

LITERARY REPRESENTATION OF THE SOVIET REGIME IN GURAM RCHEULISHVILI'S  
FICTION AND DOCUMENTARY PROSE

კომუნისტური რეჟიმის მხატვრული რეპრეზენტაცია გურამ რჩეულიშვილის  
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**Abstract**

The research deals with an important aspect of Guram Rcheulishvili's works. He lived in the Soviet system, when conformism prevailed in the society as a result of long repressions, and even those, who could not get used to the totalitarian regime, could not express it directly. Their protest was disguised in the themes chosen for writing, in the characters, and the various means of artistic expression. The present study confirms that Guram Rcheulishvili's works reflect important features of the communist regime: ideological pressure, bloody terror, standardization of public taste, thinking and

behaviour, levelling of personal dignity, restriction of rights and isolation from the outside world, false equality, complacency, and intolerance of dissent etc.

The writer was well aware that a work that did not fit into this framework could never be published. Thus, he was forced to disguise what he had to say in such a way that he could sneak up on censorship or simply write it down and put it in a drawer in the hope that it would reach the reader someday.

Some modern studies have pointed out that after the collapse of the Soviet system, Georgia did not create regime-denouncing prose. The results of the present study clearly confirm that this conclusion should be reconsidered at least in relation to Guram Rcheulishvili. The inadmissibility of the regime is evident in his writings. A fictional word does not have the sharpness that a political or publicist text can have, but its impact and effect are far greater.

**Keywords:** communist regime, terror, conformism, censorship, propaganda, representation, fiction, documentary prose

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## აბსტრაქტი

კვლევა ეხება ორიგინალური აზროვნებით, გამომსახველობითი საშუალებებითა და ცხოვრების წესით გამორჩეული მწერლის – გურამ რჩეულიშვილის შემოქმედების მნიშვნელოვან ასპექტს. გურამ რჩეულიშვილს მოღვაწეობა მოუხდა საბჭოთა სისტემის პირობებში, როდესაც ხანგრძლივი რეპრესიების შედეგად საზოგადოებაში გაბატონებული იყო კონფორმიზმი და ისინიც კი, ვინც ვერ ეგუებოდა ტოტალიტარულ რეჟიმს, ამას პირდაპირ ვერ გამოხატავდნენ. მათი პროტესტი შეფარული იყო საწერად არჩეულ თემებში, პერსონაჟთა სახეებსა და სხვადასხვა სახის მხატვრულ გამომსახველობით საშუალებებში. წინამდებარე კვლევამ დაადასტურა, რომ გურამ რჩეულიშვილის შემოქმედებაში მრავალმხრივია არეკლილი კომუნისტური რეჟიმის არაერთი მნიშვნელოვანი მახასიათებელი: იდეოლოგიური წნეხი, სისხლიანი ტერორი, საზოგადოების გემოვნების, აზროვნებისა და ქცევის სტანდარტიზაცია, პიროვნული ღირსებების ნიველირება, უფლებების შეზღუდვა და გარესამყაროსაგან იზოლაცია, ყალბი თანასწორობა, თვითკმაყოფილება, განსხვავებული აზრის შეუწყნარებლობა, და სხვ.

მწერალს კარგად ჰქონდა გაცნობიერებული, რომ ნაწარმოებს, რომელიც ამ ჩარჩოებში არ მოექცეოდა, ვერასოდეს გამოაქვეყნებდა. ამიტომ იძულებული იყო, რომ თავისი სათქმელი ისე შეენიღბა, რომ ცენზურისთვის შეპარება შეძლებულიყო ან უბრალოდ, დაეწერა და უჯრამში ჩაედო იმ იმედით, რომ ოდესმე მაინც მიაღწევდა მკითხველამდე.

თანამედროვე კვლევებში არაერთგან აღუნიშნავთ, რომ საბჭოთა სისტემის ნგრევის შემდეგ, აღმოსავლეთ ევროპის ქვეყნებისა და რუსეთისაგან განსხვავებით, საქართველოში არ შექმნილა რეჟიმის მამხილებელი პროზა. წინამდებარე კვლევის შედეგები ნათლად ადასტურებს, რომ ეს დასკვნა გადასახედია თუნდაც გურამ რჩეულიშვილთან მიმართებით. მის ნაწერებში აშკარად ჩანს რეჟიმის მიუღებლობა. მხატვრულ სიტყვას არა აქვს ისეთი მკვეთრი ელფერი, როგორც შეიძლება ჰქონდეს პოლიტიკურ თუ პუბლიცისტურ ტექსტს, მაგრამ მისი ზემოქმედება და ეფექტი ბევრად მეტია.

## Introduction

After the annexation in 1921, Georgia, along with the other countries of the Soviet Union, was hit by fierce repression. The struggle for physical survival gradually pushed values to the background. Under the influence of strong ideological factors, global conformism engulfed people's thinking and behavior. This era created a reality that strayed from the natural, logical path of development and artificially shifted to a new routine. Soviet ideology affected not only the political, domestic, and public spheres, but also almost all scientific disciplines. These influences had particular impact on the humanities and the arts.

Genetic research was strictly banned in the country, and the principles of history and literary studies were fundamentally reevaluated in accordance with the requirements of the new ideology. For example, in 1945, Joseph Stalin personally ordered the authors of the textbook *History of Georgia* – famous Georgian historians Niko Berdzenishvili and Simon Janashia, to introduce a number of changes in their works. Many of the best thinkers emigrated for an indefinite period (Ekvtime Takaishvili, Grigol Robakidze...) (Khvedelidze, 2016: 10-18) some of those who stayed in the country were deported (Levan Gotua) (Khvedeliani, 2020: 778-781), some were shot (Titsian Tabidze, Sandro Akhmeteli, Evgeni Mikeladze, Mikheil Javakhishvili...) (Ratiani, 2019: 78-94), some had their family members shot (Lado Asatiani, Nodar Dumbadze...), while others committed suicide (Galaktion Tabidze (Merabishvili, 2011: 154-162), Paolo Iashvili) (Rayfield, 1990). For those who survived during the

repression, compromising was the only way to prolong their creative life. Part of them paid a kind of tribute, and part of them adapted to the situation and kept pace with the existing system.

Georgian philosopher Merab Mamardashvili, when evaluating the twentieth century, uses the term “anthropological catastrophe”. This term does not necessarily refer to events such as the collision of the earth and the asteroid, excessive population growth under the scarcity of natural resources, ecological or atomic tragedy. It also refers to the events under the influence of which “something important in human life can be fatally destroyed” (Mamardashvili, 2011: 269). The Soviet government first challenged the “vital” values with military force and then with an ideological machine. This path required the humanities to introduce the principles that justify this new path. Accordingly, the humanities, such as history, literature, art, were filled with propaganda tendencies. Since the 1930-s, the majority of Georgian writers, in addition to their personal line of creativity, took on dedicating odes and eulogies to Soviet leaders. A clear proof of this is the collection published in 1937, which included works about Stalin by Georgian poets: Alexander Abasheli, Shalva Apkhaidze, Valerian Gaprindashvili, Sandro Euli, Paolo Iashvili, Giorgi Leonidze, Galaktion Tabidze, Titsian Tabidze, Nikolo Mitsishvili and others (Заря Востока, 1937: 183). Guram Rcheulishvili (1934-1960) writes that Soviet art turned into a “shower of praise” of the state directives.

Writing about the present in prose was like walking on a pile rope bridge because the narrative had to be devoid of any, even slightly critical, thoughts. It was safer to write historical novels because talking about past epochs and even criticizing them could not overshadow the existing regime. The resolutions of the Congresses of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union directly reflected the instructions that should have guided our writers. “The socialist state assumes a stable image and even looks at any dissident naturally as not a well-wisher according to the following principle – whoever is not with us is our opponent. The government assumes the right to art, ... the state has started teaching it from the top echelon” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 77) – wrote Guram Rcheulishvili.

Because the writer was not pampered by the goodwill of the Soviet authorities, certain circles of progressive Georgian readers used to become acquainted with the writer’s works mainly from manuscripts. In addition to the original intellectual products, the writer also drew attention with his extravagant nature and provoked the sympathy of the people in the strictly regulated Soviet society. It was annoying for some, but interesting as well.

## Methods

We used two types of written legacy as research sources: fiction (stories, short stories, plays) and documentary (personal letters, diaries, records). It was important for us to contrast the data of these two genres for different purposes and based on that to decipher the contextual background. By using contextual analysis, we were able to separate the plot of the work and the elements of the socio-cultural environment and identify the data required for the study. We also used methods of historical-comparative and empirical analysis.

## Discussion and results

Guram Rcheulishvili grew up in a family of the intelligentsia, surrounded by famous scientists and public figures. He studied at the Faculty of History in Tbilisi State University, but his behavior and creativity could not meet Soviet standards. This surprised many because he was able to successfully

follow the flow and take advantage of the “benefits” offered by the government to the intelligentsia. Although he was not an outspoken rebel or dissident against the government, he constantly expressed his mindset with his writings and his way of life. From the memories of many contemporaries, it is known that he fired a shot at the Lenin’s monument in Lenin Square in Tbilisi. The Security Service was so confused and intimidated by the fact that they did not draw up the deed of arresting the perpetrator timely and calmed themselves down by the thought that he fired a shot in another direction, towards the market the “Children’s World” and not towards the monument. Later, the writer explained his behavior in this way: “I was overwhelmed by despair and I thought, either I fire a shot at the monument to Lenin, or myself, and finally I chose the first one” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 300-306). Guram Rcheulishvili properly felt and appreciated the fallaciousness of the soviet regime, but it can be said that he was still a creative rebel and not a political one.

The lifestyle and rhythm of Soviet people’s life were like a march during the parade, where everyone’s gaze was drawn to the leader-idols standing on the tribune. People, standing in order, looked like each other in attire, facial expressions and gestures. They all smiled, and expressed happiness. The ideological machine of the state was doing its best to make this situation the main cornerstone of its existence for decades.

Guram Rcheulishvili used “running in place” as a symbol of Soviet rule ten years before Vladimir Vysotsky (the latter’s famous song “Utreniaia Gimnastika” (Morning Gymnastics) was written only in 1968). Rcheulishvili writes: “Our running forward is like running in place in one rhythm, but sometimes you say “Hoop” and you think you’re leaping up or jumping over higher” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 367). That is how elusive was the progress and development of the Soviet man.

The writer, under the age of 25, was well aware that the “main masses of the public are extremely fascinated by everything. This admiration is strange hemp for them, this unwillingness to sober up is manifested in the joy that burst into flames dreadfully quickly because of any reason, the government itself, its commander, its parishioners are in this state”, “unusual idiotic admiration is on everyone’s face – as much admiration as possible!” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 419).

The Soviet authorities easily adjusted the illusory prosperity created by them to the psyche of the nations that were tired of repressive resistance to the soviet regime, because they had no other way to save themselves. Guram Rcheulishvili uses such an interesting allegory to express this reality: “People here remind us of a mass sitting in a theatre that seems to be under siege, the very first attempt to break should die by no means, so everyone is sitting and watching a strange play, where flags are unfurled all the time and “Hurray” is shouted out, people also shout out “Hurray” and those who do not, are killed as responsible for artificially messing up the common mood”. The victims of this violence are no less tragic than those who survive in such conditions. We read in the continuation of the quote: “In the end, there are only people who voluntarily shout out “Hurray”, people who have already forgotten how they have started screaming, who do not want any other situation” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 419). Here the author draws attention to one of the most difficult psychological factors – how something that was initially thrust on a person, turns into his natural need.

Such a manipulative method of conveyor “production” of the “new man” (Lewis, 1943: 194) is one of the main tools that the communists used so successfully to build their system. Guram Rcheulishvili divides people living in the Soviet system into two groups, people “who shout” and “who do not shout”. The first category includes pathetic, marching people shouting out “Hurray, Hurray”, for whom, over time, this self-centered ideology becomes a natural state, this forced ideology becomes “their own value”, and the alien unmistakably merges with the own in the nature of such people. The

second category includes people in whom screaming, imaginary, and superficial activity is replaced by “self-reset” in their head, e. g. thinking. According to Guram Rcheulishvili, thinking is the most intolerable crime in the Soviet reality. Thinking brings contemplation, melancholy, the pursuit of self-discovery, and the discovery of the “surplus” that ideology has “attached” to it, which is deadly dangerous to the Soviet life. Totalitarianism was hysterically afraid of such manifestations of freedom. It insured itself that “A melancholy is a contagious bacillus!” So, according to Rcheulishvili, a melancholic, or a thinking person, in the Soviet Union was destined to die.

Guram Rcheulishvili often calls “a class” or “a layer” of people “excursionists”, who are guided by the tour guide in the perception and assessment of the historical and cultural achievements of the mankind. The guide quickly takes such people through all the halls of the museum, tells them about the sizes and weights of all originals or reproductions, but does not allow them to stand in front of the works, enjoy them and form their own opinion. The “excursion” has two benefits for the regime – the Soviet man, on the one hand, has an illusory feeling that he has experienced world culture and thus does not lag behind the “goddamn” capitalist countries, and, on the other hand, he, in fact, forms the idea that is dictated by the “tour guide” in connection with the seen in the museum.

On February 26 1957, Guram Rcheulishvili wrote three short stories focusing on paintings on display at the World Cultural Heritage Exhibition in Moscow. While repeatedly emphasizing the sophistication of the shapes and content of Raphael’s painting “The Sistine Madonna”, the writer shows the contrast between how superficially and with what degree of profanation the Soviet audience treats this type of heritage. In parallel with Madonna’s transcendental essence, he portrays the “thoroughbred Slavic female” as a symbol of utilized reality, a creature confined to the realm of the flesh. In this context, for this society, Giorgione’s “Sleeping Venus” is only a naked woman, maybe even lustful. It is difficult to find anyone in the audience who can make out a “Sleeping Angel” in this face. Attitudes of visitors to the exhibition hall are limited to a template and meaningless, ready-made epithets: “Good”, “Great”, “Beautiful”. Viewers say this bowing their heads, picking their noses and thinking about the “cocktail-hall”. Such assessments almost always become barriers and deprive the visitors of the opportunity for individual perception. Interestingly, the common title of these short stories – “Jungle” – metaphorically tells the reader what kind of society watches and estimates the best monuments of the world’s cultural heritage.

Exactly a year after writing these short stories, in February 1958, Guram Rcheulishvili addressed this topic, this time in a more generalized form, in a personal letter to Erlom Akhvlediani, a famous Georgian writer: “Today, after drinking vodka, I went to the Tretyakov Gallery, ... I went through the halls at least three times at a furious pace, then, in the same place, I noticed my footprints and fish scales, which I ate a week ago” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 42). The writer takes on the situation which he used in the story a year ago. Mechanical entry into museums, as a duty, was perceived by him with a sharp self-irony. An even more sarcastic symbolic expression of this superficiality is the traces of “fish scales”.

In several of Guram Rcheulishvili’s short stories, fish “Seliotka” (herring), as a cheap product, is a kind of metaphor expressing the unhappy existence of the Soviet man. On the other hand, we can also compare these small and slender fish, placed in the barrel to the top to be salted and which all look similar, to the Soviet society. The main thing here is uniformity and not individuality, abundance, and not quality. The high level of the writer’s self-irony is that the “fish scales” here belong to him and not to any of the grotesque characters created by him. The author never shies away from such harsh passages about himself. On the contrary, he often points out that he is a part of it. To illustrate that the

Soviet system deliberately suppresses the ability to access knowledge and beauty, we encounter another generalization: “The excursionists represent a separate race, they fill theatres, cinemas, the Kremlin, mausoleums, buses; they have an amazing feature – if you do not show them, they will not see; the government has invented the excursion guides, translators, and arrows with inscriptions specially for them” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 42).

Guram Rcheulishvili compared the process of conveyor production of the Homosovietikus to an excursion, where people are guided by an excursion guide who delivers everything in the context, time, and form that is regulated by the state. The excursion is very similar to a conveyor by two important features: fast mechanical production and standardized products. According to the writer, the Soviet government invented this way in order to put a person in a conveyor routine, to load him with strictly stereotyped knowledge, and not to leave any time or opportunity for self-development. In this way, people respond with statistically calculated and established accuracy to each of the provided novelty and do not pose a threat that anyone will break this orderly system with unplanned collapse. “Excursionist” is a member of the society who voluntarily gives himself to the government to be governed. Excursionists rush, push, jump on each other, fall with broken heads, as if they are striving with a great passion for what is offered. It would not even come to an excursionist’s mind to go anywhere independently.

It is noteworthy that if an individual ticket to visit the museum costs 3 roubles, the price of an excursion ticket, including the services of the head of the excursion, costs 10 roubles. This is an indication that individual choice with one’s own rights and responsibilities is not accepted in this society, therefore it is not valuable, here the priority is to be a member of the group, to think with others, and like others. If you pay three roubles here, you will have to think and evaluate everything yourself, but if you pay three times more, others will think for you, the slavery of the ideology proposed by someone else is three times more expensive because this path requires less reflection and responsibility. Here, Sistine Madonna and Picasso’s color or stroke possess definite content and purpose once and for all. That is why a Soviet citizen can run through the gallery halls three times in the shortest possible time. Excursion heads, guides, translators, and arrows with inscriptions play the role of orientation in this world. This is a comfortable position for the masses. Guram Rcheulishvili writes to his friend with a rather sharp sense of humor that it would be good to produce special money for the “excursionists “with donkey ears... with badger eyes and motorized legs – instead of Lenin’s portrait”.

In one of his personal letters, Rcheulishvili writes with humor to his friend and colleague Erlom Akhvlediani: “I have to start writing letters to the Society for the Promotion of Political Science, which will then be included in the 15<sup>th</sup>, or final, volume of the complete, revised edition of my writings” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 41). At the time, some writers’ works were more like agitations of political science than works of art. The “revised edition” and the phrase: “Sometimes a man has to account for tradition” are also worth mentioning. According to the party’s directives, the “revision” of the writer’s sincere thought had already become a “tradition” at the time, and those who agreed to it did not hinder the publication of even 15 volumes of their writings. It was in this virtual volume that the subject of one of the most ironic articles to be published should have been: “Excursionists, as a class and as a race” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 41).

On July 9 1958, Guram Rcheulishvili, who was in compulsory military service in Akhaltsikhe, wrote to Erlom Akhvlediani with humor: “You can’t imagine how satisfied I am with the army. It’s good that you don’t have to worry about having fun, someone else is leading you, I was happy to be at the sergeant’s orders yesterday” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 75-76). These words could be interpreted as an

admiration with the situation in the army, if they were not followed by the phrase: something “silently suffocates” you in Tbilisi and Moscow, while here there is something that “I can refuse! I will not do it!” On July 4 1958, he writes in his diary how he was unable to go in one line with others during a regular military marching. “I don’t know, I’m confused, and suddenly a happy thought comes to my mind that I can’t go in one line with anyone at all” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 231).

The introduction of the “Excursionist” into the system of thought as a metaphor for the Soviet man points to the deep vision of the reality of the Soviet writer, as well as to the objective analysis. As mentioned above, Guram Rcheulishvili does not present himself as separated from the society in which he has to live. He does not deny the carrying of this burden or mark that is carried by others around him, but the fact that he is doing such a profound analysis of all this, in itself, presents him as the bearer of completely different consciousness and other values.

On August 17 1960, six days before his death, in a situation where being a person was the equivalent of a death sentence, the author made the most poignant entry in his diary: “Oh, the epoch, the egoist, you don’t even consider a human being worthy of the crucifixion!” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 438). This record was a protest against the era that turned society into a “mass of excursionists”. The Soviet era did not allow people to make personal sacrifices. The communist regime created a machine that left neither space nor, consequently, a desire for self-sacrifice, as it limited the main thing – the courage of the act of thinking. They shot people in groups and dumped them in a common pit or placed them in psychiatric hospitals forever.

It is believed that Guram Rcheulishvili’s literary career was initiated by the bloody punitive campaign on March 9 1956. This event has a very ambivalent shade in the history of Georgia in the twentieth century: the criticism of the cult of Stalin by Nikita Khrushchev at the twentieth congress of the Communist Party provoked a strong reaction and almost a hundred thousand people took part in the protest march in Georgia. The demonstration gradually acquired a national spark and ended in great casualties.

It was impossible for Guram Rcheulishvili’s personality not to be affected by this event, all the more, when he himself took part in this demonstration and survived only thanks to the fact that at the time of the attack on the demonstrators he was at his friend’s place, living nearby the epicenter of the event. He soon wrote three short stories on the subject, apparently in the heat of the moment. In one of them (“Children Rushing Out of The School”, he paints a picture of how students join the March 9 1956 demonstration. The author shows the ascending emotional charge and, consequently, the increase in people’s exaltation with a chanted phrase: “Lenin-Stalin!”, which follows the text like a refrain with an increased number of exclamation marks at the end of this phrase. The short story with the roaring rhythm, in the wake of the escalation of events, subtly manages to provoke the effect of attendance. The reader first feels the buzz, then the enhanced buzz... This surge-like passion lures children, housewives, and the elderly for completely different purposes. The problems that people experience in the short story have two forms: social (“How many years there has been no sugar”, women “don’t have stockings”, someone throws a torn hat...) and ideological (“My work was earlier rejected as Stalin was not mentioned, then I introduced it and now it is being rejected because Stalin is mentioned” (Rcheulishvili, 2002: 291).

People who came out to defend Stalin’s name suddenly lit up with the national charge. The author shows this change in the purpose of the demonstration in an artistic way. At the initial stage, the text mentions seven times that the protesters sang the song – “Fly, Black Swallow” (known to be Stalin’s favorite folk song), and then it was replaced by Ilia Chavchavadze’s “Hey Georgians, Take out

your Swords”. It is no coincidence that the second song is followed by a new slogan: “Long live to independent Georgia!”

It is difficult to argue that the course of this demonstration should have deliberately reached the national charge, nor can we say that the protest against the cult of personality would, in itself, have been the main mood of this demonstration. The main thing, however, was that it was a bold move to speak out against the government, which, of course, would not go unpunished. The roar of the demonstration reduces when the first victim covered in blood appears at the tribune and a delegate sent by the people to the Government House for negotiations is released all beaten. Exaltation further calms down when a tank in the street fires and the first casualty falls down.

This short story features two very interesting and drastically different artistic images: a child as a symbol of implicit sincerity and freedom of thought and an elderly person as an image of conformism. The first one breathes his last for painting a chalk swastika on a tank and thus comparing the communist regime with fascism, while the latter draws a big star next to the swastika with the same chalk to neutralize the anger caused by the image. The generation of parents and grandparents were well aware of the gravity of repressions. Thus, the old man tries to neutralize the danger caused by the painted “swastika” with a larger “Soviet star”. It is noteworthy that in the short story this old man does not confront the child, but sympathizes him (“tears came out of his eyes”). He is neither happy with his actions nor with saving himself, he just acts mechanically, irrationally. This is indicated by the phrases: “he obtusely burst out laughing”, “he began laughing loudly”, “the old man’s laughing was increasing” (Rcheulishvili, 2002: 291) and others. The most painful thing in this historical event, therefore, in the short story, is that despite such a great tragedy, everything remained unchanged, everything soon settled down. “B-B-Bum”, the tank pealed, people disappeared, and loud laughter ceased. The sounds of the Russian waltz could be heard, the gramophone was playing ditties somewhere” (Rcheulishvili, 2002: 292).

The second untitled short story, written in 1956 (“Children, - he began with a deep, rich voice (Rcheulishvili, 2002: 49)”, describes the Georgian language and literature lesson in the first grade of secondary school. In this short story and, in general, in Guram Rcheulishvili’s works, it is important to show not only the regime’s verbal condemnation but also the contradictions that should demonstrate the tragedy of the situation with the elements of grotesque. The writer often confronts mutually exclusive data: for example, a teacher talks with young pupils, who are not able even read properly, about topics, such as the the party leaders, the fight against cult of personality, the purpose of the world leaders’ traveling to India and England, and others. The author also emphasizes the inadequacy of these topics concerning children, pointing out that children make a great effort to read the surname of each of these leaders. It is also clear that in the state, which has declared itself to be fighting for social equality, there is a clear flatter towards the son of the secretary of the district committee in the eyes of the school teacher, and disgust towards the son of the cleaner (in another story – yard-sweeper).

The short story culminates when a first-grader girl mistakenly reads a surname from the title of an article in the Communist newspaper: “Belia” (Beria) and receives “a slap in the face with parental care” from the teacher. This led to the “three-fold cursing of the slip in speaking of the name of adventurous Beria, instead of the name of the beloved kind uncle of the people and small children, Bulganin.” By the date of writing this work (April 1956), it had already been three years as Lavrentiy Beria, a former interior minister of the Soviet Union, had been executed by shooting on charges of espionage (Jangidze, 2019: 1-4), and since the twentieth congress in February 1956, it was considered a serious crime to mention his name. As soon as the 7-year-old pupil reads the first letter “B” of the

surname “Bulganin”, the surname “Beria” comes out of the unconsciousness, which not so long ago was on everyone’s lips and causes awe. The pupil is being punished for it.

In this short story, the author emphasizes another Soviet trend: the confrontation between the icons of the enemy and “Uncle”. Beria is the enemy, while Bulganin is “the beloved kind uncle”, just as Stalin had been before. The need for the new generation to closely perceive the Soviet rulers was a way to emphasize the comfort of this ideology, its universality, in a word, its psychological legitimacy.

Another short story (Rcheulishvili, 2002: 47-48) is about a kindergarten named after Giorgi Malenkov (1953-1955), Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers. It continues the pathos described in the abovementioned short story. Here, they solemnly declare to the children as young as 4 years old that “the kindergarten has undertaken to plant 251 trees and 311 bushes on the Tbilisi Sea in response to the genius, historic decisions of the twentieth congress of the Party.” This happens to children of that age who mechanically, unintentionally repeat their teacher’s ardent, fervent “Hurray! Hurray! Hurray!” with garbled exclamations “Ula, Ula, Ula!”. But adults know perfectly well that what has become habitual and mechanical is thought to be the result of their own choice.

There was a great tradition of manipulation of numbers in the Soviet Union. It is noteworthy that “251 trees and 311 bushes” are more than round number by one unit, which indicates that we are dealing not with formal, rounded amounts, but with the numbers given within the unit. Since loyalty towards the Soviet system was only a quantitative measure, the kindergarten teacher, in agreement with his children to be brought up (the agreement with four-year-old children is grotesque as well!), increased the numbers to 293 and 393 to prove his loyalty to the party. Attention is again drawn to the quantities within the units. A teacher who does not do this with an inner feeling and sincere intentions knows perfectly well the real meaning of this decision, knows that “it is so much better for business.”

The writer does not leave out the Soviet tradition of producing personal names. During this period, personal names derived from the first syllables of names or surnames of political leaders (Stalin + Beria = Stalber; Marx + Lenin = Marklen; Lenin + Stalin + Beria = Lestanber) were used in Georgia. According to the short story, in April 1956, a four-year-old child requested to change his “hateful name” ‘Stalber’, because Beria’s name was condemned, to Bukhrusha (Bulganin + Khrushchev). It is noteworthy that despite the change of the name, Bukhrusha remains an inferior character and “talks in a squeaky poor voice”, while Marklen, who remained faithful to his name, utters a slogan with a “rich baritone”: “The party is our helmsman!”

“Flag-bearers”, “detachments and squads”, “ranks”, “Octobrists and pioneers”, “pioneer leaders”, “pioneer salute”, “our party”, “new power”, “great homeland”, “proud collective farm”, “fertile breakfast”, “flags in hands”, “a trumpet shining in the first rays of the morning”, “a teacher caring for any child like a mother”, “special encouragement of violators of the order”, passionate voices of “Hurray, Hurray” are remarkable components of Guram Rcheulishvili’s one more short story and they serve the same purpose: to describe the “Soviet Paradise”. ‘Soviet Paradise’ follows the writer’s numerous stories as an ironic leitmotif, but where the hero’s age changes, so do the main features of “Paradise”. For example, Communist Zurab Mikatadze lives in a country where all public servants believe in the aim of the letter of the Communist Party’s leader: “We are approaching the radiant, spectacular peaks of communism” (Rcheulishvili, 2002: 55), where the remarkable youth, representatives of flourishing happy generation, who contemplate colourful future painted by the Soviet state, live; where the arm of each such young man in the fight against nature serves to revive the homeland; where the “great tower of the skyscraper of communism” shines through the clouds.

“Soviet Paradise”, naturally, extends within the Soviet geography. The author of the story makes the characters violate “this harmony” as soon as the narration goes beyond the mentioned geographical area. The Soviet Union and the United States are the most controversial figures in this regard. The inscription on the wall of the medical site in the above-mentioned short story is a perfect example of the bias of this contrast. It reports that in the Soviet Union: the number of hospitals increased by 250% compared to 1913, the number of children with typhus or smallpox decreased by 510%, and so on. Below the statistical data there are the figures for the United States, according to which the number of hospitals has increased by only 10% since 1913, and the number of prisons where millions of freedom-loving citizens are imprisoned has increased by 500%. Such agitation data does not mean that the happiness and comfort of the Soviet Union are disturbed by thinking about the fate of the rest of the world, but rather keep the Soviet population in lie and self-satisfaction, demonstrating that the citizenship of this country is a great happiness!

There was constant competition and controversy in the Soviet Union over capitalist countries. The latter was portrayed to be repulsive in everything and blameworthy, while the Soviet Union presented itself as flawless. Guram Rcheulishvili’s phrase echoes this grotesque reality: “One famous racist – a scientist, of course, a bourgeois, made a mistake, while we do not make a mistake” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 43). The writer’s phrase refers to the closedness of the Soviet Union, the secession from the outside world, self-isolation, and illusory existence: “What is outside. You can’t go beyond the borders of this country, there is no more outside” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 360).

Guram Rcheulishvili does not leave out the attitude of the communists towards criticism. The Soviet government is trying to convince the people that it is open and welcomes criticism from “below”. In one of the short stories “The Court is ready to sentence”, the writer describes the course of the session of the Communist Party. After the dean of the faculty calls upon the first-year students that “criticism from below” is needed, the secretary of the first year boldly exposes the lecturer of the political economy. Some in the audience consider this step to be heroic, while others, on the contrary, consider it as acted out. The main character of the story, after the meeting, accidentally becomes a witness of the conflict between the dean and the secretary of the first-year students; the latter receives a reprimand for the intolerable boldness, though encouraged by the dean. The main character, who inadvertently witnesses this conversation, feels awkward because he accidentally listens to this dialogue, but subconsciously he feels as if the dean was speaking to him in order to warn him. The writer emphasizes that almost everything is formal in the Soviet environment, everything has its own implication. Therefore, a person cannot trust another person here because any kind of activity is stipulated by nomenclature. Criticism from “below” is as phantom as caring for the welfare of the world. An even deeper thought is expressed in the following phrase about the attitude of the Soviet authorities towards free thought: “In our gendarmerie state... some do not even want to hear praise of the good side if it is covered slightly more deeply” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 421).

The writer does not lose sight of another Soviet feature: the cult of physical labour and the use of the metamorphosed nature of labor to “create” the Soviet man. In this way, the communists put the benevolent qualities of labor even higher than biological data such as gender. For this system, female labor is fully equated with male labor. Under the conditions of universal industrialization, the Soviet system is trying to justify this approach by adhering to the principle of gender equality, but it is in the leveling of natural, biological data that Guram Rcheulishvili finds quite large grotesque knots and with skillful emotional nuances exposes, at first glance, well-packaged topics. One of his short stories, from the very beginning, disarms the attempt of the Soviet authorities to transfer the biological data of man

to the background in the conditions of the primacy of physical labor – sex. The title of the short story is: “A Woman in Fuel Oil in the Workshop and Passionate Desire” (Rcheulishvili, 2002: 38). “The Workshop” and “Fuel Oil” are inappropriate concepts for the nature of a woman. The Soviet system tries to show a woman in the context of equality with men, Guram Rcheulishvili raises this issue in the context of the loss of a woman’s face. He writes in his diary about the wife of one of the interlocutors whose hand he was going to kiss: “Much to my distress in one hand she was holding a small liqueur glass full of vodka, in the other, she was holding a fork with a head of herring and onion. So, this initiative ended in a complete crash. Oh, that kiss on a hand! I was holding the hand of the fat woman who was destroying caviar and while trying to kiss her wrist I saw a huge tattoo... Her words from her autobiography are still ringing in my ears: “I am a working person, I have been working since I was ten years old, now I am fiftyish, I am not avoiding work and I am not from mollycoddles, I was cleaning the latrines for 8 years if I had to” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 55). Against the background of this situation, it is sarcastic that “the Russian women’s choir sings about peace, friendship, women’s freedom as a toast for March 8 on the radio” (Rcheulishvili, 2002: 87).

It should be noted that the traces of self-censorship in the sources and archival materials of the works are not always explicitly presented. In this regard, Guram Rcheulishvili’s play “Marina” (Rcheulishvili, 2005: 7-60) is a happy exception. Both its original version and the version edited for publication as well as the correspondence about the changes made by the author have been preserved. It would be totally unacceptable for Soviet censorship to portray a “beggar”, a “cripple” and “mentally ill” as positive characters, as well as the promise of the main judge of the Soviet justice system to the witness to change the verdict to persuade him to have sex with him (the fact remains completely unpunished in the play) and the execution of a person based on a biased testimony given by the witness, although this witness later denied his testimony.

One of Guram Rcheulishvili’s loyal readers, his father Mikheil Rcheulishvili drew the author’s attention to the problems with the Soviet censorship (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 145-147). He also advised Guram to change characters so that it would be acceptable for Soviet censorship (the beggar to be replaced by a greengrocer or a cigarette seller and the judge to be punished by the Soviet court) or to transfer the action to another country. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the text revised for the publishing house ‘*Druzhiba Narodov*’, the action takes place in Paris, in the settlement of Georgian emigrants, and the reality, which did not suit “healthy with soul and flesh” Soviet citizens, with one stroke became a part of the “rotten to the core” capitalist system, as it was called in the Soviet Union. To make the action in France natural, the writer added a preface to the text, a story of a Georgian woman who returned from emigration into the Soviet Union. Otherwise, it would have been impossible to understand what was going on behind the “Iron Curtain”. Besides, the text was supplemented with a story of the Georgian woman married to a French baron who lived in affluence in France, had a wonderful husband and children, but was still unhappy and therefore chose to return to Soviet Georgia. In addition, instead of a street confrontation, the protagonist’s assassination revealed political, multiparty roots. This, too, was considered as an event characteristic only of the capitalist world.

In the conditions of staging the all-round prosperity of the Soviet man, Guram Rcheulishvili’s many characters – beggars, pickpockets and night thieves, station whores, Rustaveli prostitutes, tipplers, tramps, in short, people without social guarantees – should have been unacceptable for Soviet censorship, because according to the officially declared Soviet ideology, such people did not exist in the soviet society.

In the short story “Away from the Skyscrapers” (Rcheulishvili, 2002: 129-130) (the metaphor – “Skyscraper of the Great Tower of Communism” can be found in the writer’s works as well), a beggar is raking through the trash and thus making ends meet away from the skyscrapers. That is away from a prosperous, happy life. That is why the writer would never have had the illusion of publishing this text. A man with a bag on his back full of papers and empty cans taken from the trash, with worn soles, and shuffling his feet could never become a hero of Soviet literature because he was not afraid of losing anything and therefore did not have to bow to anything. This damaged the “views of the Soviet paradise” and called into question its contents. Therefore, the replication of his image was completely unimaginable.

Guram Rcheulishvili also touches upon the topic of “unregistered in the apartment book”, “having no passport” people in one of his literary-critical essays: “during one of the conversations, an opinion was expressed in my presence that our society does not need works that include “people who are not registered in the apartment book, due to absence of their certain place” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 290). This was completely unacceptable for the writer. In his opinion, “there are no unnecessary bad people for real art, or people who fell out of routine, people obsessed with other ideas rather than those required by the objective correctness, evildoers, perhaps due to certain reasons of non-justification, there are all kinds of people, but only real people from each side – with thousands of passions for the expression” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 291). It is these unpredictable people who are the writer’s priority because there is a living charge in them, not everything is determined, as in any field branded by the Soviet machine. It only makes sense to work with such people, such characters, but, therefore, there is a danger.

There is another big problem here, Guram Rcheulishvili fully shares the characters and their interests. Guram Rcheulishvili cites the term “having no passport” as a metaphor for people without social guarantees. He often considers himself like them: “I am a citizen without a passport, and so are my characters” (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 291). However, here it is necessary to distinguish between two things: social ‘passportlessness’ and conscious ‘passportlessness’ when your identity and personality are not harmed by the Soviet red seal of your own free will.

The theme of Khevsureti (Khevsureti is a historical province in the mountains of Eastern Georgia) is also included in Guram Rcheulishvili’s work in terms of disobedience to the regime. The writer has repeatedly visited Khevsureti and had many friends there. Thus, he was well aware of their irreconcilability with the communist system. In 1922, the Khevsurians put up a strong-arm resistance to the army of Soviet occupiers, due to which many of them were subjected to repressions. It seemed that the Khevsurians were expecting the overthrow of the Soviet regime with the help of Germany as a result of the ongoing battles in the Caucasus in 1943 (Ninidze, 2019: 144). The short story “rumor” (Rcheulishvili, 2002: 55-57) is about this expectation and the frustration associated with it. The text ends with the words: “The cannons were firing near Dzaug. Jabushanuri’s dog did not stop howling that night. Khevisberi felt bad about the news. The Khevsurians sniffed the inconceivable”. Naturally, it is important to consider what the historical context is, what geographical location “Dzaug” represents, and what happened there in 1943. Dzaug is the former name of the city of Ordzhonikidze (now Vladikavkaz). In 1943, fierce battles took place near this city and its environs against the Germans and the 30300-strong battalion of Georgians, led by General Shalva Maghlakelidze. It was intended that the country’s independence would be declared upon their entry into Georgia. However, the Germans lost their campaign “Edelweiss”. In early 1943, they left the environs of Ordzhonikidze, retreated, and the illusion of Khevsureti, related to the overthrow of the Soviet regime, was shattered.

The short story clearly shows the Khevsurians' negative attitude towards the Soviet regime ("Rumors reached the mountains in the morning: - The Bolsheviks resigned... the Khevsurians went on the spree"), so that the writer could not really hope to publish the novel under the Soviet regime. This text, like many others, seems to have been created only for a narrow circle of relatives, friends and for history.

In 1951-1954, the short story "A Walk" (Rcheulishvili, 2002: 59-61) was written on the topic of forced settlement in Khevsureti valley. In particular, it reflects the fact that Khevsurians settled in the Samgori Valley. The short story mentions the suicide of Berdia Liqokeli. In 1935, a Khevsurian People's Healer, Mgelika Liqokeli, over a hundred years old, committed suicide. We can't say whether he or another person is meant in the short story, but the Liqokeli family was especially distinguished by their disobedience to the regime. Guram Rcheulishvili personally knew Chachaur Liqokeli, a participant in the 1921 Kojori battles, who accompanied his group during the Khevsureti expedition. Short story phrases, such as "an unruly strand of hair broke loose from the hat", "won't we have a gathering place any more?", "I wish there was war; what's the reason for exile, all in vain", "it's a war, what else", "It's a struggle, what the hell, thrown and dead" (Rcheulishvili, 2002: 59-61) indicate a negative attitude towards the deportation and its initiating regime, which they could not openly say for fear of repression.

It is noteworthy that none of the stories discussed above were published during Guram Rcheulishvili's lifetime. In the three magazines of the 1950s (*Shroma, Mnatobi, Tsiskari*), which set the tone for a literary life, only seven of his short stories were published during his lifetime. In addition to the content of his writings, the editors refrained from publishing them because of the writer's extraordinary behavior and eccentric nature, which did not meet the standards of a Soviet man.

Censorship in the stories published in the magazine *Tsiskari*, of course, did not dwell upon the correction of the author's style and punctuation, and quite boldly, often with vague criteria, interfered with the published texts. Censors used to remove the personified passages mentioned in the first person from Guram Rcheulishvili's stories. By removing such passages, Soviet censorship feared the reproduction of individualistic aspects that could bring to the fore the personal nature of a man, his senses, and, in general, such skills that could not be generalized broadly. The sentence (Tsiskari, 1957: 63) removed from the premised diary of the story "A Mousetrap" reads: "I have been reading Merezhkovsky's "Antichrist" all day". Naturally, Soviet censorship could not have left the name of the emigrant writer Dmitry Merezhkovsky in the published story without a response, especially the title of the religious nature of his work, although this short story is about Peter the Great. The lines from the poems of Sergei Yesenin and Galaktion Tabidze, used as epigraphs, have been removed from the publication of one of the short stories, although none of them have been repressed. Here, the logic of the decision of censorship may be understood as some kind of dangerous link between the epigraph and the main text. Traces of censorship can be seen in the introduction of the story "Tvirtvila" (Tsiskari, 1957: 58). Two of his pages have been removed for criticizing the Soviet court, while the phrase "Goods of the dubious structure of the cooperative" has been removed for criticizing the Soviet cooperative.

Guram Rcheulishvili constantly felt the pressure of censorship on his modern writing. "Here the structure is strangely interfering from the outside and internally, first gives artistically unnoticed push" (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 293) he writes, but he does not want to follow this push. That is why he looks at reality and says, "I can't stand the fact that every sincere word is doomed in my life and won't be able to see the light" (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 431), "The pen, like a weak, fettered hand, barely obeys me, when

I know in advance that these works, like everything else written by me, are doomed not to be published” (Rcheulishvili, 2007:421).

When examining Guram Rcheulishvili’s attitude towards the Soviet regime, it is necessary to consider the nature of the text and who it was intended for or accessible to. A very warm letter to ex-teacher Irine Mikeladze (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 8-9), who was deported to Central Asia in 1952, ends with a slogan-like phrase that no Georgian will bring shame on Georgia, “whose offspring today is leading all undertakings of the world peace and will undoubtedly bring them to an end.” Naturally, the Soviet security services paid special attention to the correspondence of the deportees, and these words are deliberately inserted at the end of the letter. We also do not see the writer’s sincerity in trying to convince Vakhtang Tchelidze (Rcheulishvili, 2007: 92-101), the editor of magazine *Tsiskari*, that those, heaping praise on the party, are sincere, that there was no time for “self-determination” and “personal feelings” during the war, and that his writings in terms of ideology should have been completely acceptable for the Soviet authorities.

### Conclusions

The research revealed interpretations in Guram Rcheulishvili’s style regarding the state of his modern society living under the communist regime. The fictional texts of the writer reflect how the Soviet government easily adapted the illusory prosperity created by it to the psyche of the nations tired of repressive resistance; He draws attention to a very complex psychological factor - how it has become a natural human need, which has been imposed upon from the very beginning; How they inadvertently “assigned” the ideological path to the people by means of tour guides, escorts, translators, arrows with inscriptions, and because of this the whole system of human transformation became like a conveyor. The writer often and emphatically refers to such collocations and determinants as: young pioneer leader, pioneer salute, our party, new power, famous homeland, praiseworthy collective farm, nutritious breakfast, a banner in the hands etc. which make the illusiveness of the situation obvious; In general, in Guram Rcheulishvili’s works, it is important not to verbally condemn the regime, but to show such contradictions, which illustrate the tragedy of the situation with grotesque elements.

Analysing Guram Rcheulishvili’s documentary prose, it became possible to identify facts that determine a fundamentally important aspect of his creative process. These are the “dangerous” passages that his family members advised him to extract from the texts. In the article, we also tried to establish the logic of the censorship of seven short stories published in his lifetime.

Although Guram Rcheulishvili is more of an observer, he always feels part of this community. To emphasize this, he very often puts himself in the position of people who are both regime-led and indifferent to the regime, and therefore complete losers. Many of Guram Rcheulishvili’s characters - beggars, pickpockets, night thieves, station whores, Rustaveli Avenue prostitutes, drunkards, vagrants, in a word, people without social guarantees must have been unacceptable to Soviet censorship, because according to the officially declared Soviet ideology, such people did not exist in this society. Guram Rcheulishvili cites “passportlessness” as a metaphor for the lack of social guarantees. He often thinks of himself as such, but here it is necessary to distinguish between two things: social passportlessness and conscious passportlessness, when a person’s identity and personality does not bear the Soviet red seal in a voluntary manner. The character gallery in Guram Rcheulishvili’s works is divided into two such categories. However, the writer expresses equal sympathy for the characters in both categories. All this is represented in different texts by different artistic means and high creative mastery, which definitely deserved systematic study and requires further fundamental research.

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