

EXISTENTIAL CONCEPTS – ABSURD AND SUICIDE – IN GURAM RCHEULISHVILI'S STORIES

ADA NEMSADZE

PhD in Philology,

Senior Scientific Member at the Shota Rustaveli Institute of
Georgian Literature, Tbilisi State University

E-Mail: ada.nemsadze@tsu.ge

ORCID: 0009-0004-9911-256X

Abstract: In European literature, the existential tendencies of the closed soviet cultural space started to emerge in the 1970s, although certain earlier precursors had been noticeable in Guram Rcheulishvili's prose. The article analyses suicide as an escape from an absurd way of life on the examples of two stories – „From the mountains to the city“ and „Batareka Tchintcharauli“.

The literary image of Salamura (*the Piper*) vividly reflects a person fighting against the world and against its harsh laws. This person tries to protect himself and his existence in the time and space, in which he feels happy. But the confronting world tries to subdue him and manages to do so. Through this story, Guram Rcheulishvili creates a literary image of a person, rebelling against the irrational, absurd world, who finally turns into Sisyphus.

Mzia Batareka's daughter lives in the harsh social surroundings. For that reason, she creates her own beautiful world, where freedom and romanticism dominate. Her thoughts are far away from the worldly, mundane human existence and pain. However, she suddenly encounters the stark reality of life, that destroys her imaginary world. She eventually becomes estranged to the surroundings, and feels insurmountable obstacle between her desires and the created circumstances. These factors are sufficient reasons for committing suicide. The estranged world leaves only one way out and leads her to the act of suicide.

As Albert Camus puts it, in such a case, the world is neither rational nor irrational. It is merely senseless. According to existential philosophy, suicide is the way of escape from this absurd world. This is how this concept is perceived in the discussed stories by Guram Rcheulishvili.

Keywords: existentialism; suicide; absurdity; Guram Rcheulishvili.

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Introduction. „No artist tolerates reality‘, – Nietzsche used to say. He is right. However, not a single artist will be able to exist without a reality. Creativity is the simultaneous requirement of the unity of the world and its denial. But the artist denies the world for the reason of whatever he lacks, and sometimes, for whatever this world represents. This rebellion enables us to observe it externally, without historical context, in its sacred state, in its primeval complexity. „Art should provide us with the ultimate explanation of the essence of rebellion“ (2019, p. 317), – Albert Camus wrote in his philosophical work „The Rebel“ when discussing the inter-relation between rebellion and art. And later he adds: „Rebellion ends in art and transfers into real creativity eternally“ (2019, p. 341).

If anyone introduces a rebellious character into the Georgian literature of the 20th century, Guram Rcheulishvili is the first one among others. His character figures think, discuss, analyze their lives, worry about petty problems of existence, try to change, to awaken dormant feelings in a human, act, love, for which they have to confront dominant views or tendencies. Although their rebellion starts from physically passive condition, i.e. from thinking process, it logically transposes into physical activity, since thinking itself is an active phase of mental functioning.

Methodology: The problem is analyzed through the prism of the philosophy of existentialism that makes reference to the works of the major authors of French existentialism – Albert Camus, Jean-Paul

Sartre, and of Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard. The research implements hermeneutical and semiotic methods of text analysis.

Discussion: The formation of existential philosophy in European cultural space is connected with the 20s and 40s of the 20th century. And its pessimistic nature was mostly conditioned by the feelings of hopeless despair and nihilism widely-spread after the World War I. Soon this worldview was transferred to fiction and became known as literary existentialism. In that period, the soviet cultural space was already closed to European tendencies. Instead, an artificially created artistic method was developed, known as socialist realism. Regarding existentialism, its tendencies appeared in Georgian literature from the second half of the 20th century, namely, from the 1970s, although, as it usually happens, certain precursors had already been detected earlier.

Certain individual features of Guram Rcheulishvili's fiction have already been investigated in Georgian literary scholarship, although existential tendencies in his stories have not been analyzed yet. The present paper will analyze suicide as a means of escaping absurd existence, on the examples of two of the author's important stories – „**From the mountains to the city**“ and „**Batareka Tchintcharauli**“.

The main tendency of Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy is the perception of distrust towards the world and tragic disposition. It is filled with unbearable evil. Optimist humans are deeply mistaken; the life is not joy. Kierkegaard believed that philosophy should turn to petty problems of a human, should help him, and should enable him to comprehend one's own „self“. As for Camus, the problem of life's absurdity is the key point. Two factors feed his pessimism: 1) a human is powerless against death, which deprives existence, joy and success of their meanings; 2) a human is likewise helpless against the nature (Kuznetsov, 1970, ctp. 279).

A story „**From the mountains to the city**“, written in 1956, has an extremely interesting connotative frame. The literary work narrates the story of a tragic life of a horse, of Salamura (a Piper). The story stands out for its active fighting pathos. An entire chain of major existential problems of a human is hidden behind Salamura's story in the depth of the text.

As already mentioned manifold, the key points for existentialism are a human standing in the center of the universe, the essence of his existence, and the problems of the relations between the universe and a human, and between a human and society. Being born free, Salamura is captured by humans, and the troubles start from that point. Salamura precisely reflects a person, fighting against the world and against its harsh laws, who tries to protect himself and his existence in the time and space, in which he feels happy. But the confronting world (life) tries to subdue him and manages to do so. The final struggle of Salamura is the process of dismounting a rider and running away from the horse-race, which he perceives as a guarantee of return to his native surroundings (mountains). But he is deeply mistaken – he falls from the bridge and injures his legs forever.

The story vividly reflects the desperation that was characteristic of atheist subdivision of existentialism: shattered universe, the ties broken with it and hence, a human left alone; sadness, fright, solitude, desperation. All this is the present life of Salamura, who has been tied into a long carriage. Albert Camus introduced the concept of *absurdity* into existential philosophy and recognized riot as one of the ways to escape from this absurdity. This is the way leading to freedom and it implies freeing oneself from the confines of the irrational world. The entire attempt by Salamura, the fight from the mountains to the race, is a riot: the people put him to hunger to subdue pelting and frenetic creature. They put bridle on the weakened horse and subdue him. As soon as he re-gains some strength, he again tries to escape, he strives towards freedom, but he fails. The final fatal struggle is the end of the riot:

„A one-year tamed stallion immensely desired to gallop in the grassland. He desired to thrust away into open fields even more, and entirely lost the senses. Suddenly, he jumped aside, high above people and disappeared.

A rider, with an injured head, stayed in the square. Galloping in the street, he saw a car driving towards him: he got frightened, shocked; and jumped from the low bridge without a moment's hesitation or thinking“ (Rcheulishvili, 2016, p. 69).

The conflict with the world ended tragically. At the end of the story, we see Salamura, feeble and obedient to fate. For Camus, a human is Sisyphus, who loyally carries out his duties. Salamura, tied into a long carriage, is exactly such Sisyphus:

„Carriage-driver was sitting and smoking a pipe. But Salamura was standing lean, feeble, and bony. Only his eyes were melancholic and tearful, as usual“ (Rcheulishvili, 2016, p. 70).

Through this story, Guram Rcheulishvili created a literary image of a person, rebelling against the irrational, absurd world, who fails in all his attempts and finally turns into Sisyphus.

Albert Camus thinks that the way out of the absurd situation is often suicide. It is the end of tragic and torturing life, and is a kind of relaxation from this torture. „Suicide was always considered only as a social phenomenon. But here, on the contrary, the initial issue is the relation between independent thinking and suicide. Such a decision gradually comes to fruition deep in heart, like a great literary work. Even a human himself does not know about it. One fine evening he shoots or drowns himself“ (2013, p. 13). The world might present itself to a person in different forms at different stages of his life. But as soon as the illusions and hopes disappear in him, as soon as the world loses sense, a human cannot find his place there and this breakup is the beginning of absurdity, – this is what Albert Camus believes.

Mzia Batareka's daughter (in the story **Batareka Tchintcharauli, 1959**), who lives in the harsh social surroundings, creates her own distinct, beautiful world. And this is not surprising at all – Mzia is 13 years old and her imaginary reality unfolds in front of her eyes like a dream that is formed by Mzia's fantasy. What kind of world is this? Let us turn to the text: she combs her hair with her fingers from morning till afternoon without looking into the mirror. Her eyes are shining in the face. The body feels that it is impeccable. Everything around it is in love. Knights fight with swords for her sake (Rcheulishvili, 2016, p. 294).

Mzia's personality ignores certain spheres of life, although she has no clear idea about them due to her young age. She feels intuitively that they go against her imaginary world. Like any woman from Khevsureti, she also has several names, out of which the Khevsurian name Mzia (associated with beauty, delight and romantic emotions) and Georgian name Tamari (here genetic code bears importance) are her favorites. „She hates other two names, Sandua and Buba, which subconsciously tell her about the future hard life and labor with her husband“ (Rcheulishvili, 2016, p. 294). This fact already indicates that freedom and romanticism are domineering feelings in Mzia's world. She values only those emotions. At the same time, her thoughts are far away from the worldly, mundane human existence and pain. She cannot sow, harvest, knead dough, or sweep. Not only does she not see doing all these tasks in the present (for these activities are part of the life of a 13-year-old girl in Khevsureti), but she cannot imagine doing these tasks in her future as well. „Thus sits this strange aristocratic woman, wrapped in fur coat, who, by nature's decision, was born here, in Shatili, and waits“ (Rcheulishvili, 2016, p. 294).

To unfold Mzia's character and analyze looming tragedy, it is interesting to refer to the legend, „with the help of which Mzia goes to sleep, and which she sees in her dreams, and does not see at the same time“ (Rcheulishvili, 2016, p. 295). „And does not dream“ – is one more indication that this fact is not only a dream, but it is also a reality in Mzia's world. The main character in this legend is a youth hunting an ibex, a lad who has hurt the feelings of a forest gnome. After a while, the goddess of hunting forgives him, as she sees that he cannot do anything else and allows him to hunt, but on one condition: he must not shoot a stag. The young lad makes a promise, but for this reason he is punished forever – he loses the skill of hunting. We can assume that this legend is a kind of prophecy in this story. The lad is a rebel, the one who violates rules, free by nature, willful and the one who does anything to fulfil one's desires. Underscoring these features of the lad uncovers Mzia's character as well and points to the fact that she also belongs to such type of people, that is to be revealed in a short while.

Existential philosophy recognized suicide as one of the major postulates and provided several different reasons and explanations for this action. It transposed suicide from social sphere to mental sphere, gave it special significance and individualistic nature. This gradually ripened decision in a human's brain is caused by a sudden sharp discord. „An unchanged hostile attitude of the world towards us has been apparent for millennia. In a matter of seconds, it becomes unfathomable for us, because only

those figures and pictures were familiar to us that we ourselves had instilled in it. And now these forces have betrayed us and we can no longer continue this charade. The world slips through our hands, as it becomes the way it is in reality. These habitually disguised decorations reveal their real faces" (Camus, 2013, pp. 27-28).

The decorations created by Mzia's mind and fantasy are ruined in a matter of seconds as a result of the slap given by her father. She suddenly realizes that the wonderful world, where everything is in love with her – red ochre walls, old chest, stone staircase, violets, mountain ridge – has suddenly turned into the fruit of her imagination and does not exist in reality. This is the feeling of utter desperation, the destruction of the existent world, the feeling that the reality is whatever is called „Sandua and Buba“ and whatever Mzia has ignored before. „A person might come across the feeling of absurdity in any corner of the street“ (2013, pp. 22-23), – Camus writes. Exactly this period comes into Mzia's life, when an individual eventually becomes estranged to the surroundings, and feels insurmountable obstacle between her desires and the created circumstances. „Estrangement is the condition of a person, when his main action is directed against his own life and happiness“, – Zurab Kakabadze remarks (Kakabadze, 2011). The reason for suicide appears immediately and it is quite sufficient for accomplishing the intention. As existentialists note, „It is an acknowledgment that you are fed up with life and you do not understand it at all. [...] It is the mere recognition that „it is not worth living any longer“ (Camus, 2013, p. 14). It is the world devoid of illusions, where a human feels estranged. The process is irreversible. The estranged world leaves only one way out and leads to the act of committing suicide. „Mzia, Batareka's daughter, had hanged herself on the chains of extinguished fire in the middle of the upper story of house“ (Rcheulishvili, 2016, p. 297).

While discussing the concept of absurdity, Albert Camus also defines the role of the world in the formation of this process. In this case, the world is neither rational nor irrational for a human. It is merely senseless. For existentialists, the theme of irrationality itself is connected with the mind that is in conflict with itself, which frees itself by denying one's self (2013, p. 79).

Conclusion: Therefore, the study has revealed that existential tendency is vivid in Guram Rcheulishvili's stories. In relatively earlier texts, a character is not yet active and he resorts to passive forms of protest. Sisyphus' model appears exactly at this point, which is realized in fiction in the story „From the mountains to the city“.

In Guram Rcheulishvili's literary works, another existential concept is also significant – it is suicide (and generally, death), a relief, an escape from this senseless, absurd world and the end of torture. Suicide is the logical finale of the failed communication with the world. This is how this concept is perceived in one of the best stories by Guram Rcheulishvili „Batareka Tchintcharauli“.

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