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Mikheil Javakhishvili

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This is, in brief, the story of a swindler, a Georgian Felix Krull, or perhaps a cynical Don Quixote, named Kvachi Kvachantiradze: womanizer, cheat, perpetrator of insurance fraud, bank-robber, associate of Rasputin, filmmaker, revolutionary, and pimp. Though originally denounced as pornographic, Kvachi's tale is one of the great classics of twentieth-century Georgian literature -- and a hilarious romp to boot.

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Date :


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Author : Mikheil Javakhishvili

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From Reader Review ?????? ?????????????? for online ebook

Azagheddi says

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A great book! It's a shame there's so little of Mikheil Javakhishvili's work translated into English, because if this novel is any indication of his quality as a writer, then the (English-speaking portion of the) world is missing out. At times bawdy, sardonic and even downright subversive, it's no surprise the poor author came to meet such an unfortunate end (executed by the Soviets in 1937).

Harry Rutherford says

The original title of this book was *Kvachi Kvachantiradze*; presumably the publisher of the English edition thought that was a bit intimidating. With names like Javakhishvili and Kvachantiradze, it is of course my book from Georgia for the Read The World challenge.

It's actually my second attempt for Georgia; I tried reading *Avelum* by Otar Chiladze, but didn't finish it. I wondered at the time if it was a problem with the translation, but this had the same translator, Donald Rayfield, and was much more readable.

It's a big fat novel?—523 pages; my heart sank slightly at the sight of it?—but the blurb was promising:

This is, in brief, the story of a swindler, a Georgian Felix Krull, or perhaps a cynical Don Quixote, named Kvachi Kvachantiradze: womanizer, cheat, perpetrator of insurance fraud, bank-robber, associate of Rasputin, filmmaker, revolutionary, and pimp. Though originally denounced as pornographic, Kvachi's tale is one of the great classics of twentieth-century Georgian literature?—and a hilarious romp to boot.

And on the whole it lives up to that blurb. Obviously it's not actually 'hilarious'?—it is after all literary fiction?—but I've long since learned that literary reviewers have very low standards for humour, and I know to make allowances. I would describe it as lively and entertaining.

Kvachi is quite an appealing character just for his dynamism and inventiveness, but he is a complete shit: he makes his way in the world entirely by lying, cheating and stealing, and has no redeeming qualities. The narrative largely consists of one swindle after another and a sequence of seduced and betrayed women, which would be too repetitive to sustain a 500 page novel; what keeps it interesting is the regular changes of backdrop.

So he starts from a humble background in Georgia in the 1890s; works his way up, via university in Ukraine, to the highest circles of Russian society, and ingratiates himself with Rasputin; things get difficult, so he moves on to France; he returns to Russia in time for the Great War and the Russian Revolution; he initially

works within the revolution but in due course flees back to the briefly independent Georgia; soon revolutionary politics catches up with him and eventually he flees again.

The author, sadly, did not manage to escape Soviet politics himself. He was not sufficiently willing to keep to the party line, and was tortured and shot during Stalin's Great Purge. It's tempting in fact to see Stalin as a model for Kvachi; a Georgian, Ioseb Jugashvili, of humble origins, with intelligence and charisma but a complete ruthlessness, who worked his way to the top of Russian society.

But perhaps that's a bit facile; there are no shortage of literary and historical models for a character like Kvachi. The blurb mentioned Felix Krull; you could think of Jonathan Wild or even Becky Sharp. A more recent parallel is Rác from Peter Pišťanek's brilliant (and genuinely funny) *Rivers of Babylon*.

Mandy says

This sprawling picaresque novel of the life of Georgian Kvachi Kvachantiradze is a romp through the early history of the 20th century in Georgia, Russia and further afield. Kvachi is a con-man and cheat, gambler and womaniser, friend of the great and not so great, including Rasputin and the Tsar, and he lies and deceives his way through all the major events of his times. Amusing to start with, I found his headlong progress began to pall after a while, especially as his adventure become more and more unbelievable. The author is regarded as one of Georgia's best 20th century writers and this novel is apparently now considered a Georgian classic. I'm delighted to have discovered it but was nevertheless rather relieved when I'd finished it.

Torsten says

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Fuat says

Tam bir üç ka??tç? Kvaçi. Her ?eyi bir ?ekilde "ey ediyor". Yükseldikçe dü?üyor, dü?tükçe daha da yükseklere ç?k?yor -Rasputin'in kankas? oluyor, daha ne olsun.- ç?kt?kça daha da yerin dibine giriyor. tam bir roller-coster hayat?. tek s?k?nt?m; içinde çok fazla isim ve yer olmas? bazen takibimi zorla?t?rd?. Hem Gürcü edebiyat?n?n hem de pikaresk tarz?n ba? yapt?lar?ndan biri bu kitap ayn? zamanda. ama öte taraftanda yoksulluk içinde do?du?u hayat? ancak bu ?ekilde de?i?tirebilece?ini biliyor. e?lenceli bir okuma.

U?ur Karabürk says

Pikaresk roman tarz?nda yaz?lm?? bir eserdi. Okurken keyif ald?m diyebilirim. Yazar?n di?er kitab? olan Lambalo ve Ka?a'y? da al?p okumaz farz oldu. :D

David says

Kvachi, that Georgian scamp. That trans-European scallywag. That chameleon, shape shifter, man about town. That moustached fop. What a man! Silver-tongued. Well-hung. Handsome. That rascal, that rogue. Bed your women, he will. He's a rob-you-blind buy-you-dinner kind o' guy. He's Red, he's White. And every shade between. I heard the strangest thing the other day. Well-travelled. Well-heeled. Well, just couldn't help myself. Had to have a taste. Bad boy. Too clever too quick to stay down for long. Had his scrapes, has he? well, I wouldn't be surprised. A scoundrel. That one over there. A friend. Traitor! War hero. Jester. Heard he had it on with youknowwho. Never seen him before, I swear. Don't know the man. Who?

MJ Nicholls says

The East European nation of Georgia (Russia to the north, Turkey to the south) masks a secret wellspring of terrific fiction from past and present, some of which is being made available via new translations from Dalkey Archive. *Kvachi*, first written as a series of sketches and reworked into a novel, was published in 1925, a year after the author evaded execution for supporting the socialist party, and less fortunate writers met the brunt of the Communist uprising. A long-buried Georgian classic in the picaresque mould of Cervantes and Fielding with a nod towards the French decadents, *Kvachi* is an exhausting stop-start rags-to-riches-to-rags tale featuring the titular confidence trickster, whose talent for hoodwinking the common to the noble knows no limitations, and whose skill for evading the noose in even the most improbable of circumstances borders on divine providence. *Kvachi*'s adventures commence in Georgia, migrate to Russia in the court of Rasputin (to whom K becomes friend and confidante), and take in the extravagance of Paris and chaos of Communist Europe, where the more interesting historical comment is housed in a novel devoid of such frill as psychological depth or critical volleys towards the regimes of the time (the author was tortured for two months during the Great Terror of 1937, then executed—his reticence to 'speak out' is understandable), although the depiction of *Kvachi*'s life was shocking and provocative for the era. The figure of the self-made scoundrel is popular in Georgia and other East European countries, having a famous bedfellow in Jaroslav Hašek's hilarious *The Good Soldier Švejk*, published in Czech in 1923. *Kvachi* fast descends into a sequence of scrapes and their (sometimes) positive outcomes (there are several macabre murder and torture scenes), and often lacks of the coherence of a proper novel (as a series of sketches might do), but always leaves the reader routing for the scoundrel in spite of his sins, and the fast-paced dialogue, black humour, and camaraderie-among-thieves keeps the antics fun and ingenious for the duration. Recommended for fans of daring and rebellious literature.

Luka Fadiurashvili says

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!Tæmbu?u says

Reviewed by The Complete Review

James Salvatore says

I'm taken by how relentlessly unredeemable a character Kvanchi is, how his imaginative schemes serve such an unimaginative greed, his gauche tastes, his sociopathic lack of empathy. Kvanchi is the epitome of the worst tendencies of his society and times. Which makes for some vicious, uproarious scenarios. But also for many tiresome, redundant ones. Generally the book is at its most enjoyable when it lets its protagonist run amok at the intersections of history.

Caroline says

Another one I wanted to write a good long review of but the library wants its book back.

This is a raucous, insightful, sometimes raw sendup of both pre-revolutionary Russia and the early Soviet Union. Bittersweet, very funny. I loved it.

Rex Bradshaw says

Javakhishvili's picaresque tale of the early twentieth century takes the reader to Georgia and then lurches on through antebellum Paris and Tsarist Russia. Charismatic but degenerate Kvachi Kvachantiradze hobnobs with (and cons) Rasputin and a variety of other characters, some historical, all colorfully drawn, making a mockery of politicians, policemen, capitalists, and revolutionaries, building fortunes and losing them at the tip of a hat. Meanwhile, the reader sees Georgia through Kvachi's eyes. At first Kvachi regards his native country as a backwater and his people as boors, but by the end of the novel these opinions are complicated by deep feelings of loss. His reckless, restless pursuit destroys the lives of nearly everyone around him; and in the end, the narrator muses, Kvachi never had a clear idea of what he was pursuing. Javakhishvili's protagonist may be reprehensible to the core, but his narrative is breezy and compelling, and it benefits from Rayfield's dexterity as a translator.
