

E. Canetti and V.V. Rozanov: On the Type of a Protean Artist

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Abstract: The article argues the originality of the poetics of the Austrian writer and Nobel Prize winner Elias Canetti (1905-1994) and the Russian writer and philosopher Vasily V. Rozanov (1856-1919) on the example of the so-called “short fiction”. The author adheres to the terminology proposed by the writers, namely “fallen leaves” by Rozanov and “notes” by Canetti, leaving unattended the discussion by literary critics and linguists regarding the definition of the genre under the consideration. A heterogeneous nature of creativity of both the authors and its thematic homogeneity, which is particularly evident in the analyzed genre, is pointed out. The genre under the study led to the conclusion that any topic in the interpretation by Rozanov and Canetti gets metaphysical and existential meaning. The history of the “fallen leaves” and “notes”, their spontaneity and at the same time thematic integrity as well as the presence of linguistic paradoxes reveal specific nature of the imagery of the author's style which highlights the problem of the thinker's individuality. Particular attention is paid to the category of transformation that allows to reconstruct the type of the artist's protean personality and identify a number of features of Rozanov's and Canetti's poetics.

Key words: Proteanism • Transformation • Genre originality • Poetics • Mythological thinking • The author's mythology

INTRODUCTION

The attempts to bring together the artistic worlds of the great artists can be made on different levels, from the genre of the literary work to the world perception. In the case of Vasily V. Rozanov (1856-1919) and Elias Canetti (1905-1994) genre originality and the so-called “short fiction” that allows to “bridge together” the poetics of the Russian philosopher and the Austrian writer on the one hand and the features of the artist's personality on the other hand may serve the starting point. Personal contacts of the artists are excluded because of half a century discrepancy, so far no one has mentioned even an indirect effect of Rozanov on Canetti through his creativity as there was no so-called “literary influence”. Both the writer and the philosopher are extremely relevant to the present day, as researchers have repeatedly noted and their contemporaries wrote Rozanov and Canetti were artists of the exclusive identity with a prophetic gift. “The Russianness” of Rozanov and “Austrian” of Canetti have, strange as it may seem, a lot in common. This, above all, is a premonition of things to come, a frightening realism of the “new reality”. Perhaps another

reason is that their work was affected by the turning points in the history of the world that they witnessed on the will of fate. For Rozanov such events were World War I and the October Revolution which brought about a fundamental change in the very foundations of Russian life. Canetti had seen two wars that shook the world, shared the fate of his people and was deprived of his homeland after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It is a priori that both writers embody a protean type of the artist in their creativity. With all the external variability “proteanism” according to German scholar H. Stammle, Rozanov had a constant commitment to the same topics [1]. Rozanov's creativity is represented by a great variety of subjects, philosophy, literature, religion, church, culture, art, theater, state, mythology, sex, family, marriage, etc. Rozanov, a philosopher, offers his vision of the world significantly different from that of other prominent representatives of Russian religious philosophy of his time and even now it has not lost its relevance and originality. Throughout his life Rozanov remained “one of the most controversial, most admired and most reviled Russian authors of modern times. He stood in the crossfire of all the big guns of opinion in

his time, from right to left, from religious to resolutely secular, from Christian and Orthodox to neo-pagan and cosmic-vitalistic. He has also been considered, appreciated and analyzed as one of the outstanding innovators of Russian creative rose, as the authentic Russian inventor of the interior monologue, the stylistic pioneer" [2, 143].

Canetti's biographer S. Hanushek characterizes him in much the same way believing that the creation of a protean artist's biography is a big risk, as capturing the essence of the person who performs various roles ridden by the power of transformations is daunting [3,15]. It is also important to consider that Canetti's like Rozanov's "thematic homogeneity" (thematische Homogenität) is an important feature of his "heterogeneous creativity" (heterogenes Werk) [4,1], as Canetti during his long creative life on the pages of several works of various genres tried to investigate such phenomena as "mass", "power", "death", "transformation", etc., creating his own perception of the reality. Canetti wrote on the mission of the artist in society and the destiny of the poet, he was interested in Eastern philosophy and classical Russian literature, the nature of tyranny and the mechanisms of power. All this allows us to consider Canetti's creative work in a wide literary and historical context, tracing parallels with his contemporaries and identifying the elements of intertextuality [5]. Obviously, Rozanov and Canetti belong to the same semantic field which doesn't exclude the existence of the coincidences as well as differences in points of view on the most important existential problems.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Methodological principles that guide the author of the article are based on the traditional historical and cultural approach to literature which combines the experience of classical literary criticism, both Russian and foreign. These are primarily biographical, historical, literary, comparative historical, comparative and typological methods. In addition, the leading method is structurally semantic method that allows to examine the features of Rozanov's and Canetti's imagery.

The Main Part: As is it well known, the concept of "proteanism" goes back to the figure of Proteus in Greek mythology, the god of the sea and riddle having the ability to various metamorphoses, transformations, transmutations. In other words, he possesses the gift to take the shape of different creatures and substances.

In addition, Proteus has the gift of prophecy, which is hidden from anyone who fails to discover his true form. Proteanism features are common to both authors and are most clearly identifiable in the "fallen leaves" and "notes". Nowadays the role of Rozanov in the history of society at the end of XIX and early XX centuries has been acknowledged and the contribution he has made to the development of Russian literature including the modern one is evident [6]. There is an opinion that Rozanov with his distinctive style and artistic vision is not only a "forerunner of Modernism" [7,6], but also a harbinger of Russian postmodernism in literature [8,4] since he positioned himself as a destroyer of traditional literary forms, "terminator" of literature, a mystic and irrationalist who denied the European civilization, a rebel who fought with all formulaic, but also the creator of a unique genre considered in this paper.

Global recognition came to Canetti in his mature years, only in 1981 he was awarded the highest award, the Nobel Prize in Literature. His emergence as an artist dates back to the beginning of the century, when, according to Canetti, the "world fell apart" ("Die Welt war zerfallen") and only having the courage to show it in a state of decay one can give its true representation [9, 126]. This maxim characterizes the poetics of the novel "Blindness" (in English the book is known as the "Auto-da-Fé") [10, 11] penetrated by the modernist view of contemporary reality.

This article concerns specific works by Rozanov and Canetti, the genre belonging and consequently genre originality which still cause a lot of controversy among literary critics in Russia and abroad. In case of Rozanov these are the so called "fallen leaves" the book "The Solitary", "Fallen Leaves", "The Mortal", "Sakharna", "The Transient" and "The Last Leaves" that make it possible to evaluate to the full extent Rozanov's literary innovation. In case of Canetti these are "The Notes", which over the years emerged as separate books capturing particular periods of the writer's life: "The Notes" (1942-1948) ("Aufzeichnungen 1942-1948"), "The Wasted Reverence. Notes 1949-1960" („Alle vergeudete Verehrung. Aufzeichnungen 1949-1960“), „The Human Province. Notes 1942-1972“ („Die Provinz des Menschen. Aufzeichnungen 1942-1972“), "The Secret Heart of the Clock. Notes 1973-1985" („Das Geheimherz der Uhr. Aufzeichnungen 1973-1985“), "The Pain of the Flies. Notes" („Die Fliegenpein. Aufzeichnungen“), „Notes from Hampstead. From the Notes 1954-1971“ („Nachträge aus Hampstead. Aus den Aufzeichnungen 1954-1971“), etc.

V.K. Donahue, the author of the preface to the book “The Worlds of Elias Canetti” (even the title of the book suggests the idea of ‘multi-faceted’ Canetti), gives the following characterization of the notes: “This is a side of the author that even those familiar with the wayward genre of the “Aufzeichnungen” (perhaps rendered best in English as “jottings”) have not yet seen. Here we witness Canetti at play, unencumbered with the strain of argumentation and proof, toying with the texture and sound of language that is very much on the margin (and in some cases well beyond the pale) of semantic meaning” [12, XVI].

In the creative work of the two authors “fallen leaves” and “notes” are important milestones embodying the purity of the artist's soul, its “handwritten nature”, the flight of ideas in their scope and at the same time exposing the highly personal, intimate.

The authors' need to commit the inner world to the paper can be found in their following statements. In the book “The Solitary” (“Uedinennoe”) Rozanov writes: “The wind blows at midnight and carries the leaves away <...>. So life in the fleeting time tears off the soul our cries, sighs, fragments of thoughts, floor feelings <...> Which being sound fragments have the significance that “came down” straight from the soul, without being processed, without purpose, without premeditation, free from the odd <...> Just “soul is alive” <...> that is “it was alive”, “breathed” <...> For some reason I have been fond of these “unintended exclamations” since so long. Actually, they are constantly flowing in us, but you do not have time (no paper at hand) to put them down and they die. Then I would fail to call them to remembrance. However, I managed to bring something to paper. The notes accumulated. And so I decided to collect these fallen leaves. What for? Who needs them? I just need it. <...>” [13,459].

In the article “Dialogue with a cruel partner” Canetti formulates his attitude to the “notes” saying that “notes” are spontaneous and contradictory. “They contain ideas that emerge with an unbearable tension, but often with great ease. <...> Man is diverse, multi faced, it is his greatest happiness and only for a short time he will live in the way as if he were different. At such moments when he considers himself a slave to his goal, the only thing can help him: he must yield to the variety of his inclinations and indiscriminately write down everything that comes to his mind. All of this should emerge as if they came from nowhere and were not going anywhere, for the most part it will be short, quick, often lightning-fast, unchecked,

uncontrollable, unfussy and completely pointless. The writer who usually strictly maintains order for a short term becomes a submissive toy of thoughts that came to his mind” [14, 45-46]. Thus, from the cited extracts follows that for both the artists it was vital to have a kind of an outlet that would give a chance to speak out, pour out the self without thinking about the reader. A “stream of consciousness” which is also the “flow of experience” is spread before the reader. In these literary miniatures the lyrical backbone is clearly felt, however the philosophical one does not disappear. This is a lyrical and philosophical prose which is characterized by artistic specificity. Like “fallen leaves”, “notes” are spontaneous, arbitrary and original. They are heterogeneous in form and style—from brief aphoristic sayings to lengthy essays, from pure philosophizing to diary entries recording the specific life events. As was stated by Canetti, his notes are distinguished by the absence of persons and events, what can't be with such finality applied to Rozanov who mentions a lot of names, specific events that are logically interwoven into a discussion of existence. However, any issue in the interpretation by Rozanov and Canetti assumes a metaphysical, existential meaning. The chronology of the notes is far from being exact in dates and events, rather it is a kind of “the history of thought”. Rozanov also follows this principle of the organization of his unique Rozanov's time and space, though along with the exact date of writing, up to the time of day, he often indicates a scene of the event and impressions (“in the forest”, “on Nevsky Prospect”, “the repair”, “cleaning the library” and so on).

As it was noted earlier Canetti and Rozanov have many “common themes”. Both authors' perception of death is associated with religion. It is known that Rozanov's attitude towards Christianity was complicated, controversial. “The Fallen Leaves” was written in a period of relative peace with Christianity therefore there is no feeling of the author's another “ideological turn”, on the contrary, in the fragmentation and chaos that is so characteristic of his style existential motives of his religious philosophy had been clearly revealed. “Yes. Death is *also a religion. A different one*” <...> “Yes, “death” beats even math. “Two times two is zero” <...> “Who needs this zero? Could God need it? But then who does? What for? Or could death be *stronger* than God himself. But then wouldn't it mean that death *itself* is God? *In God's place?* Terrible questions” <...> “I'm afraid of death, I don't want death, I'm horrified by death” [15.6] (italicized by Rozanov and Canetti).

Canetti is far from religious denomination, his attitude to religion is of purely intimate nature. He mythologizes death, the confrontation of death becomes the basis of the author's mythology: "The main courage of life is that it hates death and despicable and hopeless in their desperation are those religions that obscure this hatred" [16,257]. "It is impossible to imagine your own death. It seems unreal. Unreality of the unreal. Why did you always call it a protest? Just the lack of experience" [17, 331]. "*Insult by death*. But how can it be represented?" [17, 351].

Another theme for consideration is Rozanov's and Canetti's mythological thinking. There is no doubt that both authors are mythologizing artists because their perception of the world is rooted in the historical memory of humanity which is reflected in myths, legends and fairy tales. According to P. Angelova Canetti's system of perception of the world is based on the "myth of transformation" (Mythos von der Verwandlung), which can be found in all the works of the author, "notes" included [19, 131]. Being by nature a "mythoman" (Mythoman) [18], he sincerely believed that "bad poets erase traces of transformations while good poets openly demonstrate them" [16, 262]. Rozanov's mythology has a completely different nature, Rozanov is "a myth-maker", his "Fallen Leaves" is nothing but the result of his myth-making.

CONCLUSION

Comparative approach to Canetti's and Rozanov's creative work within a genre framework is justified and productive as it allows to raise the deep layers in the outlook of the artist, to touch the great mystery of creation, find, sometimes subtle, sometimes overt features of the national identity of each of them, that allows to judge their identity, both national and transnational, of the universality of the artist's talent as a kind of philosophical category. At the same time, it is hardly possible judge about Rozanov's and Canetti's philosophy as a harmonious and consistent teaching. We can only try to highlight some key points of their world view.

Due to a special sensibility and vivid talent of letters Rozanov and Canetti achieved an unprecedented synthesis of thought, fact and image, found a new way in the reflection of the reality in its dynamism and diversity through its subjective and fragmentary reproduction. Rozanov's and Canetti's 'trademark' is the allocation of

the individual words in italics, the use of punctuation to enhance the emotional state. Thus, the writers place emphasis promoting dialogue with the reader, using an "optical trick" they help the reader to identify the main points in perception.

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