



## Fiction from Georgia

*Elizabeth Heighway (Editor)*

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## **Fiction from Georgia** Elizabeth Heighway (Editor)

Spanning fifty years, but with a particular emphasis on post-independence fiction, this collection features a diverse range of styles and voices, offering a window onto a vibrant literary scene that has been largely inaccessible to the English-language reader until now. With stories addressing subjects as diverse as blood feuds, betrayal, sex, drugs, and Sergio Leone, it promises to challenge any existing preconceptions the reader might hold, and make available a rich and varied literary tradition unjustly overshadowed by the other ex-Soviet republics, until now.

## **Fiction from Georgia Details**

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# From Reader Review Fiction from Georgia for online ebook

## Amy Marie says

A great collection. It's difficult to find any Georgian literature that's been translated into a readable English, so I was delighted to come across this anthology while in Georgia. A must read for anyone interested in post-Soviet and Caucasian culture.

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## Pipkia says

Yay! Contemporary Georgian Fiction!

I think this book is brilliant, it really reflects the state humanity was left in at the end of the Soviet Union. This book will tear your idea of humanity to shreds.

The translation was pretty snazzy, too--well done, Elizabeth Heighway! I can only *imagine* what it must have been like to translate such a bizarre selection of stories written in such an obscure language. It paid off.

Real Beings and the Suicide Train were my favourites, but I loved them all! (Except maybe Once upon a Time in Georgia. But hey; Morchiladze's books are always weird.)

All in all, a pretty cracking book, so read it!

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## Helene Ryding says

I was really excited to find this in Tbilisi, but the excitement and interest didn't last long. I didn't even finish it. None of the stories I read at the beginning encouraged me to plough on.

Disappointing, as the translation was good. In fact the most interesting bit of the book for me seemed to be the translators introduction.

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## James (JD) Dittes says

Sorry this diverges so much, but I'm simply copying in a blog post that I wrote, comparing this book with the 2014 film, *I Love You, Tbilisi* which I also read ahead of my visit to Georgia in 2015.

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This weekend I streamed the 2014 film, Tbilisi, I Love You. Watching the film--a collection of nine vignettes--coincided with my mad rush to finish the last of the Georgia-related books that I have ordered, including Contemporary Georgian Fiction (CGF).

This gives me 18 points of reference from which to discuss Georgian storytelling, not just the nine of the film.

First to the film. The nine vignettes vary in focus and quality. Together, though, they provide a full, fascinating look at Tbilisi from many different angles--Georgian mostly, but American and British as well.

The best vignette is one I will call "Happy Meal." An out-of-work father gives in to his son's wish to eat a Happy Meal at the Tbilisi McDonald's. To do this, he must raid the stash of money that his wife has earned during her day job. The relationships between the father and the son, the father and the mother are touching and real, setting up an ending that is...(I don't want to give it away)...amazing, heartbreaking, ironic.

In his short story, "Once Upon a Time in Georgia," Aka Morchiladze sums up Georgian storytelling in this way:

Had this been an episode from the golden age of Georgian cinema, what happened next would have been amazing: we would follow the hero on his adventures, there would be romance, irony, destiny, fortune--everything. But unfortunately this was Georgian reality and not a Georgian movie where roadworkers chase butterflies through the meadows (273)

It's such a strange priority for fiction: (1) romance, (2) irony, (3) destiny and (4) fortune = everything. Yet in my reading and watching, I have found that the episodes in the film and the stories in the collection follow the form that Morchiladze describes. I have already mentioned the irony of "Happy Meal." There's more.

For me, the finest story in CGF was "November Rain" by Nugzar Shataidze, which welds fortune, romance and heartbreaking irony in the plight of a man living in the 1930s during the purges. A teacher in a local school, he gets angry with a student only to learn later that that student works with the secret police.

Fearing that they will come for him at any time, his health declines, much to the concern of his loving wife. He has a past--years spent working in labor camps in Siberia because of political action against the Tsar before the November Revolution. For the foreign reader, the story provides an insight into the Georgia of Stalin and Berea, but the characters are moving and the end is biting whether the reader is looking for

As for destiny, another of my favorite stories was "Once Upon a Time in Georgia" a fragmented, modernist look at late-Soviet Georgia, where the main characters sit around talking about American films like *The Magnificent Seven*, *Once Upon a Time in America*, and *Scarface*. The further I read, the more I realized why movies like this were so popular in the Soviet Union: gangster films fed into the theme of western decadence and malaise that the propaganda wanted everyone to believe. But there was also a deep fascination there. In many ways the American gangsters took people's minds off crime and troubles there at home.

Destiny is also a theme of Mamuka Kherkheulidze's "A Caucasian Chronicle" which sends up the vendetta culture of the mountains. Batka is a man who refuses to declare vendetta against Stalin Petre, the killer of his father. Because of this the village shuns him and no woman will marry a sap like him. Of course, in the end Petre dies, and the irony is waiting to help the reader end with a laugh.

I don't have time to describe all the delights of CGF. I loved the characterization in Zaza Burchuladze's "The Dubbing," an extended monologue by an actor on location who's craving his next fix of heroin. Guram Dochanashvili's "The Happy Hillock" is a Persian-style fable that is also a highlight.

The stories of *I Love You*, Tbilisi wield their share of irony, destiny, romance and fortune, too. On a film set, an actress plays the part of the heartbreaker, slapping her man and leading him to threaten suicide. Once the cameras are off, however, we learn that she is the one who years for her co-star.

Destiny shows its hand when a handsome movie star returns to Tbilisi and takes time to visit a long lost

love--he still wears her watch--only to watch her pick up her five-year-old daughter and realize that it is all over.

The film is filled with many beautiful views of Tbilisi. It's bridge is a locale for a Georgian "Runaway Bride" short, and the film contains many poignant moments. A Georgian girl, now an emigree in Munich during the 90s, turns the lights in her apartment off and on, off and on, a sign of her homesickness for Tbilisi; a woman puts her wedding ring back on her hand in the subway; the American motorcyclist played by Ron Perlman reads John Steinbeck's *A Russian Journal* in his hotel room, a visiting British actor realizes that Tbilisi is 12 hours different from his home in Los Angeles.

This book and this film have given me definite insights into recent Georgian culture. As for sharing, I would probably share "Happy Meal" and "The Slap" in a class of students grades 6-12, but some of the other films are appropriate only for adults.

#### Works Cited

Heighway, Elizabeth. *Contemporary Georgian Fiction*. Champaign: Dalkey Archive, 2012. Print.

*Tbilisi, I Love You*. Dir. Nika Agiashvili, Tamar Shavguilidze, Irakli Chkhikvadze, Levon Tutberidze, and Levan Glonti. Storyman Pictures, 2014. Vimeo Stream.

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### Andrew says

I was thrilled to pick this up in Tbilisi recently, what a wonderful addition to literature translations. Often the only translated literature for a small language are seminal works of poetry or epic myths, and I find that the power of the writing gets lost in translation or that only a small part of the culture becomes clearer. So, contemporary fiction is perfect for me.

Just a warning, as with much post-communist writing, the overall tone tends to be depressing; this is particularly true for stories set in the immediate post-Soviet period. Some of the stories are downright disturbing in a creepy way (Debi, *The Round Table*, *The Suicide Train*) or could be skipped entirely (*The Dubbing*, *Ladies and Gentlemen!*). But so many more are beautiful and powerful: *The White Bridge*, *Kolya*, *The Drunks*, *The Story of Sex*, *Selling Books*, and *November Rain*.

I have three favorite stories that touched me deeply. First, *The Drunks*, is a nuanced story of three old friends, background on their trials and tribulations, and how each reacts to an invitation to meet. Second, *Selling Books*, which follows one family's sacrifice in order to survive the difficult post-Soviet years of conflict. Finally, my favorite story of all, *November Rain*, the perfect short story on the evil and dysfunction of the Soviet system.

The translators did a remarkable job with these stories, although I think that more of the Georgian or Russian words could have been left in to provide better context.

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