

Gül Mükerrerrem ÖZTÜRK\* 

**POSTCOLONIAL IRONY IN *LETTERS OF A TRAVELLER*: ILIA CHAVCHAVADZE'S CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH RUSSIAN ORIENTALISM**

**ABSTRACT**

This study examines Georgian writer Ilia Chavchavadze's *Letters of a Traveller* (1861) through the lens of postcolonial theory, arguing that the text serves not only as an anti-colonial critique but also as a nuanced instance of cultural negotiation and identity formation. Chavchavadze interrogates the colonial discourse of Tsarist Russia through literary strategies such as irony and parody while simultaneously engaging critically with European intellectual traditions. *Letters of a Traveller* offers a multilayered process of resistance and accommodation that transcends the binary opposition of "colonizer" and "colonized." In particular, the figure of the Russian coachman in the "Povoska" section satirically critiques Russian bureaucracy. At the same time, intertextual references to writers such as Gogol and Lermontov highlight Chavchavadze's transformative literary stance. In this context, the work deconstructs Russian Orientalism on both linguistic and structural levels, making visible the intellectual agency of Georgian literature in the face of colonial experience. *Letters of a Traveller* not only exposes imperial structures but also lays the groundwork for the reconstruction of modern Georgian identity through cultural negotiation. Accordingly, this study seeks to move beyond the Eurocentric limits of postcolonial theory, demonstrating the potential for producing original and localized contributions within the context of the Caucasus.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial theory, Ilia Chavchavadze, *Letters of a Traveller*, cultural hybridity, irony and parody

**BİR GEZGİNİN MEKTUPLARI'NDA POSTKOLONYAL İRONİ: İLİA ÇAVÇAVADZE VE RUS ORYANTALİZMİNE ELEŞTİREL BİR MÜDAHALE**

**ÖZET**

Bu çalışma, Gürcü yazar İlia Çavçavadze'nin *Bir Gezginin Mektupları* (1861) adlı eserini postkolonyal kuram bağlamında ele alarak, metnin yalnızca sömürge karşıtı bir eleştiri olmadığını; bununla birlikte kültürel müzakere ve kimlik inşasının incelikli bir örneği olduğunu gözler önüne sermektedir. Çavçavadze, Çarlık Rusyası'nın kolonyal söylemini ironi ve parodi gibi edebi stratejiler aracılığıyla tartışmaya açarken, Avrupa entelektüel gelenekleriyle de eleştirel bir ilişki kurar. *Bir Gezginin Mektupları* adlı eser ise, "sömürgeci" ve "sömürgeleştirilen" karşıtlığının ötesine geçen çok boyutlu bir direniş ve uyum süreci ortaya koyar. Özellikle "Povoska" bölümündeki Rus arabacı karakteri, Rus bürokrasisinin işleyişine yönelik tutumu hicivli bir eleştiri işlevi görürken, Gogol ve Lermontov gibi yazarlar arasında metinlerarası göndermeler, yazarın dönüştürücü edebi tavrını görünür kılar. Söz konusu eser, Rus oryantalizmini hem biçimsel hem söylemsel düzeyde çözümleyerek, Gürcü edebiyatının kolonyal deneyim karşısındaki entelektüel direncini de açığa çıkarır. Eser, emperyal yapıları teşhir eden bir metin olarak değil, aynı zamanda modern Gürcü kimliğinin kültürel müzakere aracılığıyla yeniden anlamlandırıldığı bir zemin olarak da düşünülebilir. Bu çerçevede çalışma, postkolonyal teorisinin batı-merkezli sınırlarını eleştirel bir gözle ele alarak, Kafkasya özelinde özgün ve yerel bilgi üretmenin mümkün olduğunu göstermektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Postkolonyal kuram, İlia Çavçavadze, *Gezginin Mektupları*, kültürel melezlik, ironi ve parodi

\* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, Faculty of Sciences and Letters, Department of Georgian Language and Literature, Rize/Türkiye. E-mail: [gul.ozturk@erdogan.edu.tr](mailto:gul.ozturk@erdogan.edu.tr) / Doç. Dr., Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, Gürcü Dili ve Edebiyatı, Rize/Türkiye. E-mail: [gul.ozturk@erdogan.edu.tr](mailto:gul.ozturk@erdogan.edu.tr)  
Academic Visitor, University of Oxford, Russian and East European Studies, Oxford School of Global and Area Studies, Oxford/England / Misafir Akademisyen, Oxford Üniversitesi, Küresel ve Bölgesel Çalışmalar Okulu, Rusya ve Doğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Bölümü, Oxford/Birleşik Krallık.

## Introduction

Ilia Chavchavadze (1837–1907), one of the foundational figures of nineteenth-century Georgian literature and political thought, is widely regarded as a pioneering intellectual who laid the groundwork for modern national identity in Georgia under the colonial domination of the Russian Empire. Born in Kvareli<sup>1</sup> and educated in sociology, economics, and philosophy at St. Petersburg University, Chavchavadze played an active role not only in literature but also in journalism, civil society, and parliamentary politics. He brought issues such as national consciousness, education, and the preservation of the Georgian language to the center of public discourse. The journal *Iveria*<sup>2</sup>, which he founded in 1877, functioned both as a publishing platform and as a site of intellectual resistance, serving the mission Chavchavadze defined as “defending the rights of all Georgians and Georgia.” *Iveria* was first published in Tbilisi on March 3, 1877, initially as a weekly periodical, then as a magazine between 1879–1885, and finally as a daily newspaper from 1886 onward. It was founded and edited by Ilia Chavchavadze, one of the leading figures of Georgian national thought.

Chavchavadze's literary production goes beyond mere aesthetic engagement; it operates as a practice of cultural resistance within discursive fields where colonial relations are reproduced. In this context, *Letters of a Traveller* (1861) stands out as an early and impactful example of his intellectual struggle. Structured as a semi-fictional travel narrative, the text satirizes the bureaucratic structure and imperial discourse of Tsarist Russia through irony, parody, and intertextuality. Simultaneously, by referencing European intellectual traditions, it opens a discussion on the reconstruction of Georgian identity through modernization and cultural hybridity. The figure of the Russian coachman (yamshchik) in the “Povoska” section, in particular, reveals the contradictions within Russia's modernization discourse and, through intertextual dialogue with Russian authors such as Gogol and Lermontov, interrogates the aesthetic codes of colonial rhetoric.

This study argues that *Letters of a Traveller*, when analyzed through the lens of postcolonial theory, emerges not only as a direct critique of Russian colonialism but also as a stage for cultural resistance, identity negotiation, and intellectual subjectivation. Drawing on Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, Linda Hutcheon's theory of parody, and Russia-centred discussions of Orientalism by scholars such as Susan Layton and Rachel Ram, this analysis aims to offer a new interpretive framework that connects Georgian literature with postcolonial thought. In this regard, *Letters of a Traveller* both deconstructs the discursive strategies of colonial power and proposes an original model for the reconstruction of modern Georgian identity on cultural and literary grounds. Accordingly, the study employs a qualitative textual analysis to examine *Letters of a Traveller* and provides a discourse analysis informed by postcolonial theory. Throughout the article, the function of literary devices such as intertextuality, irony, and parody in dismantling colonial discourse is thoroughly explored. The analysis follows a qualitative textual analysis framework, focusing on narrative tone, intertextual allusions, and linguistic irony as interpretive categories. Passages were selected based on their discursive engagement with colonial and modernizing ideologies. Instances of irony and parody were identified and coded according to their rhetorical function—whether

<sup>1</sup> A town in eastern Georgia, located in the Kakheti region.

<sup>2</sup> *Iveria* was a Georgian political and literary periodical published in Tbilisi. A Georgian-language journal founded by Ilia Chavchavadze in 1877.

subversive, comparative, or self-reflective—thus linking aesthetic strategies to postcolonial critique. Notably, *Letters of a Traveller* has also been translated into Turkish by Asmat Japaridze and Ali Altun, whose differing interpretive emphases highlight the text's engagement with irony and colonial discourse.

### Summary of *Letters of a Traveller*

Ilia Chavchavadze's *Letters of a Traveller* (1861) is a fictional travel narrative that renders the colonial structure of the Tsarist regime visible through the ironic and critical observations of a young Georgian intellectual travelling within the borders of the Russian Empire. The narrator embarks on both a physical journey and an introspective intellectual process. This dual movement transforms the text from a mere political satire into a manifesto for intellectual subjectivity. The core dynamic of the narrative is shaped by the individual's encounter with the colonial space, making *Letters of a Traveller* readable as a multilayered network of representations in which the epistemic hierarchies described by Edward Said (1978) in his critique of Orientalism are reproduced in the Caucasian context.

One of the most striking sections of the text, the "Povoska" scene, presents a multidimensional critique of the internal contradictions of the Empire through the figure of a Russian coachman (yamshchik). In this episode, the coachman functions both as a representation of the Empire's self-proclaimed "civilizing mission" and as an ironic embodiment of its technical and ideological dysfunctions. The intertextual engagement with Gogol's *Dead Souls*—specifically the metaphor of the "three-horse troika" as a symbol of imperial dynamism—allows Chavchavadze to subvert the image and portray Russian modernity as stagnant, cumbersome, and contradictory. The coachman's inability to move the animals despite shouting, "Hy, что ж, давайте приступим!" becomes an allegorical depiction not only of mechanical failure but also of the ideological bankruptcy of imperial ambition.

The text targets not only the bureaucratic and cultural domination of Tsarist Russia but also engages in critical dialogue with European intellectual traditions, opening a broader discussion about the contours of Georgian modernity. The narrator's conversations with his French travelling companion and references to his education demonstrate that Chavchavadze conceptualized modernization not as an external imposition but as an internalized and transformative process. In this regard, *Letters of a Traveller* transcends colonial critique, offering an original narrative shaped by the intersection of cultural hybridity, resistance, and intellectual agency.

Written in 1861 when Chavchavadze was only twenty-three years old, the text can be read as a result of his ideological ruptures and cultural encounters following his education in Russia and return to Georgia. Therefore, the work should be evaluated not only as a critique of the past but also as an intellectual space for envisioning the future. In Linda Hutcheon's (1985) terms, irony and parody in this text are not merely aesthetic preferences; they are critical strategies that enable the reframing of colonial discourse. Chavchavadze's parodic and intertextual dialogue with Russian authors such as Lermontov, Pushkin, and Gogol reverses the cultural superiority of the colonial centre. Through this process, the text renders Georgian intellectual subjectivity newly visible.

In this context, *Letters of a Traveller* becomes a literary stage where critique and negotiation operate simultaneously within a framework in which colonial power is reproduced not only as an

external force but also at the discursive and cultural level. Chavchavadze's narrative signals that resistance is not merely rupture but also a strategic rewriting. Thus, the work offers a contextually and conceptually original postcolonial perspective on the construction of Georgian identity within the conditions of colonial modernity.

### Irony and Parody in *Letters of a Traveller*

Ilia Chavchavadze's *Letters of a Traveller* employs ironic and parodic narrative strategies not merely as aesthetic tools, but as deliberate modes of intervention aimed at deconstructing colonial discourse. These techniques construct the text's critique of Tsarist Russia's hegemonic claims at both thematic and structural levels. One of the core arguments of postcolonial theory—that resistance is not only a matter of confrontation but also of discursive rewriting (Ashcroft et al., 2002)—is clearly evident in Chavchavadze's narrative strategies. In this sense, *Letters of a Traveller* represents both the critical and generative dimensions of Georgia's complex engagement with colonial modernity.

Chavchavadze primarily uses irony to subvert the Russian Empire's civilizing mission narrative. As Linda Hutcheon (1985) argues, parody is not simply an act of quotation but a means of establishing critical distance. In *Letters of a Traveller*, this distance is constructed through the figure of the yamshchik (postal coachman), who represents the Tsarist bureaucracy. In the "Povoska" section, the coachman encountered by the narrator and his French companion becomes an ironic inversion of the iconic "three-horse troika" metaphor found in Gogol's *Dead Souls*. While Gogol portrays Russia as a mythic force surging forward with speed and power, Chavchavadze's coachman remains motionless, unable to understand commands or act effectively, turning the imperial fantasy into a biting satire: as he shouts "Ну, что ж, давайте приступим!" ("Well then, let's begin!") but fails to mobilize the animals, the Empire is symbolically immobilized by its own weight.

This episode constitutes not only a bureaucratic breakdown but also an allegorical critique of imperial ideology. The coachman embodies both the structure he represents and its failure, reinforcing the text's ironic dimension. In this context, Chavchavadze critiques the technical backwardness and administrative inefficiency of a Russia that proclaims itself modern, while also highlighting the autonomy of Georgian identity in its engagement with these contradictory discourses.

Parody and irony are not simply stylistic devices but discursive tools bolstered by intertextuality. *Letters of a Traveller* engages in a critical dialogue with Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*, Pushkin's poem "Winter Journey," and Gogol's *Dead Souls*. The contrast between Gogol's troika and Chavchavadze's *Povoska* constitutes a kind of literary polemic. According to P. Ingorokva, Chavchavadze's direct references were intentional, designed to ensure that the reader could clearly perceive the ironic comparison (Chavchavadze, 1937, p. 713). Minashvili notes that the traveller from Europe, positioned as a critical observer of Russia's technological and bureaucratic deficiencies, adds a crucial voice to the narrative (1995, p. 357).

Another prominent example of irony occurs in the narrator's dialogue with a Russian officer, who presents the idea of placing a fly in a sugar bowl to prevent theft as a mark of scientific progress. Concluding with the exclamation "Губа не дура!" ("The lip is no fool!"), the officer's instrumentalization of the concepts of education and progress underscores Chavchavadze's ironic

critique of the superficiality of orientalist discourse. The parody in this scene does not merely ridicule an individual character but presents a grotesque portrait of an entire colonial mentality.

Chavchavadze's use of irony and parody may be seen as one of the earliest instances of intellectual agency in Georgian literature. From a postcolonial perspective, these strategies function not only as tools of resistance but also as dynamic elements of cultural subjectivity and discursive transformation. While engaging in polemics with Russian literary and political discourses, Chavchavadze also reinterprets his dialogue with European intellectual traditions. In doing so, *Letters of a Traveller* is neither a text subjugated by Russian influence nor one that merely reacts against it; rather, it represents a hybrid literary position that transforms both fields.

In the context of irony and parody, the text demonstrates that colonial relations cannot be explained in binary terms but must be understood as multilayered and contradictory processes. For this reason, *Letters of a Traveller* stands as a significant example of postcolonial theory. The work should be considered not only a historical document but also a literary laboratory in which critical thought and cultural subjectivity are produced.

The following table presents a comparative overview of the parodic transformations employed by Chavchavadze in *Letters of a Traveller*, juxtaposed with representative images from Russian literary tradition.

**Table 1.** Comparative summary of parodic representations

Work / Author	Image / Character Troika → Symbol of Progress and Imperial Power	Representational Function (Russian Literature)	Parodic Transformation (Chavchavadze)
Gogol → Dead Souls	Troika → Yamshchik	Progress and Imperial Power	Immobility and Incompetence
Pushkin	Romantic Journey	Vehicle of National Identity	Critique of the Colonial Illusion
Lermontov	Caucasian Otherness	Civilization → Barbarism Opposition	Parody of Orientalist Perception

*Note:* Compiled by the author based on Chavchavadze (1937) and Minashvili (1995).

### ***Letters of a Traveller* in the Context of Russian Orientalism and Postcolonial Discourse**

In *Letters of a Traveller*, the use of ironic and parodic narrative strategies targets not only the colonial policies of Tsarist Russia but also seeks to deconstruct Russian Orientalism through a critical lens. While postcolonial theory, particularly as shaped by Edward Said's (1978) conceptualization of Orientalism, primarily addresses classical Western colonialism, it can also be applied to imperial discourses emanating from hybrid empires like Russia. Russian Orientalism emulated the mechanisms of domination developed by the West while simultaneously positioning itself as both outside of the West and culturally proximate to the East. This dual position enabled Russia to act both as a colonial subject and as an "other" situated at the periphery of the West, producing hybrid and contradictory discourses—especially in multicultural regions like the Caucasus (Layton, 1994, p. 95).

Chavchavadze's text is situated precisely within the discursive gap created by this dual structure. *Letters of a Traveller* subjects Russian Orientalist discourse not simply to external critique but also to ironic and parodic rewriting that reveals its internal contradictions. In this respect, the figure of the *yamshchik* (postal coachman) in the text functions as a direct parody of the *troika* image in Gogol's *Dead Souls*. While in Gogol the *troika* symbolizes progress and

imperial power, Chavchavadze's version transforms it into a static, incompetent, and absurd bureaucratic apparatus. Minashvili interprets this scene as a deliberate dismantling of Gogol's mythic imperial narrative (1995, p. 357).

This irony is not limited to symbolic representations. The deliberate inclusion of Russian phrases throughout the text becomes, in Linda Hutcheon's terms, a form of "ironic inversion" that serves parodic ends (1985, p. 32). The Russian language, instead of functioning as a carrier of colonial discourse, is subverted and repurposed as a tool of ideological resistance, becoming part of Chavchavadze's counter-hegemonic strategy.

Moreover, *Letters of a Traveller* not only deconstructs Russia's colonial myths but also approaches the progressive ideals of European Enlightenment thought with critical distance. The dialogues between Chavchavadze's French travel companion and the Russian coachman are not merely comparative reflections on two civilizations; they also serve as satirical critiques of the superficial forms in which claims to modernity are represented. For instance, the scene in which a Russian officer touts a supposed scientific innovation that uses a fly to prevent sugar theft is a high point of irony. This episode reveals how Russia internalizes scientific and cultural concepts imported from Europe in a superficial and instrumental fashion (Chavchavadze, 1937, p. 254).

Similarly, Chavchavadze parodically inverts the derogatory depictions of coachmen in Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*. The caricatured representation of the Caucasian "other" in Russian literature is here reworked to expose the Russian subject's gaze and dismantle the epistemological assumptions of empire. This intertextuality is not merely allusive—it is critical and transformative.

Chavchavadze's intellectual engagement extends beyond Russia to Europe. His allusion to Griboyedov's line "The smoke is sweet..." subtly satirizes superficial patriotism and unquestioning loyalty. According to Kankava, Chavchavadze regarded the legacy of European philosophy as foundational to Georgia's intellectual and political rebirth. This dual orientation casts him not merely as a dissenter but as a cultural mediator (2003, pp. 130–131).

Taken together, these narrative components make *Letters of a Traveller* a multilayered text that deconstructs the dual nature of Russian Orientalism, engages critically with Western thought, and fuses these critiques through ironic and parodic narrative strategies. Presenting a localized form of postcolonial discourse specific to the Caucasus, this work stages both the conflicts within Georgian identity formation and the unravelling of imperial discourses. It is thus a literary and political intervention of lasting significance.

### Intertextuality and Parodic Interaction

Ilia Chavchavadze's *Letters of a Traveller* stands not only as a travel narrative but also as an intertextual literary intervention that parodically subverts the linguistic, cultural, and ideological structures of colonial power. Through ironic transformation, Chavchavadze reframes narrative patterns and images borrowed from canonical Russian authors such as Gogol, Lermontov, and Pushkin. This narrative technique exemplifies Linda Hutcheon's (1985) "ironic inversion"—a form of parody that is not merely destructive but also generative in its relation to the source text.

The character of the *yamshchik* (postal coachman) in the "Povoska" section directly engages in dialogue with the *troika* metaphor from Gogol's *Dead Souls*. While Gogol's *troika* symbolizes Russia's imperial momentum and heroic national identity, Chavchavadze deliberately inverts this

image: an immobile, comical, and incompetent coachman represents a collapsing bureaucracy and a dysfunctional empire. According to Minashvili, this scene is a conscious deconstruction of one of the symbolic carriers of Russian imperial ideology (1995, p. 357).

Likewise, the romantic journey motif commonly found in Pushkin's works is transformed in *Letters of a Traveller* into a grotesque experience: rather than enabling discovery or progress, the journey results in stasis, introspection, and disillusionment. The Orientalist caricature of the Caucasian "other" in Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* is similarly parodied in Chavchavadze's work as a critique directed at the Russian subject itself. The coachman's response—"So are you"—functions as a mirror in which Russia is forced to confront its own technological and administrative inadequacies, exposing the fragility of the colonizer/colonized hierarchy.

This intertextuality is not merely a literary game but a re-negotiation of Georgia's conflicted relationship with colonial narratives. Chavchavadze appropriates literary forms that carry imperial discourse, only to subvert them within his own national and cultural context. In doing so, Georgia emerges not as a passive recipient but as an active agent in the production of counter-discursive meaning.

This parodic engagement extends to other works, such as *Lelt Ghunia*, where Chavchavadze simultaneously defends traditional values and acknowledges the inevitability of modernization. The protagonist's internal transformation underscores that cultural subjectivity is not a passive outcome but a result of deliberate and strategic choices.

Thus, *Letters of a Traveller* functions not merely as a parody of Tsarist discourse but also as a multilayered discursive intervention that reconstructs the fundamental binaries of postcolonial thought—colonizer/colonized, East/West, tradition/modernity. Resistance is not confined to confrontation; it is also shaped through the production of meaning, satire, and narrative reframing. In Hutcheon's words, parody is a textual practice that "undermines authority even as it speaks with it" (Hutcheon, 1985, p. 36). Chavchavadze's engagement with Russian literary tradition exemplifies precisely this kind of strategic dialogue.

Within this framework, *Letters of a Traveller* not only deconstructs Tsarist imperial discourse through irony but also becomes a literary expression of cultural hybridity, intellectual subjectivity, and discursive resistance. As such, this work should be recognized not only as a foundational text of 19th-century Georgian literature but also as a central contribution to the postcolonial literary canon. Through parody and intertextuality, Chavchavadze transforms cultural resistance into aesthetic form, demonstrating how subjectivity can be reasserted within colonial relations. Within this framework, *Letters of a Traveller* not only deconstructs Tsarist imperial discourse through irony but also becomes a literary expression of cultural hybridity, intellectual subjectivity, and discursive resistance. Here, *hybridity* is understood in Bhabha's sense as a cultural in-between space that challenges colonial binaries; *intellectual subjectivity* refers to the self-conscious agency of the colonized writer to redefine meaning within power relations; and *discursive resistance* designates the strategic use of language and form to undermine dominant ideologies.

### Colonialism and Eurocentrism in *Letters of a Traveller*

Ilia Chavchavadze's *Letters of a Traveller* is not merely a critique of Tsarist Russia's colonial practices; it is also a multi-layered narrative that traces the complex and contradictory

relationship with the Eurocentric paradigms shaped by Enlightenment thought. While Chavchavadze sharply deconstructs Russian imperial discourse through irony and parody, he simultaneously embraces the European intellectual tradition as an indispensable resource for Georgia's modernization. This dual orientation opens a critical dialogue with one of postcolonial theory's central tensions: how can anti-colonial resistance be articulated without reproducing dominant forms of modernity and knowledge?

Chavchavadze frames Enlightenment ideals—reason, freedom, and progress—as tools for critical subject formation. This intellectual position is closely tied, as Tevzadze argues, to “the strong internalization of scientific progress and belief in social transformation by the Georgian intelligentsia of the 19th century” (Tevzadze, 2010, p. 5). As such, *Letters of a Traveller* is not only a denunciation of colonial domination but also a project of intellectual reconstruction.

The use of Russian terms such as *yamshchik* and *povoska* functions not merely as linguistic ornamentation but as a vehicle for ironic engagement with colonial language. The coachman's retort, “So are you,” reflects not only a critique of Russian imperial inertia but also a self-reflective critique directed at stagnation within Chavchavadze's own society. As Minashvili emphasizes, while Chavchavadze satirizes Russia's imperial ambitions and bureaucratic inefficiency, he also engages with the progressive dimensions of Russian literature—particularly in the works of Lermontov, Gogol, and Pushkin—with objective nuance (Minashvili, 1995, pp. 363–364).

Chavchavadze's description, at the beginning of the text, of his four years in Russia as a period that “revitalized the mind and strengthened the heart” (Minashvili, 1995, p. 364) reveals that his relationship with Eurocentric knowledge is not one of rejection, but of transformative engagement. Kankava also affirms this view, identifying Chavchavadze as a “cultural intermediary” who transferred the intellectual capital acquired in St. Petersburg into the local context (Kankava, 2003, pp. 130–131).

Chavchavadze's stance, therefore, cannot be reduced to either Westernizing assimilationism or rigid traditionalism. Rather, his intellectual orientation represents a pragmatic balance between ironic resistance to Russian domination and a critical appropriation of European thought. This positions his postcolonial subjectivity not merely as a reaction to colonial oppression, but as a strategic intervention that reconfigures the discursive field to assert cultural autonomy.

In this light, *Letters of a Traveller* not only deconstructs Russian colonial practices and Orientalist discourse but also exposes the ambivalent functions of Eurocentric progress narratives in postcolonial contexts. By constructing modernization as a line of defence against cultural colonialism, Chavchavadze transforms intellectual agency into a force not only of resistance but of cultural reconstitution. In doing so, the work offers a discursive experience that is significant for both Georgian literature and postcolonial theory. This dual orientation—rejecting Eurocentric hierarchies while reappropriating Enlightenment ideals—reveals the paradox at the heart of postcolonial modernity, where critique and adoption coexist as intertwined forms of intellectual survival. Furthermore, this dialogic approach resonates with nineteenth-century European travel satire, particularly in its use of irony and parody as instruments of both cultural critique and self-reflection.



## Conclusion

This study has re-evaluated Ilia Chavchavadze's *Letters of a Traveller* through the lens of postcolonial theory, demonstrating that the text is not simply an anti-colonial protest but also a multi-layered interrogation of cultural negotiation, subject formation, and identity construction. Chavchavadze not only critiques Russian imperial discourse through satire, irony, and parody but also engages in dialogue with European intellectual traditions, offering a cultural vision for Georgia's path toward modernization. In this context, *Letters of a Traveller* constructs a hybrid narrative form that transcends colonial binaries—colonizer/colonized, East/West, tradition/modernity.

The work presents Georgia not as a passive object of colonial oppression but as an agent capable of discursive intervention. By centring the dialectical relationship between resistance and accommodation, Chavchavadze's narrative challenges one-dimensional and passive representations of colonial encounters. His intertextual engagement with Russian authors such as Gogol, Pushkin, and Lermontov demonstrates that Georgian intellectuals did not merely reject imperial discourse but reconfigured it from within to produce a counter-discursive space.

This analysis reveals the epistemic contributions that can emerge from re-reading Caucasus-centred literary texts through postcolonial theory. *Letters of a Traveller* generates a potent postcolonial discourse centred around hybridity, cultural resistance, and intellectual agency. The work should be seen not only as a canonical example of Georgian literature but also as a unique source that sheds light on non-Eurocentric forms of anti-colonial intellectual production.

In light of these findings, *Letters of a Traveller* deserves to be recognized as a pioneering narrative that simultaneously deconstructs Tsarist ideology and reimagines Georgian cultural identity through literary devices such as irony, parody, and intertextuality. The work clearly demonstrates that postcolonial subjectivity is not solely a matter of opposition, but also a creative process of intervention and discursive reconstruction. In this regard, the study aims to contribute to the expansion of postcolonial theory in the context of the Caucasus and to a renewed understanding of the intellectual autonomy of colonized cultures.

## References

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2002). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203426081>
- Chavchavadze, I. (1937). *Tkhzulebani: Sruli k'rebuli khut t'omad* (Vol. 1). Leksebi, p'oemebi, motkhroebi. State Publishing House.
- Hutcheon, L. (1985). *A theory of parody: The teachings of twentieth-century art forms*. Methuen. [https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=FoHXjEauvKIC&pg=PA1&hl=tr&source=gbs\\_toc\\_r&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=FoHXjEauvKIC&pg=PA1&hl=tr&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false)
- Kankava, G. (2003). Ilias "Mgzavris Tserilebi" da Bucklis "Civilizatsiis Istoria Inglisshi". *Sjani*, 4, 125–134.
- Layton, S. (1994). *Russian literature and empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy*. Cambridge University Press. Retrieved July 22, 2025, from <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511554094>

- Minashvili, L. (1995). *Ilia Chavchavadze: Tskhovreba da shemokmedebiti aspekt'ebis dakhasiateba*. Tbilisi University Press.
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Tevzadze, G. (2010). *Ilia Chavchavadze da akhali azrovneba: Shesadzlebloba da sinamdvile*. A. Aladashvili (Ed.). Carpe Diem.

**Ethical Statement/Etik Beyan:** It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited. / Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.

**Declaration of Conflict/Çatışma Beyanı:** It is declared that there is no conflict of interest between individuals or institutions in the study. / Çalışmada kişi ya da kurumlar arası çıkar çatışmasının olmadığı beyan olunur.

**Teşekkür/Acknowledgment:** This study was supported by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK) under the 2219 – International Postdoctoral Research Fellowship Programme, Project No: 1059B192402134. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to TÜBİTAK for the financial support provided. / Bu çalışma, Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kurumu (TÜBİTAK) tarafından 2219 – Uluslararası Doktora Sonrası Araştırma Burs Programı, Proje No: 1059B192402134 kapsamında desteklenmiştir. TÜBİTAK'a sağladığı mali destek için içten teşekkürlerimi sunarım.

**Copyright&License/Telif Hakkı&Lisans:** Authors publishing with the journal retain the copyright to their work licensed under the CC BY-NC 4.0 / Yazarlar dergide yayınlanan çalışmalarının telif hakkına sahiptirler ve çalışmalarını CC BY-NC 4.0 lisansı altında yayımlanmaktadır.