate vehicle for popular dissemination; rather, Ghunia’s dialectisms strongly resemble in difficulty the classical language against which Ch’avch’avadze inveighed elsewhere.
In all these dialogues Ch'avch'avadze’s mediating position as intelligent is constructed as the almost invisible authorizing viewpoint that unites these dialogues into a single text, just as an intelligent is “entitled to speak for the good of the social whole.”23 Serving both as a letter of introduction and a challenge to Georgian “society,” it at once reproduces the pragmatic presuppositions of that discourse even as it seeks to transform them. All of these dialogues, in other words, build up a complex whole, an authorizing intelligentsia mythology, in which Ch'avch'avadze underwrites his ability as an intelligent to “speak for the people against the state” to an audience of other Georgian intelligentsy.

The dialogue with Georgian romanticism, in particular with the figure of Grigol Orbeliani, a noted Georgian romantic poet, noble, and high-ranking Tsarist official of the

previous generation, is mostly overt. Ch'avch'avadze achieves it through a series of pointed citations and barbed comments, but also by adopting the time and location (evening at Mount Qazbeg) of Orbeliani’s “Night of Farewell” for a series of allegorical ruminations on nature in the middle of his text (IV–V; see the cover of this issue for the scene in question). The intertextual dialogue with Russian Romanticism is by and large achieved covertly, by means of formal imitation. Ch'avch'avadze adopts the title and genre of a much earlier account of the same journey by the Russian Romantic A. C. Griboedov, whose own “Letters of a Traveler” was composed in 1818 but published a few years before in 1859, making it oddly contemporary. Whereas Griboedov, like many after him, is a writing a travel account of a journey from home into a strange, foreign land, Ch'avch'avadze inverts the expectations produced by the title and genre, casting himself in the ironic role of an estranged “traveler” seeking to rediscover his homeland. This work is divided into eight separate “passages,” and thus Ch'avch'avadze’s later travelogue formally echoes the structure of Griboedov’s work. He also arranges the passages of his journey (Roman numerals I–VIII in Fig. 1) spatially as a skewed icon of the passages of Griboedov’s journey (Arabic numerals 1–8 in Fig. 1).

The literary filiation with Griboedov, a contemporary of Pushkin, places Ch'avch'avadze in a covert genealogy with Russian Romanticism, just as his overt citation of Orbeliani places him in a genealogical relation to Georgian romanticism. But more significantly, Griboedov himself married Nino Ch'avch'avadze (a distant relation of Ilia Ch'avch'avadze), daughter of the Georgian noble and Romantic poet Aleksandre Ch'avch'avadze. In the small circle of Georgian gentry who made up Georgian “society,” literary relations and kinship relations were inseparable; if Orbeliani was addressed overtly as Ch'avch'avadze’s consanguineal literary kin, then Griboedov could be reckoned covertly as his literary kin by marriage. By means of these intertextual allusions Ch'avch'avadze constructs a literary filiation as a “son” to two groups of wayward Romantic “fathers,” Georgian (Orbeliani) and Russian (Griboedov).

THE GEOPOETICS OF THE TEREK

If earlier Russian and Georgian Romantics exulted over the natural beauty of the Caucasus, it was a nature alien to humanity and devoid of human voices. Ch'avch'avadze, instead, humanizes this natural order (giving a human voice to the roar of the Terek) as a prologue to naturalizing the human order (by naturalizing the human voice of the Terek-dwelling peasant, Lelt Ghunia). In so doing, Ch'avch'avadze radically revises the geopoetics characteristic of these earlier Romantics, who often sought to align Georgia with Russia against the Caucasus, by creating a novel geopoetics in which the Caucasus, in the form of

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25 For example, in Aleksandr Ch'avch'avadze’s poem Kavk'azia, discussed in detail in Ram and Shatirishvili, “Romantic Topography.”
the Terek River, is identified with Georgia as opposed to Russia. In Griboedov’s text, the frightening animal roar of the Terek in the first five passages marks the terrain as being the uncivilized, dangerous, frightening Caucasus, a land of war, strife, and uncivilized mountaineer tribes and bandits. The sixth passage marks the transition from the uncivilized and frightening Caucasus, symbolized by the roar of the Terek, to the pleasant and peaceful Georgia, symbolized by the Aragvi River, “the morning song of the Georgians.”

Ch'avch'avadze radically revises this imaginative geography by dispensing with the Aragvi as a symbol of Georgia as opposed to the Caucasus symbolized by the Terek. The Terek can now stand alone as a symbol of the Georgian Caucasus (the Khevi district beside the mouth of the Terek). By eliminating the ever-present inherited opposition between the Aragvi and the Terek—between the peaceful, feminine, civilized, and subdued Georgia and the warlike, masculine, and free Caucasus—he brings Georgia into the Caucasus.

Ch'avch'avadze also proposes a radical rereading of the meaning of the roar of the Terek as it figures in the texts of Orbeliani, Griboedov, and others. The unbridled torrents of the Terek in the Caucasus become a symbol of mountaineer freedom, whose institutions of justice and authentic culture can be favorably compared to the pretended civilization of Russian rule, represented by the subdued flow of the Terek in the plains of Russia: “Happy Terek! You are at your best when you are restless. Stand still but a little while and do you not turn into a stinking pool and does not this fearsome roar of yours change to the croaking of frogs!”

The Terek is identified with freedom of motion and change, but not necessarily modernity or progress, for Ch'avch'avadze’s program cannot easily be understood as a progressive one. Rather, it is a somewhat jarringly eclectic combination: a celebration of mountaineer freedom and an apologetic for the harmonious and mutually beneficial relations between estates that once—it is claimed—characterized Georgian feudalism. The motion and roar of the Terek in the mountains represent the political self-determination and freedom of the (now defunct) autonomous community-based institutions of the mountaineer polity (eroba). But at the same time he mourns the demise of the eroba, Lelt Ghunia extols the recognition of reciprocal obligations of service and reward and general harmonious relations.

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26 Layton, Russian Literature and Empire.
27 For Pushkin also, the peaceful shepherd characterizes the Aragvi in Georgia, while the dangerous robber mountaineer tribesman characterizes the Terek Gorge in the Caucasus. See Pushkin's The Caucasus (1829), in Alexander Pushkin, trans. A. D. P. Briggs (London, 1997), 76. The sudden transition and absolute contrast between the gloomy mountain vales of the Caucasus (and the Terek) to the pleasant pastures of Georgia (and the Aragvi) is a familiar topos of the journey, noted by, among others, Griboedov, “Ot Mozodka do Tiflisa (Oktiabr' 1818),” in Polnoe sobranie sochinenii A. S. Griboedova (Petrograd, 1917), 3:30–34 (passage 6); Pushkin, A Journey to Arzrum (1835), in Tales of Belkin and Other Prose Writings, trans. Ronald Wilks (London, 1998), 144; and Lermontov, The Demon, section III–IV.
28 In contrast, Ch'avch'avadze’s contemporary poem Achrdili (“Phantom,” 1859–72), also set in the Darial Gorge, features both the Terek (as the Caucasus) and the Aragvi River, and the latter is explicitly identified with Georgia (“Our Aragvi”).
29 This is all the more jarring because mountaineer freedom (characterized by political institutions like the eroba, that operate outside of, or at least in friction with, a feudal framework) are made to coexist with feudal estates more characteristic of the plains. Ch'avch'avadze is trying in a sense to have his cake and eat it too, by assimilating radically different and potentially incompatible political arrangements that existed among mountaineer and plains Georgians into a single harmonious whole, whose disintegration is laid at the door of Russian conquest, and thence not only the disintegration of reciprocal obligations and harmony within the community, but also between estates.
between estates that once apparently existed between Georgian peasants and nobles. All this was lost, according to Lelt Ghunia, under the “empty peace” of the Pax Rusica, which places the people economically at the mercy of usurious Armenian merchants and abrogates the system of reciprocal service and rewards that once apparently made the Georgian people valorous. This changed social state of affairs, brought about by the subjection of the Georgian people to Russian rule and the cooptation of Georgian nobles like Orbeliani into Russian service, is again likened to the change of the natural order, witnessed in the domestication of the animal fury of the Terek as it moves into Russia. Ch'avch'avadze notes that at Vladikavkaz, in the plains, the Terek flows “as placid, as silent, as if it dwelt under the rod or had received a high official post (chini)” (II); or, as Lelt Ghunia would have it, the stagnant water of empty peace brought by Russia is for servile frogs, but free trout splash happily in the torrential Terek (VII).

Prior romantic descriptions of this journey are notable for their rapturous communion with nature (and Ch'avch'avadze’s is no exception), but in them the noisy natural order (the Terek) is complemented by the complete silence of cultural order (mountaineer “Terg-daleuli”). Where local inhabitants appear at all, they are of a piece with the natural order. Ch'avch'avadze humanizes the natural order via a subjective revelation that organizes the text, one which is mirrored in the natural order. At first a reluctant Terg-daleuli in the plains at Vladikavkaz, where the Terek flows lifeless and silent, he refuses to even look at, let alone drink from, the Terek, lest someone think him a Terg-daleuli (II). Ascending into the mountains, the Terek ever more torrential, ever more noisy, he enters into communion with nature, finally coming to feel “a secret bond—a concord—between my thoughts and Terek’s complaint” (V). Ch'avch'avadze transforms the inchoate noise of the Terek into a human voice, first the voice of the river, whose complaint, the complaint of his motherland, he comes to understand (V), and then in the very real voice of the Georgian mountaineer who dwells by the Terek, whose dialect-inflected voice Ch'avch'avadze appropriates for his political message (VI–VII). The furious roar of the Terek in the mountains now appears explicitly as the voice of the free Caucasian mountaineers, who are, it needs to be added, also specifically Georgian mountaineers. Having humanized the voice of nature, the Terek, he now turns to naturalizing his relationship to the cultural order, giving voice to the Terek-dweller.

FORM AND CONTENT: LANGUAGES OF CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION

This revisionist geopoetics of the natural order is paralleled on the linguistic plane in Ch'avch'avadze’s dialogues with the drunken Russian officer (III) and Lelt Ghunia (VI–VII). The viability of a geopoetics that assimilates Georgia into Russia (characteristic of the older generation of Georgian Romantics) is called into question when the Russian officer finds out that Ch'avch'avadze is actually a Georgian, and so reclassifies him from enlightened interlocutor to benighted local. At the same time, the inherited geopoetic opposition between Caucasus and Georgia is elided when the mountaineer Lelt Ghunia

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30 Compare this with Ram and Shatirishvili, “Romantic Topography.”
Ilia Ch'avch'avadze’s “Letters of a Traveler”  

and plains-dwelling Ch'avch'avadze discover their common essential Georgianness underlying their accidental differences of dress and dialect.

Further developing this revisionist geopoetics, Ch'avch'avadze uses the opposition between form and content in these two dialogues to show that Russian civilization is a form with at best debased content, while the traditional culture of the mountaineers is revealed as authentic. He thus reverses the apparent value of form and content.

Ch'avch'avadze continually defines and glosses terms to draw our attention to the opposition of form and content, but he works these devices differently in each dialogue, with different degrees of explicitness, and with important rhetorical effects. The dialogue with Ghunia relies on implicit operations of glossing that allow recognition of natural similarities within the heteroglossia of dialect, and, moreover, recognition of Ch'avch'avadze’s kinship with Ghunia as Georgians. The linguistic relation is a fraternal kinship relation, therefore Ch'avch'avadze is truly an “organic” intellectual; using dialectal differences as the basis for recognizing natural similarities, meanwhile, rhetorically resolves Ch'avch'avadze’s anxieties about whether he will understand his country’s voice, the voice of Ghunia. “But what shall I do,” he worries, “if my country tells me its complaint, the secret causes of its sorrow, its hopes and despairs, and I, unaccustomed to its language, cannot understand its language, its speech?” (III) But just as quickly he concludes that there exists a natural kinship connection between himself as patriot (mamulishvili, lit. “child of the fatherland”) and the fatherland (mamuli) itself, which would allow him both to understand the complaint of his fatherland and to make himself understood in turn:

I decided that my country would receive me and acknowledge me because I am its blood and its flesh; I should understand its words and speech because a patriot (mamulishvili) hearkens to his fatherland (mamuli) not only with his ears, but with his heart too, which understands even the unspoken words; I will make them hearken to my words too, for a parent always listens to the words of his child. (III)

The dialogue with the Russian officer, by contrast, works with radical disjunctures between forms and meanings that are mediated only by his own explicit fiat, by which he seeks to make the difficulty of “scientific discourse” understandable to the unenlightened local, Ch'avch'avadze. Again the problem is one of failure of recognition. When first he learns that Ch'avch'avadze hails from St. Petersburg, he is full of great respect for an enlightened visitor from the pinnacle of civilization in these benighted parts. Upon learning that Ch'avch'avadze is a local, “that is, a Georgian or an Armenian” (III), he imputes a radically opposed identity to him; he becomes full of contempt, and is merely glad that at least Ch'avch'avadze is a Georgian, and not a despised Armenian (a topic on which both he, Ch'avch'avadze, and Ghunia apparently all agree!). Because it is revealed that Ch'avch'avadze is essentially a benighted local and only accidentally resembles a visitor from the local center of enlightenment, the officer assumes the role of a enlightener whose task is to explain and gloss the complex terminology of civilization for the backward Ch'avch'avadze. Hence, where the first dialogue involves implicit recognition of the essential

identity underlying apparent differences of outward form, the second dialogue, premised on misrecognition of the essential underlying differences despite appearances, involves explicit glossing operations that reveal the obscurantism of the civilizing pretenses of the Russian state.

At issue are two very different views of form and content in language. The first, characteristic of Enlightenment thought, views signs and their objects, form and content, as externally related (in that both sign and signified exist autonomously of the sign relation, and are therefore brought together arbitrarily by stipulative fiat). This view is parodied by a reductio ad absurdum in the Russian officer’s civilizing discourse, in which French words are arbitrarily made to stand for discordant Russian realities. The other, characteristic of post-Enlightenment thought, views signifier and signified, form and content, as internally related, mutually constituting, organically interdependent, and unable to exist apart. Here language is not merely an arbitrarily chosen means of reference about independently existing, objective states-of-affairs, but also expressive of, and therefore constitutive of interior, subjective essences (here, Georgianness). Such an “expressivist” view of language is essential to any nationalism grounded in language and is certainly central to the discussion of the relation of form and content in Ch’avch’avadze’s dialogue with Lelt Ghunia. Hence, the two dialogues enact in their implied theories of language Enlightenment discourses of “civilization” as opposed to Post-Enlightenment discourses of authentic indigenous “culture.” Just as Ch’avch’avadze brings himself into an organic relation with Lelt Ghunia on the basis of an expressive view of language and authentic culture, he prises Russia apart from European civilization by the arbitrariness and obscurantism by which francophone civilizing discourses are accommodated to Russian realia, leaving Russia in a no-man’s land between culture and civilization. In this process, he appears to revalorize the received term Terg-daleuli itself, from a term meaning “one who has received (false) enlightenment in Russia by crossing the Terek” to one meaning “one who has found (authentic) culture among the Georgians who dwell by the Terek.”

DESCRIBING DIALECT

Nowhere is the new concern for authenticity of representation of folk language more clear than in the dialogue with Lelt Ghunia (VI-VII), which resembles a folkloric text embedded within a larger prose narrative. The dialogue is not merely a sprinkling of dialecticisms for flavor but rather a striking exercise in attempted literary realism, and possibly the first systematic, if distorted, representation of a nonstandard dialect of Georgian. Lelt Ghunia’s dialect is rendered in such a way that not only are its specificities of form highlighted, but at the same time its essential Georgianness is retained. Dialectal difference within language is revealed to be a kind of accidental difference within a framework of essential similarity: differences of form of what are in effect the same words, so too differences of dialect of what are the same language. Moreover, the differences between the Mokhevikian peasant

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34The distortion of dialect itself works by systematic principles. Wherever a Mokhevikian, or other nearby dialect’s, form in some distribution is distinct from a standard form, this form is generalized to all distributions, in accentuation,
mountaineer Lelt Ghunia and the plainsdwelling gentry Ch'avch'avadze become matters of outward form of dialect or dress that obscure an inner identity of Georgianness.

Ch'avch'avadze begins their first dialogue (VI) by a number of failed gambits that make him resemble a Georgian noble of the previous generation, failing to recognize Ghunia’s Georgianness underneath his mountaineer garb, failing to recognize the human poverty writ large in the entrancing natural beauty of the mountains. The remainder of the dialogue in VI allows Ghunia to correct these misapprehensions. In the following dialogues the comparable terms of Ch’avch’avadze’s and Ghunia’s dialect are emphasized in parentheses.

“Where (sadauri) do you come from?”
“Where (sadável)? From Gaibotani, here in the mountains on the banks of the Terek.”
“Are you Georgian or Ossetian (osi)?”
“Why would I be an Ossetian (ovsi)? I am a Georgian, a Mokhevian.”
“Your home is in a good place.”
“It’s not so bad (gonjái): it suits our poverty.”
“Water and air like this are happiness itself.”
“How!” laughed the Mokhevian.
“What are you laughing at (itsini)?”
“I laugh (vitsíni) at the laughable. An empty stomach cannot be filled with those.”

“gonjai – tsudi [gonjai – “bad”] (VI)

If the first dialogue concerns Ch’avch’avadze’s misrecognition of Ghunia as a possible non-Georgian mountaineer (an Ossetian), the second involves Ghunia’s misrecognition of Ch’avch’avadze as a Russian (VII), as if echoing Ch’avch’avadze’s concern that, as “one transplanted and reared in another soil” (III), he would not recognize his country, and his country would not recognize him.

The substance of the dialogue deals with the defunct ethnographic institutions of the Mokhevians and the debasing effect of Russian political domination and Armenian economic domination on the Georgian people, both in the narrow sense of the eroba (“[village] community”), the traditional form of autonomous mountaineer polity, as well as in the broader sense of the Georgian eri (“nation,” “folk,” or “people”).35 As Ghunia explains

phonology, and morphology of nouns and verbs alike. The result is systematic, intentional difficulty of dialect achieved by a hypertrophy of dialectisms that mark each and every word as being distinctively “dialect” in form, maximally distinct from the standard dialect. An example chosen at random will give some idea of this. Each major constituent bears at least one, and sometimes two or more, distinctive features of “dialect” phonology or morphology. The whole text is like this:

Ghunia: rái ärn mteröba, tu eri érobs? tsaríal mshvidába mits’áchits gveqópis.
Gloss: “What are enemies, if a people is free? We’ll have enough empty peace in the ground.”

35Ch’avch’avadze’s choice of terms for native institutions may be tendentious, since he uses the term eri (“people,” “folk,” “nation”), redolent with nationalist connotations, where the corresponding Mokhevian term would have been temi (“village community”). According to the Mokhevian writer A. Qazbegi, the correct term for what Ch’avch’avadze calls the eroba is temi (“village community”) or temobá. The Mokhevian eroba is not an institution or a collectivity but a place, which Qazbegi defines as a village square. What Ch’avch’avadze refers to as the “People’s council” (erta sabch’o) is called by Qazbegi more prosaically the “gathering of the temi” (temis qriloba), although he also makes
the traditional ethnographic functions of an old monastery dedicated to the holy trinity, Ch’avch’avadze demands clarification about one of them, the people’s council (erta sabch’o), an important institution of the eroba, at which point it is revealed that the eroba no longer functions under Russian rule:36

“What in the world is a council (sabch’o)?”
“A council (sabch’o)? There is a cell there, where justice was dispensed by judges. Whenever any serious affair arose in Khevi it was judged there. … When there took place in the community a great pursuit, any important affair, a big election, the community went there, chose as judges wise old men, men famed for their wisdom (p’eit’róbít),” set them up in that cell to judge. Whatever these mediators then, in the name of the Trinity, having asked grace from God, speak and decide, none breaks, none infringes.”

“Have you been present at such a tribunal?”
“How should I have been present? I am telling you tales of former days.”

“Why is it now (exla) no longer as it was?”

“Nowadays (ats’ína)?” … Where is the community (eróba)? We are under Russia. Now everything is destroyed, everything is changed.”37

*p’eit’róbít—met’is gonebi sakhelgantkmulni [p’eit’róbít – “famed for great wisdom”] (VII)

In both these dialogues, Ch’avch’avadze uses the mechanisms of dialogue itself—specifically questions, answers, and repetitions—to establish that differences of form overlay identities of content, an “outer clothing” of different dialect forms of what are essentially the same words. Using these devices, the translational equivalence of partially different dialectal word forms as “different ways of saying the same thing” is established implicitly.

As can be seen from the above examples, Ch’avch’avadze’s questions frequently are met by a two-part reply. First, Ghunia repeats a single word from Ch’avch’avadze’s question as a question; for example, Ch’avch’avadze: sadauri? (“where from?”) Ghunia: sadável? Ch’avch’avadze: ost? (“Ossetian?”) Ghunia: osvíst? Ch’avch’avadze: sabcho? (“council?”) Ghunia: sabch’ít? Ch’avch’avadze: exla? (“Now?”) Ghunia: ats’ína? (“Nowadays”). This foregrounds the sundry differences of dialectal form (such as the pervasive marking of accentuation, for example) between otherwise equivalent words, as if striving to ascertain

reference to a “judgment place” (sabch’eo), a building inside the church where the community gathered for certain other matters. See Aleksandre Qazbegi [A. Mochkhubaridze], “Mokheveebi da imati tskhovreba” [The Mokhevians and their life], Droeba 167 (1880): 2; and ibid. 164 (1880): 2, and 2n.
36 Ch’avch’avadze believed that ethnographic studies of “folk customs which pertain to economic and juridical life,” institutions like the Mokheuvian sabch’o and eroba, were more pressing than purely folkloric collections of poetry popular at the time, and which this text also pioneers. See Ilia Ch’avch’avadze, “Khalkhis chveulebata shest’avlis shesakheb” (1887) [About the study of folk customs], in Ilia Ch’avch’avadze: Tkhzulebata Sruli K’rebuli, vol. 2, Mkhat’ruli P’roza, ed. P. Ingurqova (Tbilisi, 1997), 191.
37 Passage VII. Qazbegi’s own description of the “meeting of the community” (temis qriloba) held at the Monastery of the Trinity is virtually identical to Ghunia’s description of the “people’s council” (erta sabch’o): “Here was held the village gathering. Here they decided their own affairs, here they tried the cases of plaintiffs, and no Mokheuvian would dare to appear to be in opposition to against the will of the people decided here. Now, it is true, this monastery has lost its old significance” (“Mokheveebi da imati tskhovreba,” 164 [1880]: 2).
whether Ghunia’s sadável or sabch’ői “mean the same thing” (or “are the same words”) as Ch’avch’avadze’s sadauri or sabch’o. Then, Ghunia answers Ch’avch’avadze’s question in terms of its content, explaining where he is from or what a sabch’o is. The organization of the dialogue itself recursively divides dialect form (the echo question) from content (the answer). At the same time, the first part of the response foregrounds differences of dialect form and acts as an implicit glossing operation establishing the underlying equivalences of words.

Whereas this device allows identical Georgian words to be recognized despite dialectical differences, Ch’avch’avadze establishes equivalence of meaning between different words through a separate textual device, the philological footnote. The text has six philological footnotes that offer glosses of Mokhevian vocabulary; for example, in the first quotation above gonjái (“bad”) is glossed as standard Georgian tsudi (“bad”). These glosses are often denuded of other Mokhevian formal peculiarities, such as pervasive marking of accentuation, and thus presented as if they are part of standard Georgian vocabulary. There are two stages of “translation” of dialect into standard: a translation of form, by which an unfamiliar word in the text (for example, t’alávar) is glossed in the footnote in a “citation form” denuded of distinctive dialectal features (t’alavari). This is followed by a translation of content, where this word is glossed by a standard Georgian word (t’anisamosi; “clothing”). Thus, while the dialogic system discussed above uses the same words to present different dialect forms, this system highlights the essential identity of words across dialects, backgrounding accidental differences of dialectal form. The footnotes present Ghunia as if he were himself an ethnographic or philological text engaged in dialogue with his transcriber. If the dialogic glossing discussed above produces a precarious equality between their utterances and themselves as speakers of Georgian, the footnoting device reestablishes Ghunia as a philological text (speaking a nonstandard dialect) and Ch’avch’avadze as a philologist (speaking the standard dialect).

As “dialect” is the outer garb of words, so too do their different styles of dress prevent Ch’avch’avadze and Ghunia from recognizing their common Georgianness. On their first meeting, Ch’avch’avadze mistakes Ghunia for an Ossetian, for which he receives a testy rebuke.38 In turn, before he reveals his true opinion of Russian civilization, the peasant Ghunia wants to know Ch’avch’avadze’s mileti (derived from the Ottoman term of ethnic classification, millet), assuming from his dress that he is a Russian (VII). “I am a Georgian, can’t you recognize me?” is Ch’avch’avadze’s surprised response. “How would anyone recognize you?” Ghunia replies, “You don’t dress like a Georgian. You resemble a Russian.” Attempting to find a basis for mutual recognition that does not depend on such outward forms, Ch’avch’avadze pleads that Georgianness is not a matter of outward alienable form (dress), but a more essential trait, represented perhaps by language. Ghunia objects that “many speak the Georgian language, Armenians, Ossetians, Tatars, other millets” (VII). Ch’avch’avadze concludes that perhaps Georgianness is not a matter of such relatively outward forms (dress, language), but one of inner essence, a matter “of the heart.”

38Passage VI. Ch’avch’avadze’s mistaking Lelt Ghunia for an Ossetian would not have been an isolated incident. Qazbegi complained that “the greater part of reading society thinks that ‘Khevi’ is Ossetia and its inhabitants Ossetians. … [However, Mokheveebis] are pure Georgians and know no other language than Georgian” (“Mokheveebi da imati tskhovreba,” 156 [1880]: 1).
dubiously agrees, noting merely that clothing, at least, has the advantage of being visible, “Who can see into the heart?” he complains. For Ch’avch’avadze, Georgianness is an essential content that is not impaired by variation in outward form of dress or even language (though perhaps it should be reflected or expressed in it). Ghunia, in turn, argues that the outer form (dress) must express the inner content, or the outer form becomes the inner reality: “In Russian dress a Georgian becomes a foreigner” (VII), just as the Terek changes its nature as it moves from Caucasian mountains to Russian plains.

**DEFINING “CIVILIZATION”**

The form of Lelt Ghunia’s speech is as humble as that of the Russian officer’s is “scientific” and elevated. But in terms of content, the reverse is the case. The historical predicament of Georgia is that the authentic culture of the folk has been displaced historically by the empty forms that Russian civilization has brought with it. Form and content are divorced in reality as well as discourse, a chiasmus of high terminology and vulgar referents of the Russian officer’s speech is mirrored in the realities of Russian civilization.

The Russian officer is not the only representative of a civilized Europe in this text. In fact, Ch’avch’avadze’s first conversation at Vladikavkaz is with a French traveler, who, mocking the notorious Russian postal carts, appears merely to authoritatively demonstrate that Russians are not Europeans. “The whole of Russia travels like that? ... Who in the world will ever catch up with them?” is his snide observation (I). This rhetorical separation of backward Russia from civilized Europe is continued in the speech of the drunken Russian officer (III). This dialogue has the surreal quality of a “Through the Looking Glass” exposition of Russia’s civilizing mission, presided over by a Russian analogue of Humpty-Dumpty who glosses over the gap between form and content by fiat. The officer condescendingly notes that Ch’avch’avadze, like most locals (“that is, Georgians or Armenians”), owing to his lack of enlightenment, does “not understand logical, orderly reasoning,” and probably does not even know the meaning of terms like tsivilizatsia, assotsiatsia, argumentatsia, intel’ligentsia, k’assatsia, and pilologiia (III). Since, of course, it is soon revealed that the officer himself does not know what these terms mean, it can be concluded that he chose them on the basis of their purely formal properties, that is, because they sound French and rhyme. Russian civilization is revealed as an empty form, a Francophone jargon consisting of words that rhyme with tsivilizatsia.

The scientific officer also engages in an explicit discourse of definitional glossing, which seeks to bridge the imputed gap between his position as civilizing Russian and Ch’avch’avadze’s position as uncivilized local; he attempts to bridge the linguistic barrier between “scientific language” and “vulgar language” by acts of “translation” that debase the meanings of words. This glossing of “scientific” terminology (mostly of European derivation) by “low” referents reveals the scientific officer’s own lack of enlightenment, 

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39 These are Georgian forms, the Russian equivalents being tsivilizatsia, assotsiatsia, argumentatsia, intellectsia, and filologiia. Readers unfamiliar with the Georgian language should know that the hard apostrophe (‘) in Georgian transliteration represents a glottalized consonant, not palatalization.
trading in high-minded abstractions for low-minded vulgarities, revealing once again Russia’s claims to civilization as being a fundamental vulgarization of the real thing, the empty form of civilization as opposed to its reality. For the drunken Russian officer, the pinnacle of civilization is Izler’s Garden in St. Petersburg, notable for its “fairies,” a scientific term he is certain Ch'avch'avadze will not understand:

Do you know what fairies are? That is a scientific word, perhaps you don’t understand. If we translate it into the vulgar tongue that means that the garden is full of merry-eyed damsels. If you like you can take one by the arm, and, if you like, a second. See what enlightenment can do. Your women—as soon as they even see a man—they hide. (III)

The scientific officer continues to help Ch'avch'avadze understand scientific discourse by this process of glossing, of translating scientific language into the vulgar tongue: “It will be difficult for you to understand scientific conversation, but I will translate scientific words here and there into simple language and so thus make scientific conversation easy for you” (III). He then proceeds, step by step, and with numerous false starts, tautologies, and asides, to gloss “enlightenment” for the unenlightened Ch'avch'avadze. In his asides, he inadvertently identifies the Russian imperial metropoles of Moscow and Petersburg with the colonial outposts of Stavropol and Vladikavkaz, that is, cities not larger than Ch'avch'avadze’s own unenlightened Tbilisi, thereby undermining his assertions of the self-evident superiority of metropole over colony. Let us follow the culmination of his explanation:

“Now when we begin by saying that your country is not enlightened we must also say what enlightenment is. I will explain this by an example; imagine a dark room—have you imagined it or not?”
“I have imagined it.”
“No, perhaps you have left a window open somewhere, close it too.”
“I have closed it,” I said, and smiled.
“Very good. When you fasten the window you must let down the blind.”
“I have let it down.”
“When you have let down the blind the room is darkened, you can see nothing. Suddenly a candle is brought and the room is illuminated. That is enlightenment. But really, I tell you this cigarette is not bad. Is it from Petersburg?”
“No, I bought them in Vladikavkaz.”
“It’s all the same. Now do you understand the meaning of enlightenment?” (III)

Having defined enlightenment, the officer turns to measuring its progress among the locals. “How does civilization go among you?” the officer asks. Just as the unit of measurement of enlightenment turns out to be lumens, for the Russian officer the dry measure of civilization turns out to be “generals.” By “civilization,” therefore, the scientific officer wishes to know how many Georgian generals there are.40 When Ch'avch'avadze answers,
“about twenty,” the officer exclaims with disbelief, “This is great civilization!” After considerable clarification of the “scientific” definition of “general” (a matter ultimately having to do with mustaches and epaulettes), he quickly determines the mathematical constant for the rate of growth of civilization in Georgia, measured as a constant in generals per year: twenty Georgian generals, seventy years since Georgia has become a Russian colony, yielding a constant rate of two generals every seven years.

As the conversation becomes increasingly deranged, the officer reveals an invention of his own devising that will give value to ordinary flies (yes, flies), which will replace the complex and expensive machines that are the engines of progress in European countries like France. As a result of his invention, he cheerfully anticipates the beginnings of a bustling commerce in flies, with the result that soon there will be “fly shops” all across the empire. Such inventions in the aggregate, products of enlightened minds, which give value to worthless things, will lead to the establishment, perhaps, of an Izler’s Garden, symbol of enlightenment, in Ch'avch'avadze’s own backward town of Tbilisi, leading the elusive and standoffish women of Georgia to promenade boldly. Hence Tbilisi will be transformed into a kind of paradise, the last term he tries to define for the unenlightened Ch'avch'avadze: “Then the people will see their paradise, as the learned say, that is to put it simply ... but what shall I say, paradise in the vulgar tongue is also paradise” (III).

Ch'avch'avadze represents the core of the Russian civilizing discourse as a set of acts of translation and definition by which the officer attempts to mediate the putative divide between himself as enlightener and Ch'avch'avadze as unenlightened local. The dialogue is the opposite of the dialogue with Ghunia. It is a parodic lampoon of the colonizing Russian state’s empty pretenses to a civilizing mission, confronted with a “realistic” ethnographic account of the predicament of the peasantry. The two dialogues, belonging to primary genres of surreal parody and critical realism, respectively, are juxtaposed without authorial comment. The processes of glossing found in each dialogue differ in degrees of explicitness of framing: the dialogue with Ghunia leading to implicit recognition of the kinship of Georgians, the dialogue with the Russian a divorce of form and content sutured together by explicit fiat. The dialogue with Ghunia reveals lowly folk dialect to be a vehicle capable of bearing authentic culture, while the dialogue with the officer reveals the “scientific” francophone language of the civilizer to be the empty jargon of a spurious civilization.

41A seeming parody of a similar narrative of frustrated enlightenment found at the center of Marlinsky’s *Ammalat Bek*.

42The rhetorical “de-Europeanization” of Russia in this work stands in interesting counterpoint to the appropriation of Russian voices as positive representatives of European modernity against the backwardness of local society among “native” intelligentsia elsewhere in the empire, particularly the Islamic cultural reform movement of Jadidism. See the relevant papers in Brower and Lazzerini, *Russia’s Orient*; and Jersild, “Rethinking Russia from Zardob: Hasan Melikov Zardabi and the ‘Native’ Intelligentsia,” *Nationalities Papers* 27, no. 3 (1999): 503–17. In part this is a function of Ch'avech'avadze’s generally quite ambivalent posture toward modernity in general, which was noted by contemporaries (Suny, *Making of the Georgian Nation*, 130–31).
By these various formal means, Ch'avch'avadze constructs a complex genealogy for himself as intelligent, establishing an overt literary genealogy that addresses his text as a son’s reply to a wayward generation of Georgian fathers who have abandoned the Georgian people for the Russian state (Orbeliani), and at the same time a covert sideward glance is made to the affinal relations of these same Georgians among Russian Romantics (Griboedov). By opposing himself to his kin within the literary community of Russified Georgian society, Ch'avch'avadze turns to the people, establishing a naturalized fraternal kinship based on shared language within the speech community of Georgians (Lelt Ghunia). He can then use this as a foil for the empty claims of the francophone discourse of Russian civilization represented by the Russian state. At the same time, he revalorizes the term by which his own generation of intelligentsia were already known, Terg-daleuli, from a term which implies a Russophile geopoetics of assimilation of Georgia to Russia via enlightenment, to one which instead seeks to find authentic culture among the Terek-dwelling mountaineers of the Georgian Caucasus.