

## Individualism in Georgian Writing

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### **Abstract**

Individualism is a Western phenomenon. Its manifestation is felt in the East from a cultural point of view, despite Eastern collectivism and, when considered from a political perspective, a certain despotism. Individualism manifests in a person's moral actions within a socio-political environment. In terms of revealing individualism, sixteenth-century Georgian writing is particularly important. If we judge by the historical context, the main lines of Eastern and Western individualism are outlined. The country's historical context shaped the individualism of Georgian literature - the country and the nation, throughout their history, constantly needed to protect their identity, especially after the 19th century, when the country lost its independence and became part of the Russian Empire for two centuries. The traumatic experience of colonialism was most poignantly reflected in literature. We will discuss this issue based on a contrastive analysis, using historical and comparative research methods. Georgian literature dates back to the 5th century, and its origin is connected with the proclamation of Christianity as the state religion in Georgia. Until the 11th century, Georgian literature was primarily religious. While it had a specific purpose, it nurtured the most important aspect: the individual and their relationship with the outside world. Human nature also reflects divine nature, as human nature is originally embedded in the divine.

**Keywords:** Individualism, religion, Christianity, divine

## Introduction

A special stage in Georgian literature is Shota Rustaveli's *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, in which the intellectual capabilities of the nation are fully revealed. The poem presents the Renaissance idea that the individual is paramount, and manifesting one's will is the most important. *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* has become a world classic. The nature and features of the Georgian Renaissance are still debated among scholars. Despite historical calamities, the fundamental direction of Georgian culture, especially in poetry, was significantly able to manifest individualistic elements in lyrical poems. In Georgian writing from the Renaissance period (16th–18th centuries), the artistic texts of Georgian king-poets such as Archil, Teimuraz, and Vakhtang VI, as well as *Davitiani* by the great Georgian writer Davit Guramishvili, emphasize the self-realization of the individual and the understanding of “who they are, where they come from, and where they are going.” This period concludes with Besiki, whose poetry shares the main tendencies of Renaissance writing and expresses the poet's fascination with human beauty and the feeling of love. Thus, their works, along with the romantic pathos of their content, are imbued with moral and pedagogical-educational patterns of personality formation. In this way, they represent a broad spectrum of individualistic attitudes, at least in the ultimate sense.

## The Problematic Regeneration of Personality in Relation to the Social Environment in 19th-Century Georgian Literature:

A completely different, almost diametrically opposite picture emerges in Georgian writing of the 19th century. This period begins with a powerful literary trend: Romanticism. In terms of individualism, the most important texts in Georgian literature from the second half of the 19th century focus on problematic themes of a socio-political nature, such as D. Chonkadze's *Surami Fortress*, L. Ardaziani's *Solomon Isakich Mejghanuashvili*, the works of Al. Kazbegi, and a significant portion of I. Chavchavadze's works. Ilia Chavchavadze, a writer and public figure, manifests an individualistic spirit. Sociality, as a phenomenon, is naturally connected with collectivist relapses. The problematic regeneration of the individual's relationship with the social environment is emphasized, as their struggle with outdated, so-called “social traditions” fundamentally requires reforming social systems. Individualism opposes the idea of suppressing the individual. Individualism is foreign and unacceptable in primitive societies, where the individual appears as an asocial being. In this context, a positive contrast between the personal and the social is created in Vazhapshavela's *Aluda Ketelauroi, Host and Guest*, and similar works, where a fierce struggle takes place, not only to highlight but also to establish the clear features of individualism within social structures. At the same time, as is well-known, personal independence is a guarantee of

any state's freedom and independence. This thesis is sharply applicable to the period of the Georgian Sixties (the so-called *Tergdaleuli*) in the 19th century. Therefore, the national-patriotic motives intertwined with the writers of these movements first and foremost demonstrate the independence of individual consciousness - not only from the ideology of any type but also from the so-called "chauvinistic-imperialist" influence and from the social violence within it. Based on this, we can confidently assert that the roots of the national liberation movement in Georgia are closely tied to the country's literary heritage.

The situation is entirely different when we examine the important ideological thesis of American philosopher Ayn Rand on economic freedom concerning 19th-century Georgian writing. In this context, we focus on L. Ardaziani's *Solomon Isakich Mejghanuashvili*. The situation is as follows: on the one hand, the gradual influx of the bourgeois-capitalist system is represented by Solomon Isakich Mejghanuashvili; on the other hand, the peculiar distortions and perversions of this correct economic system in Georgian society - illustrating the "unsuitability" of the system - not because it is impossible, but because our economic consciousness was unprepared for it, and our mental and ethnocultural background needed significant improvement for the widespread acceptance of this system. The embryonic social order of market economy and capital accumulation is shown by Ardaziani in *Solomon Isakich Mejghanuashvili*, reflecting the factual accuracy of 19th-century Georgian economic existence. This social arena is expanding daily and includes all classes of the social stratum. In contrast to Giorgi Eristavi's works, where representatives of the merchant class appear well-formed in economic transactions, Solomon makes a great economic leap from the so-called "proletarian" stratum to the so-called "revolutionary capitalism." This embryonic form of capitalism, both in Georgian and Western contexts, still remains underdeveloped. The main characters of the works of these writers distinguish themselves through a flexible form of "independent economic individualism," marked by qualities crucial for the stability of the capitalist system: strong will, resourcefulness, refined economic skills, and, most importantly, sharp wit and intelligence. Moreover, Solomon engages in usury, declaring: "Money must be in motion; money must earn money" (*Solomon Isakich Mejghanuashvili*). The economic trends in these works represent a radical difference from modern capitalism, especially with its socio-political and philosophical foundations. It is noteworthy that the popularization of a capitalist economic lifestyle in a peculiar form appeared in Georgian writing, particularly in Giorgi Tsereteli's *The First Step*. Tsereteli's work reflects the economic processes in Georgia during the 1880s and 1890s with naturalistic accuracy. The writer describes the changes with vivid imagery: "There was a time when a fire ship

first sailed into the port of Poti, disturbing the sleep of the Georgian nation weakened by the enemy... Poti became the trade bay of the Caucasus... and Georgia regained its long-lost hope." (*Tsereteli, G., 2010, p. 3*) The work is distinguished by its clear plot and its characters' real-life prototypes, giving it a unique and personal character.

Tsereteli's depiction of economic processes - alongside the benefits and negative consequences of these changes - demonstrates how economic competition plays a significant role in individualism. At the same time, it emphasizes mutual independence between state and private individuals, where the state's role is primarily regulatory. Ayn Rand confirms this: "When I say 'capitalism,' I mean full-fledged, unadulterated, unfettered, laissez-faire capitalism - the separation of state and economics, just as state and church are separated." (*Ayn Rand, "The Virtue of Selfishness"*)

Even more striking is Georgian writing in the 20th century, where individualism is more clearly manifested. The so-called "Blue Horns" literary movement exemplifies this shift, as it mirrored the Western model but clashed with the ideological framework of the Soviet political system. This movement represented an antagonistic attitude toward collectivist public character writing, prioritizing individual creativity and the superiority of the personal over the public. The *Blue Horns* poets, along with other symbolist-modern poets, expressed a peculiar individualistic vision of the world, human beings, and nature.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Georgian literature, despite ideological contradictions and a variety of trends, consistently prioritized the individual world of the creators, emphasizing the freedom to express their position. This preserved the individual character of Georgian literature throughout the centuries. The literary phenomenon of the Futurists, with its revival of artistic forms and strong aspirations toward individualism, significantly transcended traditional concepts in both form and content, creating a new conceptual position in literary thought.

## The Ideological Pressure of the Soviet Political System and the Individualism of Georgian Literature

The influence of Soviet political ideology is even more striking in 20th-century Georgian prose. "Radical individualism" is especially characteristic of literary movements in the 1920s, such as symbolism and decadence. This is most evident in works such as M. Javakhishvili's *Jago's Dreams*, Ch. Amirejibi's *Data Tutashkhia*, and the works of Otar Chiladze, L. Gotua's *Sorrow of Heroes*, and K. Lortkipanidze. These works depict historical and fictional characters who serve as moral measures of society but,

at the same time, are autonomously independent, possess willpower, and seek complete personal freedom. The characters' struggles, whether internal or external, are aimed at achieving individual freedom in the face of totalitarian regimes. Ayn Rand also expressed similar views: "An individual is a person who says: I will not interfere in anyone's life and will not allow anyone to interfere in mine..." (*Ayn Rand, "The Handbook of Americanism"*).

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