

Rezo Cheishvili's Biographical Novel "The Iron Counsel of People's Commissars" – Main Character

Abstract: In the article is discussed the main character of Rezo Cheishvili's biographical novel "The Iron Counsel of People's Commissars" - Sergo Ordzhonikidze, a revolutionary and anti-Georgian morally fighter. In the article is also discussed the viewpoints of the writer about the Bolshevik, about his personality as well as is revived the different biographical aspects concerning to the revolutionary's life. Furthermore, the following significant questions are emphasized: what was written about the famous Bolshevik as a historic person before the 90s of XX century and what has Rezo Cheishvili written about him. It is certain that "The Iron Counsel of People's Commissars" in the Georgian literature is created in the genre of the biographical novel, which mainly reflects the famous people's lives. In this case, the diversity of the novel is created by using the satirical, antinational hero.

Keywords: Rezo Cheishvili, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, biographical novel.

The world literature knows many such biographical novels. They are written about writers, artists, composers. Still the prosaic texts written about these distinguished people are popular. The books are read, movies are made. Nowadays, this genre has already been well emphasized in the Georgian literature, while in the foreign literature it has a long tradition. E.g. Stephen Zweig: "Balzac", "Mary Stuart", André Maurois: "Byron", "The Titans: The Extraordinary lives of the three Dumas", "Olympio: The Turbulent Life of Victor Hugo", Irving Stone: "Lust of Life" based on the life of Vincent van Gogh, "Sailor on Horseback" and many others. In our, Georgian prose: Konstantine Gamsakhurdia: "The Life Novel of Goethe", Vakhtang Chelidze: "The Life of Ivane Machabeli", Otar Chkheidze: "The Novel and History", Rostom Chkheidze: "Alexander Orbeliani", "Kazbegiana", "Iase Janus", "The Fate of Pavle Ingorokva", "Upper the River Ksani", "The Letters from the Itri Mill", "The Sun and The Sorrowed" "A Traveller in the Sun of June" and others.

One of the critics writes: "The literary fantasy in the biographical novel only not participates into the plot development process, but also the fact itself serves the deep imagination. In this genre the fantasy is knitted in the text in such way that a reader is not able to notice where the document finishes and where the author starts" (Kuridze 1981:112).

In the biographical novel, as a rule, is shown the way of a famous public figure's life. A great person's formation as an individual is taking place in the historical epoch, thus the reflection of the historical past represents the necessary component of the background of such kind of genre. The transmission of the person's life is based on the recollections, historical sources and archive materials.

Before discussing the object of our interest, the novel of Rezo Cheishvili "The Iron Counsel of People's Commissars" I would like to attract you attention to his literary way.

In the modern Georgian literature among the prose-writers Rezo Cheishvili represents one of the most original and particular writers. Main object of his literary legacy represents an individual and

environment where he/she lives and works. That is why the works of the prose-writer contains so much different information. The authors each piece of work, a novel or a short story reflects the pure humour, satirical stream and great sorrow. All these together represent the author's credo. His works are contemporary.

In the modern Georgian historiography discussion about the person of Sergo Ordzhonikidze is given little place. Lately were published four volumes of XIX-XX centuries' history of Georgia, wherein the famous Bolshevik face is curved during the narrating the famous events of February 1921. More specifically, when after Philippe Makharadze and members of a newly founded Revolutionary Committee he arrives from Baku to Tbilisi. At this time, he is the Chairman of Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) and he must fulfil the instruction of the Chief of Russia to compromise and find mutual concessions with the current social-democratic government. It is obvious that in his book author writes about his active participation in the fight for the Soviet Republics political unification. Alexander Daushvili in this case, provides us with the historical facts chronologically which points out that it is significant to discuss Sergo Ordzhonikidze from nowadays' standpoints. The historian writes that it has no meaningful importance what occurred in the past and to whom is connected this or that historical fact.

A question might rise: what made Rezo Cheishvili to be interested in the biographical prose genre? In the Georgian society and not only, Sergo Ordzhonikidze was considered working people's prosperity fighter and a positive person. However, the writer decides to reveal his real face. His wish is to change attitudes towards the well-known revolutionary and for this purpose starts writing his biographical novel.

"The Iron Counsel of People's Commissars" first is published in 1992 and as the author says: "This book is written about the tragic and hypocritical life of Sergo Ordzhonikidze" (Cheishvili 1992:2). By this book, he created Ordzhonikidze's life literary-historical chronicle.

In the beginning, Sergo Ordzhonikidze is a member of the Workers Social-Democratic Party, later he becomes its leader. Sergo is an active participant in the revolution of 1905-1907. Soon he is arrested with the charges of proclamation distributing and gun carrying. Though as an under the age of adulthood he is freed, he leaves for Germany in emigration where he gets in touch with the Bolshevik emigrants. Then he is in Baku or in Iran. Several times he gets in prison, is forced to live in exile. Nevertheless, some years later he changes several high positions in the Russian government. He is Temporary Extraordinary Commissar in the Ukraine, The Extraordinary Monitor of Food Affair Commissariat in the Southern Russia, The Leader of the Red Army, and The Chairman of the Northern Caucasus Defence Council. At the same time, by his leadership in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia is announced the Soviet ruling.

It is worth mentioning, that in Georgia during the Soviet ruling about Sergo Ordzhonikidze is written many books, wherein his political life, beliefs, purposefulness are estimated differently and analyzed unlikely the works of the following period. During the specific period, he is named as a celebrity, the country's prominent person, and the most honoured member of the army fighting for the future prosperity of people. However, later, all his deeds are revealed and appropriate evaluation is given. We are not able to wipe off neither the life of "Iron Counsel of People's Commissars" nor the vestiges of Sergo's decisions in the latest history, and it is reality.

It is significant to discuss several important standpoints of the books and reviews written about Sergo Ordzhonikidze subsequently. It is interesting to know the different evaluations of the different episodes written by the various writers when Sergo was alive as well as the other facts after his death. In this particular case, I mean the short biographical essays written about his life: "The Soviet Republics and Communist Party Distinguished Public Figure" which is dedicated to his 70th anniversary. "Grigol (Sergo) Son of Konstantine, Ordzhonikidze" a book written in 1956 by S. Chkhartishvili. The book is

written in the style of biographical essay. It contains three long chapters and tells about the Bolshevik Party works, their contribution “in the fight for working people’s freedom and happiness” (Chkhartishvili 1965:5). In the book is subsequently discussed Sergo Orjonikidze’s works as a political figure on the various positions in the different periods of his life; when and how it began and what scopes have it engulfed.

It must be mentioned that, S. Chkhartishvili gives many praiseworthy words to the Great Georgian Bolshevik as well as supports and justifies his every step and political decisions. Here is a passage as a proof: “Sergo’s name is tenderly recollected by the Soviet people, knowing perfectly that Sergo completely devoted his excellent life to the working class and did his best to protect their interests, was fighting for Communism... Sergo’s name is forever immortalized as it is undividable part of the Soviet Union Communistic Party and the long-term history of Soviet Republics, as well as in the history of our divisive victory (Chkhartishvili 1965:93-94).

I consider that above cited passage does not require any further comment I only would like to indicate that the author S. Chkhartishvili’s standpoints about Sergo Ordzhonikidze are not different from any other wrong standpoints established during the dozens of years of XX century about the Georgian Bolshevik and thus, is estimated his public figure in the Soviet historiography.

In 1964, a book “Sergo Ordzhonikidze (Sergo)” is published. The authors of the book are V. Kirilov and A. Sverdlov and it consist of 16 chapters. The book represents the biographical text. The book from the point of view of the themes and evaluations does not differ from its predecessors. In the book is given the detailed information about the great revolutionary’s works that starts form the year of 1886, his birth and includes his death, the year of 1937. In the book is minutely described all the facts or historical-political events that are connected to the Bolshevik Party, at the same time, in it is also written about the strikes, demonstrations, organized revolts in the Southern Caucasus by the leadership of Sergo Ordzhonikidze. The authors conclude these occurrences with the various documents, letters and dispatches. They fully describe first the preparation period and then the Soviet Government establishment in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia by the leadership of the “Iron Commissioner”. Extract: “Leading the Russian Communistic Party (Bolshevik) according to the Central Committee decision, Sergo Ordzhonikidze paid great deal of his attention to helping and supporting the Georgian Bolsheviks, who were leading the Georgian workers and peasants in the fight against the Menshevik Government. Was created Non-Party Organization named as a “Revolutionary Committee” which included all the leading peasants”. On 25th of February 1921 Sergo sends a dispatch to Moscow: “Over Tbilisi is flying the Soviet Union Government red flag. Long alive to Soviet Georgia”! (Kirilov... 1964: 178-179).

It is a fact that in the books discussed here and also, in many others is positively evaluated activities of Sergo Orjonikidze that caused Georgia’s becoming the part of the Soviet Union. The fact is proved by V. Kirilov and A. Sverdlov in their book: “On 24th May of 1921 the whole Russia Central Committee gave S. Ordzhonikidze the highest military reward, a medal for bravery and heroism in the fights for his country’s freedom” (Kirilov.. 1964: 146). Moreover, he is appointed The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic Government representative in Tbilisi, as well as he is left as the Chairman of the Central Committee of the Southern Caucasus Bureau of the Russian Communistic Party (Bolshevik). It is reality; they appreciate the contribution of “The Iron Commissar”, his huge work and fight for the establishing the Soviet Government Regime in Georgia.

Thus, in XX century during the dozens of years the life episodes and political decisions of “The Iron Counsel of People’s Commissars” were depicted from the different angles. However, it is approximately last twenty years that the “desert” and “merit” of the great revolutionary has been evaluated accordingly in our country’s history.

In biographical novel “The Iron Counsel of People’s Commissars” by Rezo Cheishvili without any prettify, artistic or any literary fantasy in details is described Sergo Ordzhonikidze’s political merit – the Beginning and the End, what was his share in decision making of every historical event. Herein the attention is drawn to the Russia’s conquering and cunning plans towards Georgia. In the novel is completely revealed the Russia’s imperial policy.

According to the evaluation of a critic Ivane Amirkhanashvili: “The Iron Counsel of People’s Commissars” belongs to the writer’s “queer” list of works, the huge historical-informative material went to the artistic hearth and as a result the biographical novel about the life of Sergo Ordzhonikidze was created, which is read interestingly though its great merit represents somehow difficult for understanding irony, that is sometimes covered but reveals distinctively sensitive feature of the writer” (Amirkhanashvili 2003:98).

A writer Vaja Mikeladze in his critical essay about “The Iron Counsel of People’s Commissars” writes: “The book together with the other prominent documents relies on the relatively unknown materials: the documents and oral stories in order to be stripped by the sharp and ironical eyes and to reveal not only an individual’s morals degradation, but as well of the epoch, its genuine face that was created by the individuals who as well imprisoned themselves in it” (Mikeladze 1992:16).

On our behalf, we admit that in the novel “The Iron Counsel of People’s Commissars” is described in details the process of Ordzhonikidze’s formation as a revolutionary. According to the novel at the age of 17, he becomes the member of the Party in 1903. At this time, he is already in Tbilisi and from the medical school, where he is taking courses to become a doctor’s assistant carefully watches the argument about the Marxism and polite-economics between Iliia Chavchavadze and young Noe Zhordania. Soon he becomes friend with Russian and Georgian Marxists, also becomes the member of the Russian Social Democratic Party and starts spreading the proclamations. In 1906, he meets Stalin who likes him and gives some advices: “First read, especially Marxism and his grounds. Get education.” Stalin also gives him the list of the books to read.

At the age of 34 Sergo Ordzhonikidze is leading the military policy of the Caucasus. Rezo Cheishvili writes: “Sergo maintained extremely monotonous, international-Caucasian name and was comfortable with it, he never changed his surname. Many was called by “the Iron Counsel of People’s Commissars”, among them Yezhov. However, Sergo is never addressed by this title, though at that time all the Iron Counsel of People’s Commissars, if not turned out to be wrecker, was iron and I left it iron as well- “The Iron Counsel of People’s Commissars” (Cheishvili 1992:234).

The writer in the novel provides us with one documental source, which is created by the Moscow leaders of that time. Here is a quotation: “Those issues, which is related to the Northern Caucasus, possible can be solved by the board without Sergos attendance, but all those issues related to the Southern Caucasus (Georgia is not invaded yet) must be solved solely in his presence” (Cheishvili 1992:10). I consider that from the words is obvious that the character of Sergo Ordzhonikidze represents an enemy for his motherland. The authors of these orders were perfectly aware about the evil intentions and plans of our fellow-countryman and of course, by their support and willingness later they were embodied.

In that period, one of the most difficult issues represents the independence of Georgia. There existed different opinions, many generations’ appeal. In the novel author writes: “The Georgian Social Democrats admitted and after the inner hesitation declared the independence of Georgia. The Seim of the Southern Caucasus seized its existence. In the history of Georgia came time to restore a new but short era of State governing system” (Cheishvili 1992:91) and chronologically tells us stories which were followed this occurrence. This fact causes a great deal of indignation among the Bolsheviks: strikes, uprisings, organizing ethno-crisis. Noe Zhordania and his followers attempt to confront them. However, the independence of Georgia is short.

In the biographical novel is vastly described, how willingly is planned and later carried out invasion and conquest of the countries of the Caucasus by the Soviet Russia in order to establish its ruling. The writer depicts all the faces of the leaders, who were direct participants into the destroying the independence of Georgia.

As we have already mentioned, in the biographical novel nothing is left out, about the Bolshevik' life, everything is written according the chronological sequence. In 1926, Sergo Ordzhonikidze is appointed as the first Military Committee Secretary of the Northern Caucasus. He leaves for Rostov and soon becomes the Commissar of the Central Control Commission of the Worker-Peasants Inspection. The extract from the novel: "Thus, left Sergo the Southern Caucasus, Georgia, where he came across with so many inconveniences; he had to disturb all chiefs of all Bolshevik Party, had personal arguments, had to speak with iron will... went and left behind the best years, plaintiff persons of positions and displeased people" (Cheishvili 1992:191).

Stalin is one of the persons, who in 1921 orders to the Political Bureau oblige Sergo Ordzhonikidze to organize and fulfil a plan in order to make Georgia a part of the Soviet Union. In the novel is underlined, that he is very active, participates with great desire and willingness, and is involved in all decisions of destroying the independence of his motherland. Rezo Cheishvili points out: "Time went by. There never was a single chance to invade Georgia. Two Georgians were worrying about it. One's heart was breaking In Baku and another was smiling about the inevitable in Moscow" (Cheishvili 1992:114).

Rezo Cheishvili suggests his reader a dialogue: Stalin asks Ordzhonikidze: "What forces are needed to defeat Georgia. Can we hope to gain a complete victory?!" (Cheishvili 1992:115). The viewpoint of the writer about this fact is quite interesting. Extract from the novel: "We do not know the exact answer of Ordzhonikidze to this question, though we guess his respond. He could give such a guarantee of the complete victory that Stalin could sleep like baby. Nothing was to worry about; the fate of his country was decided. The Russian Empire did not require much preparation. Less than in a month they would put on Georgia's neck a loop, which they would pull tightly, than ever" (Cheishvili 1992:115).

The ending of the book is rather interesting. The writer recalls the memories of the revolutionary's daughter. An extract from the novel: "Father thought a lot and was speaking in Georgian, but to nobody in particular. I tried to listen to him, but he was mumbling something I could not understand.

- To whom are you speaking, father?
- Etera, you can't speak Georgian, right?
- How can I when you never taught!...
- You are right, Etera, I never did, but not everything is my fault!" (Cheishvili 1992:205).

His words are expressing plenty; his nature was horrible and at the same time, partly, sincerely miserable, in the novel we see him as an impressive person with colourful speeches that once again reminds what Hippocratic lived life means.

The book was enriched by the documental materials; the Resolutions of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party and of the Russian Conferences are mentioned numerous times in the novel as well as the reports read during the Party Meetings, the extracts from the memories of the Russian or Georgian politicians of that period, the letters of Stalin and Ordzhonikidze, dispatches... all these are used by author, in order to be much more convincing in the biographical novel representing the nature, moods and political activities of his character. Accordingly, Rezo Cheishvili parted from the specifics of the biographical novels well known for us e.g. Konstantine Gamsakhurdia "The Life Novel of Goethe" and modern biographical novel writer Rostom Chkheidze "The Fate of Pavle Ingorokva". From

the structural point of view, “The Iron Counsel of People’s Commissars” is sharply different from them. In the novel there are no chapters as well as separate episodes do not have own titles. After researching the issue, we are certain, that Rezo Cheishvili suggests different kind of biographical novel. The comparative stricture we will discuss some other time. This one is his first (and only) attempt in the above-mentioned genre. It was written in 1992, when it was essential to open the eyes of the Georgian society. I consider that he fulfilled the mission successfully.

In his biographical novel ‘Iron Counsel of People’s Commissars’ Rezo Cheishvili did not change and maintains the historical truth about this or that political or everyday life, facts and occurrences which are related not only to the name of Sergo Ordzhonikidze but also those famous political figures of the novel who were directly connected to that epoch.

In the conclusion, we are able to say, that the novel of the wonderful modern prose writer Rezo Cheishvili “The Iron Counsel of People’s Commissars” is written about the revolutionary, morally anti-Georgian fighter. This book in the field of the Georgian literature creates a biographical genre, which mainly represents the lives of the great public figures, in this very case gives diversity by inviting a satirical and antinational hero.

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