

THE POWER OF A RED ROSE

a poetic oration

BY HUANG XIANG

3:50 p.m., November 22, 2003. For the Republic of Georgia, this is a sacred moment, a moment of commencement. From this moment, history alters its course in Georgia. Following in the footsteps of the peaceful uprisings in Belgrade, Indonesia, Beirut and Argentina, Georgia, too, has just completed a bloodless revolution. I am amazed, I am enthralled, for I witness the universal awakening of democratic consciousness in the twenty-first century; I witness yet another amazing success story of democratic reform! Within this significant historical event in this tiny remote state, with awe and wonder I discover what I have long worshipped – the latent power of individual lives and the irrepressible breakthrough of consciousness; a radical reordering and a qualitative transformation of existential values; a cosmic explosion of life and inexhaustible energy, contained in a red rose . . .

On this day, in Georgia, at Liberty Square in Tbilisi,
A multitude suddenly gathers beneath the winter sun,
Heads like lily pads spreading across a pond in ceaseless undulation.
Against the backdrop of floating green, a sudden flash of red—
It is a rose, a red rose, a solitary red rose!
It is fated to appear at this moment, to appear in one hand;
It is fated at the same moment to be raised aloft.
The man with the rose, holding his red rose high,
Is the first to charge into the Town Hall as the newly founded Congress meets,
Toward President Shevardnadze as he delivers his speech.¹
In the name of the red rose, the man declares to the President:
Please resign! Please step down! Please step aside! The people do not need you!
An explosion of cheers; the crowd surges around him,
The waves of sound from megaphones lifting him up, raising the red rose higher and higher.
In an instant the murky masses flood the hall,
Submerging the President and submerging the man with the rose.
A huge iron hammer is brought to the podium and smashes down—
The voting machine on the podium is shattered; a country
and its power machine are likewise pulverized.
In shrieks and screams the Congress collapses, documents dancing through the air,
Shevardnadze spirited out the back door by his bodyguards.
And so the people regain their right to support and
Their right to oppose,
To demolish what they wish to demolish, to elect whom they really wish to elect.
The President is forced to resign, deposed from power; Georgia takes new leaders, and the
people achieve a bloodless revolution, a red rose revolution!

A red rose is a Liu Di, a Du Daobin,
A Huang Qi, an An Jun, a Yang Zili, a Tao Haidong, a Li Dawei, a Zhao Changqing,
An Ouyang Yi, a Yan Jun, a Luo Yongzhong, a Zheng Enchong, a He Depu,
A Ren Bumei, a Yu Jie, a Liao Yiwu, a Yu Shicun, a Wang Yi, a Fan Baihua,
A Donghai Yixiao, a Yang Chunguang, a Liu Xiaobo, a Mo Lihua!²
One red rose is hundreds and thousands of red roses; it is millions of acutely silent Chinese people!

A red rose is a bomb, a grenade, a
 machine gun, a ballot, a pen, a torch of enlightenment and self-awakening;
 a spaceship cruising through the universe; the all-conquering and
 unconquerable power of collective humanity.
 A red rose can ward off the Siberian cold front.
 A red rose can proclaim the Georgia spring.
 If a dictator dares to trample the people underfoot and tolerates allegiance to himself alone,
 The people will rise as one and tower above him.
 If a dictator dares to shoot a bullet into the crowd,
 The people in their collective authority will declare him on public trial.
 Raise the red rose! Raise the red rose! Raise the red rose!

This world does not answer to one man, but to each and every one.
 This world does not allow anyone to dictate to others,
 And the people, made up of individuals, can reply with ten million cries of "No!"
 Everyone has an equal right to participate in elections,
 Everyone is subject to the same conditions and rules of power.
 The people can give you power, and likewise can strip you of power.
 The people can put you in office, and likewise can remove you from office.
 This world answers to each person, answers to the will of all combined.
 It does not answer to bullies, bandits, hoodlums, rascals and various forms of
 human scum, or to violent thugs in the name of "revolution," or to
 those "public servants" who bare their hairy chests and spit
 in the faces of millions.
 The people want democracy, not oligarchy. The people want respect for life and self, not
 worship of some idol, or worship of violence or worship of a corpse.
 In the name of the red rose, I declare:
 Remove the rotten carcass from the Square! Cast it from its artificial shrine!
 Tiananmen is China's Liberty Square, not some enormous
 crypt, nor the crime scene for trampling human flesh and spirit,
 nor liberty's slaughterhouse.
 Pull the icon down from walls of soul and brick! Each man is his own god.
 If anyone presents himself as the people's god, the people have a thousand holy
 reasons to unzip their trousers and piss on his head.
 Let's cleanse our memories of the shame of badges, red books and thunderous rallies.
 The people have not chosen to live in historical repetition and vicious cycles, have not chosen
 to be trapped in the shadow of the Cultural Revolution and Mao Zedong, but rather have
 chosen liberty and sunlight.
 Raise the red rose, Chinese people of the twenty-first century!

You who have been forced from your jobs or homes, you who worship in house churches, who
 are confined to bed with AIDS; you who have been forced to have abortions, and whose
 unborn flesh and blood are served as a nourishing delicacy; you who have narrowly
 escaped death in floods and collapsing coal mines, you who have vanished mysteriously
 on the Internet;
 You who are deprived of your right to freely associate and form parties; you who have lost your
 right to freely express yourselves in public; you who have been molested and persecuted
 for asserting the rights of the public and the media;
 You who have been senselessly and relentlessly shadowed; you who have been put on a black
 list or condemned to a life sentence; you whose independent natures have repeatedly
 subjected you to atrocities in prison and virtual incarceration upon release . . .
 Raise the red rose! Raise the red rose! Raise the red rose!

One person is a red rose, petals unfurling free beneath the blue sky; independent petals,
 democratic petals.
 Raise the red rose on Tiananmen Square, on Tiananmen Tower;
 Across the vast landscape of China, raise the red rose!

Let's turn the thousand years' ocean of blood into an ocean of flowers, into a heaving, howling ocean of sunlight!

A red rose is a kind of power. Ten million red roses are ten million people living under ten million free choices.

People of China, raise the red roses of your lives! For as long as you raise the courage, Brute force will falter, tyranny will shrivel, darkness will pale and retreat.

As long as you can raise the faith, this world will not fall to the bayonets and lies of dictators.

There is no representative or core that can impose itself upon millions of lives;

But if you agree it is the biggest and grandest cock of all, you can only lower your pants and present your buttocks for rape;

There is no such thing as the world's exclusive command center;

But if you willingly allow yourself to be gagged, you will drown in the spittle of others.

Why is there dictatorship in this world? Because you consent to it and become its accomplice.

Why is there totalitarianism in this world? Because you recognize it and become its co-conspirator.

When you should howl, you twitter; when you should roar, you murmur; when you should charge, you cringe.

You're a broken-legged sparrow, a befuddled chicken, never to become a soaring eagle.

You're anemic, you're calcium deficient, you're impotent, you're nothing but a myopic, muddle-headed, lethargic, apathetic cynic!

Your elders left you some scattered bones from a shameful death;

You inherited a submissive, slavish, living corpse.

O how strange! Throughout the vast land of China there is not a single red rose, the red rose of life, the red rose that dares to be held high, the red rose that dares to be smashed into a pulp beneath the trampling wheel, the red rose that dares to thrust its prickly self at others, the red rose that dares to light the world with the self-immolation of its liberated soul.

Raise the red rose! Raise the red rose! Raise the red rose!



An opposition supporter in Tbilisi, Nov. 22, 2003. Photo: AP World Wide Photos

While living, let's live in the spirit of the red rose.
 Bow to the red rose, pay homage to the red rose.
 Whoever draws near to the red rose draws nearest to God.
 Whoever believes in the red rose believes in love and kindness.
 Whoever raises the red rose raises the sword of justice, raises the scepter of human conscience,
 and becomes a pillar supporting the paradise to which mankind has aspired throughout
 the ages.

The red rose blooms in our hearts;
 It is the smile of God in our hearts, the opening of the Gospel in our bodies.
 Each one of us is a red rose, a red rose bursting through flesh and blood.
 Each one of us is a living Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson;
 A living Homer, Dante, Goethe; a living Jesus, a living Siddhartha Guatama,
 A living Muhammad.
 Those who respect others will be respected.
 No one can claim ultimate superiority, dominance, honor or power.
 He who is worshipped in life
 Waits for incense and candles after death.
 As to those who should not be on the altar, let's pull them down – let's pluck off their crowns,
 extinguish their halos, strip their stinking bodies of their saffron robes, and return them to
 mere flesh and blood, just like you and me.
 No one is more special than anyone else,
 Even if he resides in a secluded palace in life and lies in a royal mausoleum in death, or reigns
 over a desolate temple, or is displayed in a memorial hall before thousands.
 The people of China are so damned pathetic, nobody dares to publicly shout:
 Who should sit on high? Who should grovel below?
 Life is an amusement park—it is not for the enjoyment of one but for all.
 There is no Solitaire in life.
 Life is also a casino—for those who dare to come and go, win and lose, there is nothing but
 wild adventure,
 Nothing but mad gambling, and no eternal winner.
 Life is even more like a prison; no one escapes the bounds of life and death or the imprisonment
 of existence; no one is born to be jailor, guard or cell bully!
 Raise the red rose! Raise the red rose! Raise the red rose!

A red rose is a tender and peaceful power;
 It is a fragrant rejection, resistance and destruction;
 It is beauty's contempt and transcendence of darkness; it is the eternal blue dream of humanity
 that floats between the sea, the sky and the vast land . . .

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Translated by Yunshan Ye with Stacy Mosher

1. The man with the red rose was Mikhail Saakashvili, who on January 4, 2004 was elected president of Georgia in a landslide victory.
2. All the persons mentioned are active political dissidents or well-known independent writers. Some have been imprisoned for expressing their opinions and some remain in custody.