



„CAPTAIN VAKUSH" by GIVI MARGVELASHVILI  
(Conceptualization of ontological space of Is-Mih and the metaphorical  
image of Mamasakhlisi (Feudal Lord))

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**Abstract:** Givi Margvelashvili - a double emigrant, a victim of Nazism and Communism is rightly considered one of the greatest creators of modern times. His miscellaneous works are created on the boundary between two cultures i.e. two different worldviews. He started writing at the age of 30, when after leaving the Sachsenhausen concentration camp appeared in a completely foreign environment, in his historical homeland. There was only the German language attaching the writer to her aunt's family who decided to shelter the writer after his return to the homeland.

On the one hand working on German literature, and on the other hand, the literary disagreement that Margvelashvili showed against the current regime, increasingly formed the basis for the statement that "language and theme choose the writer" and not vice versa. That's why the characters from his book i.e. the inhabitants of his illimitable literary world had to meet the reader in a new reality.

One thing is clearly noticeable in Margvelashvili's literary work - the material having been developed in his book corresponds to the Western philosophical discourse, while the source of the topics within the texts are typically Georgian. Carlo Jorjaneli writes that in this autobiographical novel, "the facts are not distorted, at the same time the reality seen through the eyes of the youngster almost becomes the fruit of fantasy, the real stories often carry a grotesque image intensifying the general connotation of the book" (Margvelashvili 2005: 7).

"Captain Vakush" is an autobiographical work belonging to the genre of historical novel. At a given moment the main focus of the manuscript is the first volume of the writers work. The writer's literary art is preserved in the text where the messages are conveyed grotesquely with the help cynicism and allegory. An excursion in the novel is led by Givi Margvelashvili - a teen writer. The principle of historicism is observed in the novel; the facts are based on real events and conveyed ironically; mental image of the totalitarian regimes is identified by metaphorical subtexts.

In this paper, we want to focus on one of the chapters of his autobiographical text "Captain Vakush" entitled "Is-Mih and His Captives".

**Keywords:** Captain Vakush, Totalitarianism, Father, Inheritance, Advanced, "Is-Mih".

## Introduction

Givi Margvelashvili - a double emigrant, a victim of Nazism and Communism is rightly considered one of the greatest creators of modern times. He was born in Berlin in a family of Georgian emigrants in 1927. The writer was only four years old when his mother, filled with nostalgia, committed suicide; thus the orphaned child grew up with his father and German nannies. Due to the historical misfortune, Georgia remained a purely linguistic homeland calling the country his own "Vaterland". Georgian was a foreign language for the writer as he had spent his childhood and adolescence in Berlin. Carrying the burden of an expatriate family, he had to emigrate after World

War II. In 1946, the writer and his father were abducted by Soviet special services; his father was shot. The writer had to spend a year and a half in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp; later he returned to Tbilisi where he remained in the country until "perestroika" (restructuring) period.

Givi Margvelashvili is a great existentialist. His works in phenomenology are particularly noteworthy; Together with Zurab Kakabadze and Merab Mamardashvili he launches a new type of Georgian philosophical tradition. The writer's worldview was greatly influenced by the philosophy of Heidegger and Foucault. In the case of the writer, Heidegger's model of "being-at-home" (Zuhause-sein) is somehow modified, as the house is given an approximately new function and the idea of Nietzsche's eternal return also acquires an existentially conditioned meaning. The writer became an eternal emigrant, an acclaimed "alien" in literature and philosophy.

Together with his texts, Givi Margvelashvili strives to escape the irreconcilable reality and tries to overcome closeness to the specificity with the help of self-identification. He is a typical malcontent who manages to cast off the shackles for regaining freedom. Hence the writer suggests the space-time conception models which would be desirable to be implemented according to maxims from Kant's moral philosophy.

### Discussion

Givi Margvelashvili is a postmodernist author. Moreover, he considers his own texts to be postmodernist. The subject of his passion is the concept of the French philosopher - Gilles Deleuze, according to which "instead of dots we draw lines". So his prose is a meta text i.e. a meta prose. The author calls his own works an ontotext and believes that the lyrical characters of his book are somehow determined and fetlocked counting on the reader only. They are unable to do anything until they accept the author's consent. Thus the author becomes the rescuer of his book's characters, studies their existence and believes that people are defined by the text.

Ontotext, as well as the intertext, represents a sensible phenomenon; For Givi Margvelashvili, human existence and textual reality are interrelated. The phrase "Stop Death inside the Texts!" may serve as the starting point of the writer's prose. The writer believes that when the author dies, the characters gain ultimate freedom and behave the way they would like to be treated.

Hermeneutics is the key enabling the reader to apprehend Givi Margvelashvili's works. The main task of hermeneutics is to show how the comprehension process is achievable. Based on this method, we underline the importance of prior knowledge in order to reveal the hidden meaning of Margvelashvili's text. In this paper, we want to focus on one of the chapters of his autobiographical text "Captain Vakush" entitled "Is-Mih and His Captives".

The writer Naira Gelashvili notes that the main theme of Givi Margvelashvili's novels is to understand the Georgian historical, cultural and social reality through other eyes. "Georgian themes often use words from native language in the German texts transforming them into basic concepts and leitmotifs" (Margvelashvili 2018: 218).

"Captain Vakush" (Volume 1) is a text rich with postmodernist details. Narration full of symbolic characters is established in the reader's consciousness; its hermeneutic task is to explain the liminal phenomenon "that performs the transitional phase function between a force-controlled destructive reality and an imaginary transcendental cosmos" (Ratiani 2010:112). According to Carlo Jorjaneli, in the given autobiographical novel, "the facts are not adulterated; at the same time, the reality considered through the youngster's eyes, almost becomes the fantasy; True stories often acquire grotesque style, making the essence of the book more significant" (Margvelashvili 2005:7).

„ In order to convey and evaluate the stories properly, one should analyze the concept of "KOGEL MOGEL" (metaphoric implication of certain occasions/dates from the writer's autobiography) inside the texts first of all. This is really challenging ... Every new "KOGEL MOGEL" is completely incomprehensible, because its history seems to be stuck the the braces of a toddler's bed". (Margvelashvili 2005:9). Discussion around the concept of "KOGEL MOGEL" from the historic perspective has become the principal goal for the writer. Reality embedded in specific dates evokes anamnesis which, hidden in a metaphorical-grotesque context, requires an appropriate explanation

from the reader. What does the term “KOGEL MOGEL” symbolize? In this sense, in our opinion, it refers to the totalitarianism in general, and more specifically it implies certain historical dates in order for the reader to easily identify which dictatorship is characterized by a given date: Nazism or Communism. Unfortunately, the harm of both regimes has negatively affected on the writer and his family. Hence this encrypted code word points to the cruelty of the totalitarian and authoritarian ideology.

„KOGEL MOGEL 27” is not a local concept at all. It is directly linked with the events happening before and after 1927. It is also closely related to the numbers 17, 37 and 47 in terms of the “KOGEL MOGEL” concept. These events used to periodically interfere the writer’s lifetime from different directions swinging him backwards and forwards“ (Margvelashvili 2005:10).

Givi Margvelashvili was born on December 14, 1927 in Berlin whose father was Tite Margvelashvili - Georgian emigrant, historian and ethnographer, one of the representatives of the national liberation movement. The writer's subsequent fate was greatly influenced not only by the global movements and force distribution all over the world, but also by his father’s occupation, who used to speak broadly about the Georgian culture and history in German magazines and newspapers and exposed the dangers posed by Bolshevism (Margvelashvili, 2018).

In the given passage of the autobiographical text, the writer uses Georgian words to convey the reality, and the semantics of each word creates a relation between a so called abstract model and its specific manifestation. The founder of phenomenology, Husserl, believed that one should have a direct access to reality; though we can revert this method from reality to entity, likewise having been formed the structure of entity this way (Brachuli et.al., 2006). Therefore, we are supposed to find an explanation of the events being conceptualized in the given period of life, perceive them from the ontological viewpoint and focus on their metaphorical-semantic features.

"Is-Mih" was the name of the canteen, which had become a gathering place for Georgian emigrants in Berlin. The writer recalls that he often visited this place together with his father, almost every week. Many Germans also visited the place enjoying the delicious Georgian dishes there. During the meetings with the compatriots, the dressing style of his father was noticeable; he used to wear Chokha (traditional coat dress costume for Georgian men) in such occasions. "Once little Vakush was also sewn such coat hanging uselessly in the closet” (Margvelashvili 2005:40).

Emigrants met in Is-Mih, "the patriots used to gather here every day sharing nostalgic memories about their abandoned homes in the Caucasus (Margvelashvili 2005:71). Here they traditionally spoke Georgian and guests were treated to Georgian dishes and Kantsi (drinking horn) full of wine. This ethnocultural event is deeply framed in the memory of the author and, as an eyewitness, the writer conveys to us the feelings what must have been very close to him. However, due to certain circumstances he was limited to direct communion only with a foreign cultural tradition. He considered Kantsi “as an extremely important accessory to be taken as a gift while moving to Charleston and Boston” (Margvelashvili 2005:48).

It is noteworthy that Vakush did not like such gatherings.“He used to feel restless under the strict supervision of Tamada (toastmaster at a Georgian feast )” (Margvelashvili 2005:48). The reason of his discomfort was Colchi patriots debates. The “KOGEL MOGEL” phenomenon used to rise bitter dispute in “Is-Mih” especially when German military forces approached Caucasus (Margvelashvili, 2005:72).“

This passage of the autobiographical text is particularly interesting with its expressive language created by the metaphorical images of the patriots or ex-patriots. The story begins with the fact that the Georgian "Is-Mih" has a new president who has to present his program to the specially assembled compatriots. The reader's attention is drawn to the fuglemen, who "belonged to the numerous defeated military units having been huddled out from the war" (Margvelashvili 2005:85). People in civilian clothing were greeted by regular guests of the canteen with handshakes and sincere sympathy. Everyone was curious to hear what was going on in their motherland. At that time, the Goliaths' struggled for world domination dragging their homelands into its whirlpool. By fate Mamasakhlisi (feudal lord) of Alaznispiri appeared at the heart of the events. Tiny Kolkheti

resembled a cork bottle stopper being shaken by the sea and the inhabitants looked like they were involved in the Dance Macabre” (Margvelashvili 2005:86). Who is Mamasakhlisi (feudal lord)? Or what is meant under the word “Tiny Kolkheti”? Who are fuglemen? These questions are answered by the author himself: „Their compatriot was the chairman of the authority in Kremlin” (Margvelashvili 2005:86). For more clarity the use of historical context for comprehending the sense of the world- wide shifts and the role of migration in this process is urgent.

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland and World War II broke out. On September 17 of the same year, the USSR engaged in hostilities and attacked eastern Poland. The country failed to repel the two strongest states, and Poland ceased to exist as an independent state. Germany and the Soviet Union occupied the territory of Poland according to Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The Hitler&Stalin political tandem did not last long. On June 22, 1941, Germany declared war on the Soviet Union. World War II entered a new phase. Thousands of Georgians were called up for compulsory military service and national divisions were formed. The Soviet Union suffered a particularly heavy loss on the Kerch Peninsula. About one hundred thousand Georgian servicemen were killed there. More than 700 thousand people were called from Georgia during the Second World War, more than 300 thousand of them died, some were declared missing and others were taken captive (Bakhtadze, n.d.).

We are particularly interested in the way the captive Givi Margvelashvili talks about in this section and how the events ended up in the "Is-Mih" in Berlin. The fact is that about 35 thousand Georgians fought on the German side during the Second World War. These were people who had emigrated after the Soviet Union, their descendants or the militaryman who had been taken captive in the first phase of the war; although they chose to fight together with the German troops instead of being imprisoned in the concentration camps. The Georgian Legion appeared in 1942 as part of the German Wehrmacht. Emigrants played a big role in its creation. It is particularly noteworthy to mention that some emigrants were in favor of Germany, as they believed the independence of Georgia would have possibly been restored in case of Soviet Union defeat.

Givi Margvelshvili writes: “They pointed to the long and enduring struggle for the native hearth and home. In the political turmoil from the east, their homeland became a stronghold: they escaped the Mongols, repulsed the Arabs and Persians, and at the moment they had to endure the Russians.” (Margvelahvili 2005:86)

Many Soviet soldiers were captured during the war. Unfortunately, the Soviet authorities did not sign the 1929 Geneva Convention, which made it possible for international organizations to protect the rights of soldiers. In addition there appeared Stalin's decree according to which the captive was declared a traitor to the military homeland. In this way, in fact, the red government sacrificed its own citizens (Georgians Abroad, n.d.)

Georgian emigrants made every effort to free the captives. The "Georgian Union Headquarters" was set up, which was responsible for seeking the Georgians in captive camps, releasing them and taking care of their future conditions. “Representatives of their homeland demanded allowances for all the scattered defenders of their land. They were too few in this country to leave their own people alone and doom them for death. On the contrary, everybody should have been assembled and reinstated as they had been faithfully protecting their country for centuries. (Margvelashvili 2005:87).“

In the text, the word "Kolkheti" is a symbol of ancient Georgia. The author notes that “the representatives were invited and asked to formulate their argument in favor of Colchis in written form ... A package of documents was prepared ... Correspondence was carried, numerous sealed and stamped reports were sent to various institutions (Margvelashvili 2005:87).“ Many POWs survived by emigration who were later transferred to the German Wehrmacht hoping that if Hitler reached the Caucasus, Georgia would have been declared as an independent country.

Immigrants were well aware that wicked empires were dragging innocent nations into a pool of blood. While presenting his program, the new chairman of the Georgian community says that "the feudal lords (Mamasakhlisi) synchronously start a battle and destroy the patrimonies attacking each other from lands, water and even the air" (Margvelashvili 2005:89).

A solution must have been found. Immigrants had two options - they had to choose between bad and worse; Which conqueror did they prefer to fight to save their homeland? „Each ex-feudal lord had to stand among the other feudal lords in the name of his own patrimony and prevent mutual destruction and massacre as much as possible” (Margvelashvili 2005:89).

It is also known that the other half of the immigrants were opposed to cooperate with the Nazis because they believed that their aggressive policies posed a threat to humanity. The following passage from the text is focused on this detail: "They contacted all the potential militant feudal lords (Mamasakhlisi) heralding them their former patrimonies and even decided to discuss the issues regarding common patrimony with the Russian feudal lord in case of mutual agreement“ (Margvelashvili 2005:91).

What does patrimony represent? It is a metaphor for the union that should have been ruled by the chief. It is not an accident that the capture of prisoners in "Is-Mih" coincides with the election of a new president. Therefore the patrimony is the body (institution) which is ruled by the superintendent. The latter is synonymous with a dictator for Givi Margvelashvili. "One should not convert patrimonies historically denying the existence of feudal lords, but somehow define their practical role, as they (feudal lords) theoretically look very conceited". Here there is talk about the German term "Hauschen", which means a little cabin but the translator uses the word - "patrimony". In this context, the writer tries to explain that every human union is based on a strict hierarchy headed by the ruler or Mamasakhlisi (feudal lord). (Margvelashvili, 2005:88)

Givi Margvelashvili is an eyewitness to what regimes create. According to the writer, patrimony is a type of organization which is being managed while Mamasakhlisi (feudal lord) is a person making individual decisions. The ex-feudal lord is no different from the existing feudal lord in the idea - "The ex-feudal lord can learn a lot from the current feudal lord and vice versa. They are capable of becoming perfect if they start listening to each other" (Margvelashvili 2005:91). Thus, one model of authority is replaced by another and the process becomes endless, forms of governing regulations are obvious – tyrannical and dictatorial.

In this episode of the autobiographical text, the writer reveals the truth; there is only one reality - „war comes from current feudal lords while peace comes from the ex-feudal lords” (Margvelashvili 2005:91). Essentially nothing changes, tyranny is replaced by tyranny, and slavery by slavery, because “there existed people who felt admiration towards a completely different character having a successful career in Kremlin as the moon never changes, no matter from which side it is shining” (Margvelashvili 2005:93).“

## Conclusion

The main topic of Givi Margvelashvili's works (novels, short stories, miniatures, plays, philosophical or linguistic works) is the struggle between existence and prior-existence; it is also a type of attempt, decision, attitude, invincibility and the constant readiness to act in a “literary” manner.

Every single thing is codified in the autobiographical work; everything is obvious. The repressive policies of the dictatorship have a negative impact on humans. People with different values cannot withstand the pressure and the existence in a constantly controlled environment becomes infeasible.

In this episode of the book, the writer portrays the ruthless face of dictatorship with the highest manifestation of artistic aesthetics in a specific game-like literary manner. We can read the tragic stories of specific people. Citizens in a tyrannical state have become immigrants; title of feudal lord implies constant control and total obedience. That is why the author tries to describe the existing situation with the idea of building Wartburg (i.e. the castle-tower of expectations –the author’s interpretation) implying the idea of creating an alternative space where people will be able to form a type of microstate model after having been escaped from existing reality. That is why Vakush longs to become the captain of the castle-tower of expectations paving his own way towards Dixieland (i.e. the space of European values) (G.Margvelashvili’s interpretation). Before that he was in Doixiland (implication for Nazi Germany) among the feudal lords and ex-feudal lords.

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