

E. CANETTI'S AND A. P. PLATONOV'S MYTHOPOETIC CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

We study the specifics of mythopoetics of the novel "The Blinding" by Austrian writer, the Nobel Prize laureate Elias Canetti (1905-1994) and the novel "Chevengur" by Russian writer A. P. Platonov (1899-1951). The starting point for comparing is mythopoetic context. Mythopoetics and poetics of the work are correlated as a particular and a general, therefore, mythopoetic context can comprise mythological images and literary myths, allusions, motifs, author's / individual mythologema, various transformations of the myth, etc. We study the peculiarity of functioning the biblical motifs in the text space of the novels. Platonov's "Russianness" and Canetti's "Austrianness" find much in common, the crisis of the late nineteenth - early twentieth centuries demanded the use of special linguistic devices, the development of a unique idiostyle from the artist. The study of Canetti's and Platonov's novels in perspective of mythopoetic context seems to be productive for revealing common regularities of development of European literature of the first third of the twentieth century.

Keywords: *mythopoetics, the Bible, biblical motif, mythopoetic context, idiostyle, mythologizing, the author's myth, myth transformation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The scale of literary works by Canetti and Platonov today is not in question, the two authors are the classics of standing reputation of world literature. The common is their perception of the world, as the both perceived the modern world as "the kingdom of anonymity" (Zverev, 1990, p.42). Platonov is a unique writer, his poetics is beyond comparison, so any attempt to find a point of contact with the representatives of "foreign" literature deserves attention. Important in this connection are the attempts previously made at drawing a parallel between Platonov and Kafka from the standpoint of typologization of artistic form in the literary process of the twentieth century (Keba, 2001), tracing the "stylistic convergence" between Platonov and Canetti (Shastina, 2016).

As in "a writer of "philosophical "prose", (Seifrid, 1988, p. 367), in Platonov, in the center of the narrative the existential themes, issues are traditionally associated with human psychology and history, are the background against which the main developments take place.

T. Zeyfrid views Platonov to be the artist with a tragic vision of the world, with his own prophetic gift ("a writer of tragic and prophetic vision") (Seifrid, 2006, p. 1). A truthful statement concerning Canetti is that in the novel "The Blinding", and the dramas, and in the philosophical study "Crowds and Power", he was able to foresee the future troubles of humanity. Works by Platonov absorbed the basic features and principles of artistic reflection of reality, "in particular the poetics of mythologizing" (Yaroshenko, 2004, p. 4).

The both authors in their works appealed to mythology. According to K. P. Zepp, all the important works by Canetti, including the novel "The Blinding", indicate the mythological thinking of the author (Zepp, 1990, p. 42). Canetti follows P. Angelov's "footsteps of mythological thinking", drawing on the different

anthropological and philosophical theories, the scholar describes Canetti's type of thinking in the center of which is "the myth of transformation" (Mythos von der Verwandlung) (Angelova, 2005, P.7).

"Thematic homogeneity" (thematische Homogenität) (Knoll, 1993, p.1) of works by Canetti allows to study the works of different genres in the form of a "single text" (Shastina, 2004). Also in Platonov study there have been established a tradition to treat "all works by Platonov as an integral text, which is characterized by the structural and thematic unity" (Kostov, 2000, p.9).

The present study decides a range of tasks: to characterize the specific feature of mythopoetics of the analyzed novels, on the one hand, and, to touch upon the question of Canetti's and Platonov's place in the paradigm of European literary process of the first third of the twentieth century, on the other hand.

2. METHODOLOGY

Methodological guidelines, the authors of the article are guided by, are based on the traditional historical and cultural approach to literature which combines the experience of classical, domestic and foreign literature. This is, above all, the biographical method as well as the methods of comparative literary criticism and lingvostylistic analysis.

Reference to new publications about Canetti and Platonov as well as a comparative analysis of mythopoetics of the novels "The Blinding" and "Chevengur" allows the authors to consider novelistic works of both authors in a new manner. Taking into account the features of Canetti's and Platonov's individual style, revealing the prerequisites of stylistic convergence of the novels contributes to a more profound interpretation of these works.

3. RESULTS

It is a priori that Canetti and Platonov belong to different cultures, have different roots, disparate aesthetic views. But, as the present study shows, the attempt to compare certain principles of poetics of these authors and their most important works proves to be productive. Both novels – "The Blinding" and "Chevengur" - were written almost contemporaneously - in 1930s of the twentieth century.

The thematic homogeneity of Canetti's and Platonov's works allows to study their literary heritage in the form of a "single text", since their "sense sphere" shows a great number of intersections, both wrote about the crowd, power, death, transformation, man's place in the micro- and macrocosm. The characters in both novels are often in the situations of the border between reality and unreality, between past and present, in their sleep and when awake, between life and death.

To depict the reality of a crisis era, both writers sought to create "their own language", to work out their own idiosyncrasy. A particular manifestation of the author's style is an imaginary indirect speech, carrying "Platonov's narrative polyphony to limit" (Mikheyev, 2003, p 8.). In Canetti's novel in a stream of imaginary indirect speech there "lies not only the ability of author's silence – it is this form that gives his hidden presence away" (Pavlova, 2010, p. 144). Both authors predicted the advent of a "new time", the language in their novels is intended to show the social "failure of communication".

Mythopoetics of the novel "The Blinding" refers to the fact that the writer uses allusion of the Greco-Roman, Christian, Akkad, Sumerian, Chinese mythological system in the text. Platonov's texts also comprise allusions and reminiscences of classical mythology, but at the same time there dominate mythological images of Christian and Slavic pagan origin. Transformation and modification of various myths are traced in the literary system of both novels.

4. DISCUSSION

Treatment of the myth as a way of modeling the artistic world connects Platonov's and Canetti's works with neo-mythological modernistic literature of the twentieth century which is characterized by not only appealing to mythology but also transformation of mythological stories in tragifarical or grotesque manner.

4.1. The History of Writing the Novels

The work on the novel "The Blinding" "as one of the greatest books of the twentieth century" (Donahue, 2007, p.1) was finished in 1931-1932. The plot of the novel is quite trivial: the protagonist Peter Keane - scientist sinologist, marries maid Teresa who seeks to lay hands on all fortune of her ill-starred husband, his main wealth - his library. Peter's younger brother - George, a well-known Parisian psychiatrist, arrives to save his unfortunate relative. He manages to deliver his brother from Teresa's society and return his book to him. But the story cannot have a happy end, Peter Keane sets fire to his library and perishes in the flames.

The plan of the only finished novel by Platonov - "Chevengur" appeared in 1926. The work on the book, according to various sources, was lasting from 1927 to 1928/1929, up until 1951, the author corrected the manuscript finishing individual scenes, rewrote some episodes. The events in "Chevengur" are developing in the south of Russia in the 20s. The main character - Sasha Dvanov- being left an orphan in early childhood, was taken into care by foster father - Zakhar Pavlovich.

Canetti writes about the concept of the novel: "Once it has occurred to me that it is impossible to depict the world in the way it is depicted in old novels, so to speak, from the point of view of one writer, the world has fallen apart, and only having the courage to show it in a state of decay, it is still possible to give a true representation of it" (Canetti, 1990, p. 126). This phrase often cited by Canetti critics appears to be a vivid illustration of the author's intention which is embodied in the pages of "ironic parable about the ontological abyss" ("eine ironische Parabel über den onthologischen Abgrund") (Boose, 1996). On Canetti's recognition, "it was necessary in a strict sequence to devise extreme individuals like those who really make up the world and to compare these individuals brought to the edge in their complete dissimilarity" (Canetti, 1990, p.126).

Platonov in his essay "Factory of Literature" also writes that "it is necessary to reinvent not only the novels but also the methods of inventing". It is important for Platonov to find a "half-finished product" - foundation for future work, since "art is not on its own, not objective but results from addition (or multiplication) of social, objective phenomenon with the soul of man" (Platonov, 2011).

4.2 Peculiarities of Poetics of the Novels and Approaches to Its Study

Both novels have been quite productively studied for a long time, in both domestic and foreign literary criticism. Based on the purpose of the present study, it will be a matter primarily of the similarity of principles of poetics of the authors in general and mythopoetic contexts in particular. The language of the novels is worth being discussed. Canetti indicates that the perception of a person through his language look is the best way to learn the main thing about him: "I have realized that even though the people are talking to each other, they do not understand each other, their words bounce, hitting the other words, that there is no greater error than the notion that language is a means of communication between people. <...> Beautiful, ugly, noble and ignoble, holy, brute words - they all fall into this messy tank, and each fishes out that corresponds to his own stagnation, and repeats it as long as the word is changed out of all recognition, until it does begin to express something completely different, the opposite of what it meant

once.” (Canetti, 1990, p. 39-40). In such a way Canetti explains the phenomenon of “acoustic mask” which, like a fingerprint, is one of the main characteristics of the speaker.

Canetti’s favorite device is an appeal to the experienced speech, because it contains unique opportunities of interpretation of characters’ speech, provides a dialogue between the author's word and the quote introduced in the text, and the character’s word. As a result, there appears an image that comprises several points of view of the author, the characters and also correlates them with literary and mythological prototypes.

Platonov in conversation about the “the methods of invention” of the novel also lays emphasis on the fact that “from now on, it is necessary not to write using the words by inventing and copying a living language but using the right pieces of the living language (of “stolen” into the notebook) by assembling these pieces into the work” (Platonov, 2011).

I. Brodsky believes that Platonov “dedicated himself to the language of the era, he saw such depths in it that by having looked into which once he could slide no longer over the literary surface” (Brodsky, 2001, p. 189). Monography by R. Hodel concerns functioning of the experienced speech (*erlebte Rede*) in Platonov's prose (Hodel, 2001), the scholar points out to the originality of Platonov’s narrative strategy, which lies in the unity of experienced speech and the elements of the narration in the first person (“in relation to two narrative reference poles – free indirect discourse and *skaz*”) (Hodel, 2011/2012, p.130).

4.3 Mythopoetic Context of the Novels

Discussion of the mythopoetic context implies a detailed coverage of the “presence” of numerous references to mythology in the text of both novels. The intertextual interpretation of both novels with bringing the Bible into as a precedential text is impossible to be called an innovation in literary criticism. This aspect in studying the novel “The Blinding” is brought out in a number of works by foreign and domestic literary critics (Bartsch, 2007; Greiner, 1999; Schutti, 2006; Shastina, 2013 and others.). The literary discourse of Bible is attractive for Canetti as an artist. Blindness, transformed into a blinding as a reflection of the new reality, occurred to him under the influence of the fine arts. He perceived painting by Bruegel “Six Blind Men” as the embodiment of blindness, Rembrandt’s canvas “Blinding of Samson”, on the contrary, fixes a process of blinding which will end with blindness. It is generally known that the source to inspire Rembrandt and Canetti is the Bible - The Book of Judges (Ch.16,15-30) which gives only few lines of the history of blinding. The biblical story of blinding becomes a central motif in the novel by Canetti, the author brings the Bible into the present tragedy.

The third chapter of the novel “The Blinding” the title of which is “The World in the Head” describes reflections of George Keane, a doctor of psychiatric clinic and his arguments with his elder brother. The author introduces the biblical story of creation of the world into the narration: “He filled the two rooms with the world. He created what he needed, and after his six days, on the seventh, got it. Instead of resting on his laurels, he presented language to his creation”(Canetti, 2000, p. 431) (“Er bevölkerte zwei Zimmer mit einer ganzen Welt. Er schuf, was er brauchte, und fand sich nach seinen sechs Tagen am siebenten darin zurecht. Statt zu ruhen, schenkte er Schöpfung eine Sprache”) (Canetti, 1999, p. 441).

Transformation of the biblical image is illustrated in the chapter of the novel “Jude and Savior“ („Judas und der Heiland“), we are talking about the film “The Last Supper“, which Theresa saw in the cathedral. The well-known parable of the feast of Jesus Christ and the twelve apostles, when he predicted the betrayal of Judas is presented as if inversely, because the interpretation of Teresa, which is a militant ignorance, leads to a complete distortion of the biblical story.

Peter who identifies himself with Christ is associated by Theresa with Judah; Teresa, who dreams about “an interesting person” imagines herself to be a white dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit; Grub, “an interesting person”, in fact, the greedy trader, is transformed in the eyes of Teresa in the Savior.

In Platonov, one can trace numerous allusions to biblical stories to be subjected to all sorts of transformations. The stepbrother of the main character - Prokofy Dvanovgotov, brings his stepbrother to Zakhar Pavlovich for “rublyovka”, which is a direct allusion to Judas’s betrayal. “Travel with an open heart” brings chaste Alexander Dvanov together with Jesus Christ. Nikitok from the gang of anarchist Mrachinsky, intends to shoot Alexander, he sees him as the Saviour, and the rib of the Virgin, and all the Christian generation (Platonov, 1990, p. 98).

In the novel “Chevengur”, according to N. M. Malygina, “there are a lot of hints” that indicate that Alexander Dvanov – “a chevengur Christ” (Malygina, 1995, p.39). Therefore, it is logical that “before Easter Zakhar Pavlovich made a coffin for his adoptive son “as the last gift to his son from master-father” (Platonov, 1990, p.80), which, fortunately, was not necessary, because there were the resurrection. Chevengur appears to be as a handmade model of “creation of the world”, the world has its ways and customs, its morality, its time, its opposition to the death, its expectation of a “second coming” of Christ.

4. SUMMARY

The perspective of the study of the art world of Austrian writer Elias Canetti and Russian writer Andrei Platonov proposed in this paper opens up new prospects for studying their works in the context of European literary process of the first third of the twentieth century. The distinctive national identity to be inherent in both authors, paradoxically, reveals much in common, although it is clear that each of them is governed exclusively by individual principles in art. The history of writing of both novels points to the deep connection with the crisis era of the turn of the centuries.

The study of functioning of the biblical myth in the text space of the novels enables to expand understanding about writers’ mythological thinking, to see the point of value judgment about the being, to follow the evolution of the artists’ ethical and philosophical views.

It was crucial for Canetti and Platonov to create “their own” language, on the one hand, being in tune with the times, on the other hand, allowing the reader to plunge into the sphere of everyday life, there is no boundaries between reality and unreality. This explains the presence of linguistic paradoxes in the text of novels. “The stylistic convergence” is also found in the fact that both authors make full use of the potential of the experienced speech which creates a unique tone, indicates the special nature of the imagery of idiostyle that highlights the problem of the personality of the artist-thinker, “standing test of time”.

5. CONCLUSION

When characterizing the novel of mythopoetic context, we will talk about the originality of Canetti’s and Platonov’s artistic world, the possibility to learn and reflect era through mythological images. Canetti’s and Platonov’s referring to the biblical myth as the most frequent precedent text indicates that the literary discourse of the Bible has influenced the formation of their idiostyle. The analysis of biblical motifs helps to better understand the dynamics of the author’s value attitude to the being, indicating the genetic closeness of their perception of the world with mythopoetic traditions.

It turned out to be productive the use of intertextual and intermedia methods of analysis which made it possible to trace the intertextual interaction, interaction of literature and arts (Canetti), to identify the role of precedent text, which contributed to disclosing the mechanisms of reception of the Bible in the text of

the novels “The Blinding” and “Chevengur” finding out the elements of transformation of biblical motifs and author’s myth.

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