

Tatia Oboladze
Tbilisi State University

Wine, Opium, and Hashish in Georgian and European Symbolism

Introduction

In the 1910s, the first symbolist group of 13 poets, The Blue Horns,¹ emerged in Georgian literature with clearly stated purposes and aesthetic positions. *The Blue Horns (Tsisperi Qantsebi)* was the first organized literary group. The main goal of the symbolist poets was renewal of Georgian literature and its inclusion into the Western context. This group of young poets made attempts to broaden the area of thought and to modernize Georgian literature with their art and their public activities. They declared Tbilisi as a cultural centre, and thus rejected the status of a cultural periphery (Oboladze, 2018). Georgian symbolists regarded Charles Baudelaire, Stephane Mallarme, Richard Wagner, Friedrich Nietzsche, and others as the leading authorities for forming their creative positions and worldview. By mentioning their names and texts, dedicating their verses to them, and translating their works, Georgian symbolists clearly outlined the cultural area of their art and declared Georgian literature as part of European modernism.²

Theory of Myth

One of the universal signs of symbolist aesthetics determining the substance of each variation of this movement (French, Georgian, Russian, etc.) is the reconstruction of myth. Symbolism not only starts with the actualization of universal characters, images, motifs, and literary myths (such as Salome, Medea, Narcissus, Satan, etc.), but new mythology is also created. Valerian Gaprindashvili and Grigol Robakidze are the key theorists of Georgian symbolism who declared the renewal of the traditional mythological pantheon. Their theory of myth was closely linked to German thinkers, more precisely to those of Wagner and Nietzsche.

1 The appearance of the journal *Tsisperi Qantsebi* provoked a mostly negative reaction. The related manifesto and criticism of authorities of Georgian literature were unacceptable for the public. Although officially the group *Tsisperqantselebi* existed until 1931, its active creative period with the short period of Georgia's independence, 1918-1921.

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The group of the young poets regarded Gr. Robakidze as one harbinger of symbolism, and Nietzsche as the other. As early as 1911, Robakidze presented a lecture entitled *Friedrich Nietzsche* in a Georgian theatre, and was actually the first to familiarize the wider society with the German philosopher's views.

Nietzsche's concept about the Dionysian and Apollonian dichotomy turned out to be especially significant for Georgian symbolists. Apollo – the god of light – is associated with the concept of an individual's ego, rationalism, chastity, while Dionysus – the god of the subconscious and the god of wine and feasting – is associated with the destruction of the ego (Robakidze, 2012, 218). Each artist is one of either Apollonian dreams or Dionysian narration. Only in Greek tragedy were these two concepts harmonically combined (Nietzsche, 2016, 61). The modern individual, who has rejected the Dionysian concept, has lost the mythic sensibility and turned into the "eternally hungry" individual (Nietzsche). The main challenge of modernism and its primary goal is reviving these lost ties and activating the mythic sensibility in art. Robakidze wanted to renew what he saw as the stale Georgian literature, employing actualization of the mythic flow. For him, myth was the "voice of internal experience; myth is the word of the universe. That is why those desiring to be the mediator between the humans and the world of divine substance should talk in the language of mythos" (Robakidze, 2014, 142). Because of this, he can be seen as the apologist for Dionysian art in the desacralized art of his time. "My emblem is Dionysus's medallion", states the poet in *Automedallion (Meotsnebe Niamorebi [Dreamer Gazelles]*, 1922 N7). Unlike Nietzsche, for Robakidze the key substance should be sought not in the ancient world but rather in Georgian, Caucasian mythology. The desacralized story can be dealt with by "returning" to myth. Though Robakidze's ideas are fed by Nietzsche's philosophy, he has adapted these to his own purpose, aesthetics, and specific Georgian culture, and created his unique mythic theory. He was interested in the East, "saturated" with its mythos. He considered Georgia as a "piece of the East" (Robakidze, 2014, 395), and for him the renewal of Georgian culture meant returning to these traditions. Robakidze's theory of the myth comprises a harmonic combination of two incompatible fundamentals – paganism and Christianity, Nietzsche's dichotomy of Apollo and Dionysus, as the idea of the polarity of classical thinking greatly influenced the formation of German symbolism, in particular the art of Stefan George. His theory of myth is close to Robakidze's views, and in both cases we can see the synthesis of different (oriental, biblical, Greek, Roman, etc.) mythological traditions (Grigorian, 2009, 151-152).

Another German thinker that determined the substance of symbolism and greatly influenced the art of The Blue Horns is Richard Wagner. Symbolism inherited two key elements from Wagner –significance of music and the myths. Wagner regarded myth as the only means for restoring the ancient tradition and approaching poetry and music, and his' art is a manifestation of the revival of the lost power of the myth (collective subconscious) (Marchal, 2011, 123).

Based on German myths, Wagner has created his own. He rewrote the history of humanity, as in his myth humans have replaced the dead gods. Wagner's myth tells us about mankind ruined by the gods and saved by humans (Grauby 1994, 62-63). Like Wagner, The Blue Horns also replace the ancient gods with humans, in this case with poets, while they replace the ancient heroes with literary characters (Hamlet, Ophelia, etc.). "While before, in poetry there was Apollo, now there is Gautier, while there were the Medusa and the Girl, now there are Edgar and Maldaror... Before the poets were inspired by the Hellenic and Roman gods and heroes, now they are inspired by the fantastic names of the past poets" (Gaprindashvili, 1990, 445).

In Wagner's and the symbolists' theories, the central issue is a reconstruction of myth, but fundamental to this is the definition of the purpose of "myth rehabilitation". For Wagner, myth had the function of protector of the national genius, i.e. for him myth is the instrument for the conservation of the national idea. In contrast, for the symbolists myth is universal, transnational. Hence, for the (French) symbolists myth is a phenomenon on a broader scale, and its reconstruction does not serve a narrow, national purpose. In this respect, the position of The Blue Horns is closer to Wagner's theory of myth regarding the political and cultural situation of Georgia³, and myth was associated with the re-determination of identity in the Georgian symbolist space. In the art of The Blue Horns, myth was accepted as a universal instrument for creating a new Georgian identity.

While Robakidze felt that it was important to "weld" the Christian and pagan, the symbolist poet Gaprindashvili believed that it was important to create a new mythology, one more valuable and closer to symbolist aesthetics. It turned out that the ancient and Christian mythology, determining the substance of European art, was not "sufficient" anymore.

Gaprindashvili, one of the leading theorists of Georgian symbolism, offered a thorough discussion of the key characteristics of symbolist mythology. In his keynote article *Declaration (New Mythology)* he stated the group's aim was to separate from traditional mythology and create new myths from actual images. "Pagan and Christian mythology has lost its ties with our minds, and the poets sought the other subjects for their art. No one believes in the old myths, and at the same time, we desire the myth, we long for the myth" (Gaprindashvili, 1990, 543-544). In his' opinion, the "material" for the new mythology was diverse – the poet's biography, literary characters, etc.

The Georgian symbolist group created a new pantheon and brought into the "masquerade of the new mythology" their "French and German brothers". "Possibly, this

3 From 1802 Georgia found itself within the Russian Empire, in the 1910s (1918-1921) it obtained independence for a few years, but from 1921 was forced to become one of the members of the Soviet Republic. The primary objective of The Blue Horns was to restore and re-conceptualize the national identity via modernizing Georgian literature.

could be the new example in world poetry, when the poets had the desire to transform their friendship into the fairy tale, where the poets transformed close relations into the poetry and made universal lyrics from the personal emotions (*Chaldea, Tbilisi Backbone*). Intimacy is the factor giving *The Blue Horns* a special place in the world of poetry (Gaprindashvili, 1990, 546). For example, Tabidze's sonnet *Valerian Gaprindashvili*, Iashvili's sonnet *Titsian Tabidze*, and Iashvili's poem *To Ali Arsenishvili*, among others.

Thus, in the Georgian symbolist space a particularly interesting and original theory of myth was developed. Robakidze and Gaprindashvili considered the Western model of the such a theory (i.e. the views of Nietzsche and Wagner) only partly. The specific nature of their theory was determined, on the one hand, by the combination of different mythological flows (pagan and Christian, Western, Eastern, etc.) and on the other by the renewal of the mythological pantheon as dictated by trends tailored to the symbolist way of thinking and the creation of the new mythology. Both ways of myth revival served the main purpose of *The Blue Horns*. We suggest that at the same time as the modernization of Georgian literature, the identity of Georgian culture was re-defined.

The Myth of Opium and Hashish

In all invariants of symbolism, a reflection of "drug experience" is omnipresent. The most important and complex theme of symbolism is the creation of the myth of opium and hashish, along with the recreation of the myth of Dionysus/Bacchus (the god of wine and fertility).

Western civilization has known and consumed hashish and opium since ancient times, though they were consumed for different purposes. Opium, as a panacea, was used for the treatment of many diseases (a sleeping pill in *Othello*, analgesic in the tenth story of *Decameron* by Boccaccio; sedative in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*), and hashish was conceptually associated with spiritualism and mysticism, as it was used in India, China, and Persia, and mostly in the religious and mystical rituals (see *La Fountain's Fables*, among others) (Mickel, 2017, 35-48). While there is a long-standing tradition of opium and hashish consumption in Europe, for the Western world both means of intoxication were regarded as a purely oriental phenomenon, part of oriental culture.

The introduction of opium and hashish in French art is associated with the "discovery of the East" that started in the 17th century (in the reign of Louis XIV). From this period, the political, trade, and missionary relations with the East started to deepen. The new wave of expeditions and colonization in the late 18th and the early 19th centuries were naturally followed by making cultural ties, introducing new concepts into the art, and so on.

Many quite different cultures were unified into the concept of the "East" for Europe, and this idea was directly linked to something new, strange, and remote. In the

Western thinking model, the oriental culture, mythos and traditions were regarded as something exotic and phantasmagoric, and the Western world recognized the East as a source of occultism and mysticism. Unlike Europe, attempting to approach the "mystical" Eastern world, make cultural-worldview ties through direct acceptance of certain traditions and concepts, Georgia regarded itself as and organic part of the East. Sh. Apkhaidze, one of the representatives of the Georgian symbolist school, determined the place and significance of Georgia as follows: "We believe in Messianism of Georgia: welding of the Western and Eastern culture. Symbolism has this mission in art and if the exhausting Western world needs revitalization by the oriental mysticism and magic countries, indeed experienced doctor – Georgia will be able to do this" (Apkhaidze, *Prospects of Georgian Poetry*, 1919). Maestro of *The Blue Horns*, Gr. Robakidze stated much the same: "The East is amazing [...], and Georgia is a part of the East! And we should not forget our cradle. Western Europe is indeed valuable, but we cannot leave the East for Europe. It would be better to celebrate their marriage with a Georgian feast" (Robakidze, 1917, 177). Indeed, *The Blue Horns* unified two traditions – "I placed the Hafiz rose into the Prudhome vase. // I plant Baudelaire's flowers of evil in Besik's garden" (Titsian Tabidze from the book *Chaldean Cities*) and created a new artistic paradigm. Thus, as the inseparable part of the exotic world, Georgian symbolists regarded returning to one's own roots as the precondition for introducing the new poetics – symbolism.

In the symbolist thinking space, intoxication with opium and hashish (primarily with wine) was regarded as the means for getting rid of worldly boredom, disorder, routine and passing to the transcendent world. "Surprised only by Wilde's necktie, / drunk with Hashish, the old, Persian smell" (Paolo Iasvhili *Self-portrait*). The imagined world is the antipode of the surrounding reality, and, at the same time, it is preferable. It is preferable, as achieving one's goals, the realization of which is restricted by reality, is possible only in such an imagined world (Tsipuria, 2016, 425). There are many ways of moving to the alternative reality – travel, art, wine consumption, etc., separately or all at once. As Charles Baudelaire wrote: *Il faut être toujours ivre... Pour ne pas sentir l'horrible fardeau du Temps qui brise vos épaules et vous penche vers la terre, il faut vous enivrer sans trêve. Mais de quoi ? De vin, de poésie ou de vertu, à votre guise. Mais enivrez-vous* (Baudelaire, 1980, 197).

The consumption of drugs was not only demonstrated in close relation to the oriental culture and philosophy, but it was also regarded as a manifestation of artistic freedom and creative rebellion, and it became an integral part of the subculture. In the opinion of Max Milner, the main danger of narcotic intoxication is that the "individual has the illusion, as though they can understand the mystic symbolic language of the world and imagine themselves as the god" (Milner, 2000, 120). The popularity of narcotic drugs is evidenced by the existence of clubs of hashish consumers in 19th century France.

One of the main lines in the art of Charles Baudelaire is the reflection of different forms of intoxication and their impact. Together with the positive content, opium and

hashish acquire also have negative connotations. On the one hand, they are means for escaping from one reality and passing into another, while on the other they can ruin a person, because of the loss of free will. For this reason Baudelaire calls drugs the brilliant instruments of Satan (Baudelaire, 1980, 154).

To clarify the artistic-aesthetic function of opium and hashish in the symbolist texts, the most important information is provided in Baudelaire's *Artificial Paradises* (*Les Paradis Artificiels*, 1860). For us, the most interesting is the first part of *Artificial Paradises*, the *Poem of Hashish* (*Le Poème du Haschisch*), as it is based on the poet's personal experience. It thoroughly describes the condition of the human body and mind at a time of narcotic intoxication, and the internal transformation experienced due to its effects.

The condition of narcotic intoxication is complex and includes several phases. First of all, intoxication intensifies any emotions, whether positive or negative. An individual can feel, hear and see the things that could not be felt, heard and seen while sober. Strengthening of the senses grows into hallucinations, i.e. the perception of something that does not exist objectively at a given time. Individuals intoxicated with narcotic drugs begin the construction of the new reality, saturated with the new, unusual associations. The deformation of the things and exaggeration of the senses are the common effects of such intoxication, as we can read in the poem "Le Flacon" (Baudelaire, 1980, 35–36). At this time certain analogies and hidden links are created, similarities are found (let us recall Baudelaire's *Correspondences*). Baudelaire's synaesthesia is associated, whether directly or indirectly, with the consumption of drugs and experience gained under their effects. The poet transformed this psychological phenomenon into an artistic category. In such conditions, time and space are perceived differently. Time flows differently (e.g. *Les Sept vieillards*, and we can find similarities with Paolo Iashvili's *Peacocks in the City*, Shalva Karmeli's *Des Essents*). Gaprindashvili's poem *In the Fire Mirror* is entirely saturated with phantasmagoric dreams, passing into the world of hallucinations and shadows.

A glass palace – dreamt with evil hashish,
Chimeras are standing in the doorway as cruel guards.
I am climbing the turquoise stairs with hidden fear.
Will any lover help me?
(Gaprindashvili, *In the Fire Mirror*, 1990, 46)

In *Bohemia*, Gaprindashvili associated opium and hashish with bohemia. As the poet admits, bohemia creates the new psychology and aesthetics of opium, alcohol, hashish, horror, evil, and ugliness (Gaprindashvili, *Bohemia*).

The creation of the myth of opium and hashish in the symbolist texts can be explained by the aesthetics of this school – striving to the extramundane world, preferred over the material world and a desire to culturally approach the exotic East. The creation

of this myth is particularly significant for Georgian literature, as the formation of opium and hashish as artistic categories is associated with the names of Georgian symbolists.

The Myth of Wine

For Western civilization, the cult of wine and mysteries related to Dionysus, the god of wine, is part of the cultural identity. Indeed, wine is the symbol of "divine cognition and immortality" (*Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Symbols*, 2012, 102). Wine has a long and rich history indeed, and it plays a significant role in all spheres of human life – social (feasts), religious (Eucharist) and cultural.

Wine and Bacchus are associated with the cult of Dionysus: "Orgies, night, sounds of music ... dance: ecstasy with the lark" (Robakidze, 2012, 216). Robakidze attempted to find evidence for the presence of the cult of Dionysus in Georgia. In a series of articles published in 1917, *Cult of Dionysus and Georgia*, the maestro of The Blue Horns regards White St. George Day and related rituals as the vestiges of the cult of Dionysus (as seen on the August 14, in the village of Atskuri, Kakheti). In addition, he found traces of the cult of Dionysus in almost all regions of Georgia. "Generally, there was the cult of Dionysus in Georgia, for sure, but with time, the other cult was added to it, or it has gradually disappeared" (Robakidze, 2012, 224).

While the concept of wine is not something strange for Georgian literature, in the symbolist aesthetics wine was taken as a particularly significant concept and acquired additional meaning – it became an artistic category, it was aestheticized. The French (Baudelaire) and German (Nietzsche) influence can be seen here in relation to the wine.

Similar to in Georgia, in the French symbolist paradigm wine is preferable to the other means of intoxication (opium, hashish). Baudelaire demonstrates a different attitude to the wine, too. This opinion can be evidenced by the cycle dedicated to wine in the *Flowers of Evil*, which is no coincidence. Also, in the essays included in *The Artificial Paradises*, Baudelaire compares opium, hashish and wine, and favours the latter. Primarily this is because, unlike hashish, which ruins and destroys human will, wine makes people stronger (Baudelaire, 1860, 55). Wine socializes the individual while hashish is an antisocial substance and pushes a user to loneliness and self-reflection. Wine makes the individual more productive and active, while hashish makes him lazy. Two different methods of intoxication have different impacts on the individual, not only for mental and emotional states but also concerning physical health. For Baudelaire, hashish is "une arme pour le suicide" ("a weapon for suicide"), while wine is the elixir (Baudelaire, 1980, 227).

Robakidze, the leader of *The Blue Horns*, shared Baudelaire's opinion and further developed, regarding intoxication with wine as ecstasy and "holy madness". In his opinion,

in a drunk condition the soul leaves the body and shares itself with the divine (Robakidze, 2012, 216–217). Robakidze associates wine and Dionysus with the aesthetics of the mask, while both of them imply turning into the "other": "The mask is the other's face... Dionysus was the first who showed it to the world. Dionysus assumes any other image. And he manages to suit every image excellently" (Robakidze, 2014, 404). Here we should recall that in Jung's theory the mask is one of the four universal archetypes, and plays a significant role in the process of individualization. Aestheticization of the mask is associated with symbolist ideas. Different things – a veil, window, mirror, wine, and narcotic drugs – play the mask's role in symbolist texts. Intoxication allows the poet to transform into the other. In a certain sense, intoxication is the carnival condition, where a character can put on any mask and turn into any person. According to Bakhtin's definition: "The mask is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation...The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, mockery and familiar nicknames. It contains the playful element of life. It is based on a peculiar interpretation of reality and image, characteristic of the most ancient rituals and spectacles" (Bakhtin, 1984, 39–40). Baudelaire's poem *Le Vin de chiffonniers*, where the drunk lyrical character declares that he is the king, the drunkard turned into the king acts like a king:

Il prête des serments, dicte des lois sublimes,
Terrasse les méchants, relève les victimes,
Et sous le firmament comme un dais suspendu
S'enivre des splendeurs de sa propre vertu (Baudelaire, 1980, 79).

In French and Georgian symbolist aesthetics, while different narcotic drugs have significant artistic functions, wine is seen as different from the other stimulants. The primacy of wine cannot be explained only with the physiological and psychological reactions and impacts. Here, cultural memory plays the main role, together with social memory. Dionysus is the god of wine, and the myths related with him along with the Dionysian tradition are from an ancient civilization and part of the substance of the European cultural identity. The sacral significance of wine is demonstrated in the art of the symbolists and the texts dedicated to it.

Wine awakens the creative stimulus, gives the artist the ability of expression, and gives creative freedom. Similar to the poet, wine fulfils the function of a medium between two realities. The concept of the "daydream" – a temporary escape from worldly life – is associated with wine.

A November imp came to me,
It held a glass of wine in the hand,
It was yawning ...and with short jaws

was asking me: You will follow me, won't you? ...
 Where we were going I do not know this,
 We were moving like frightened Kviri.
 Silence was riding behind us on horseback,
 Silence was hugging sadness.
 (T. Tabidze, *Prince Magog*, 2015, 69).

In symbolist aesthetics, wine has numerous functions. It is a way to get rid of the spleen, a source of inspiration for a lyrical character. "Verse confusément le bienfait et le crime, / Et l'on peut pour cela te comparer au vin" (Baudelaire, *Hymne a la Beaute*). Its only negative property is ephemerality. With sunrise, the condition of intoxication ends, and with daybreak an intolerable soberness begins, e.g. in the poem *L'Âme du vin*. Or:

Night will dampen and soot the weary city;
 I will leave the poisonous streets and, together with others,
 will enter a café, I, covered with mist, I will find a place,
 Perhaps I will be able to buy oblivion for a trouble.
 (K. Nadiradze, *I Will Leave the Streets*, 1971, 294).

In Nadiradze's poem *Honeymoon Journey to the Moon*, wine is directly linked with hope – "Dark tavern will look like paradise// and the night again will join the ill travellers, // and again the night as the crucifix will be the saviour"(Nadiradze 1971, 268). Or "be as black as you can, miserable// life, I keep the tight rein on you, // to turn this hell into the paradise" – wrote Tabidze in his *Self-Portrait* (Tabidze, 2015, 73). Or "I killed neurasthenia with wine/and drove away from the pain of sins (Karmeli, *Duel with the World*, 1921).

Conclusion

In the symbolist thinking model, opium and hashish were directly associated with the exotic East and creative liberty. They were considered an effective way of escaping from the claws of the material world, the chaos of being, and passing into an imaginary world. Psycho-active substances were regarded as the precursors for going deeper into oneself, the introduction of the micro-cosmos. With the symbolist artistic space (Charles Baudelaire in French and The Blue Horns in Georgian literature) is linked, on the one hand, the creation of the new myth of opium and hashish and, on the other the actualization of the myth of wine and Dionysus, the god of wine. In both French and Georgian symbolist texts, wine is of special artistic significance, as it is an inseparable part of identity for Western civilization. And for The Blue Horns wine was a sacral substance, the reservoir of centuries-old cultural memory. Such a broad sense of wine

can explain how in the poetic texts of the Georgian symbolists, unlike those of the French symbolists, wine is closely related to such specific concepts of their art, such as the national identity, tradition, and one's ancestors.

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Vino, opij in hašiš v gruzijski in evropski simboliki

Ključne besede: gruzijska književnost, simbolizem, teorija mita, opoj, vino, opij, hašiš

Pričujoči članek obravnava prepoznavanje kulturnih povezav med gruzijsko in evropsko (predvsem francosko in nemško) simboliko. Naš cilj je ugotoviti vlogo in mesto gruzijske simbolike v kontekstu svetovne književnosti ter preučiti kulturno-estetske povezave, ki so vplivale na umetnost gruzijske simbolistične skupine, na proces oblikovanja njenega estetskega okusa in svetovnonazorskega položaja. V prispevku smo se osredotočili na nastanek simbolistične teorije mita, na njeno specifičnost in na motivacijo, ki je pripeljala do nastanka novega mita. Poleg tega obravnavamo temo vina, opija in hašiša v gruzijskem in evropskem kulturnem prostoru ter analiziramo konceptualni smisel oziroma funkcijo tega novega mita.

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Keywords: Georgian literature, symbolism, theory of myth, intoxication, wine, opium, hashish

The subject of the article “Wine, Opium, Hashish in Georgian and European Symbolism” is the identification of the cultural links between Georgian and European (primarily French and German) symbolism. Our goal is to determine the role and place of Georgian symbolism in the world literature context and study the cultural-aesthetic ties that have influenced the art of the Georgian symbolist group, the process of forming their aesthetic taste and worldview. In this article, we focus on the genesis of the symbolist theory of the myth, its specific nature and the motivation for the creation of a new mythology. In addition, we consider the theme of wine, opium and hashish in Georgian and European cultural areas, and analyse the conceptual sense and function of this new mythology.

O avtorici

Tatia Oboladze je doktorska študentka na Univerzi Ivane Javakhishvili v Tbilisiju. Deluje tudi kot raziskovalka na področju gruzijske književnosti na Inštitutu TSU Shota Rustaveli.

E-naslov: tatia.oboladze@gmail.com, tatia.oboladze@tsu.ge

About the author

Tatia Oboladze is a PhD Student at the Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. She is also a Researcher at the TSU Shota Rustaveli Institute of Georgian Literature.

Email: tatia.oboladze@gmail.com, tatia.oboladze@tsu.ge