

“Animalistic Context” of Elias Canetti

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Abstract

The article describes the originality of the artistic world, created by an Austrian writer, a Nobel Prize winner Elias Canetti (1905-1994), the author of the unique "animal context". Animalism in the most general sense is a sentient human relationship to animals. The author of this article uses the term 'anthropological animalistic' because Canetti explores human nature through the prism of the animal world. The attitude of the writer towards animals is multifaceted: from sympathy to a special kind of reverence. The work uses an extensive literary material, which allows studying the animal images in the works of various genres. It is noted, that in Elias Canetti's novels different manifestations of animalism are shown. On the one hand, Canetti's story-telling about animals has the mythological character, animals' figures can be attributed to the category of representative symbols. On the other hand, the writer appeals to the world of animals to illustrate the modern society. Special attention is paid to the research of transformation category, because a person's ability to transform, according to Canetti, is the main feature that distinguishes him/her from the animal.

Keywords: animalism, autobiographical myth, biographical myth, animalistic context, anthropological animalistic, transformation, mythologization, authoring myth.

1. Introduction

The book, published after Elias Canetti's death "About animals" ("Über Tiere") (Canetti, 2002) is a collection of fragments from the works of different genres: the novel "Auto-da-Fe" ("Die Blendung"), the notes that had been created throughout his life, a philosophical research "Crowds and Power" ("Masse und Macht"), the collection of miniatures «Unsleping ear. 50 characters" ("Der Ohrenzeuge. 50 Charaktere"), the book "The Voices of Marrakesh" ("Die Stimmen von Marrakesch"), an autobiographical trilogy "The Tongue Set Free. Story of my Youth" ("Die gerettete Zunge. Geschichte einer Jugend"), "The Torch in My Ear. Life Story. 1921-1931" ("Die Fackel im Ohr. Lebensgeschichte. 1921-1931"), "The Play of the Eyes. Life Story. 1931-1937" ("Das Augenspiel. Lebensgeschichte. 1931-1937"). The appearance of this unusual book wasn't left without the critics' attention (Macho, 2002; Reiterer, 2002, etc.) who appreciated the idea of the "literary encyclopedia of animals" compilation. The epigraph to the book is Canetti's words: "Immer wenn man ein Tier betrachtet, genau hat man das Gefühl, ein Mensch, der drin sitzt, macht sich über einen lustig" (Each time one observes animals, there is a feeling that the man who sit in it, chuckles over you) (Canetti, 2002, p. 10).

The writer, who managed to surprise the readers when he was alive, now, years later, intrigues the fans of his work as well. The biographical myth existing in the time of Canetti's life, nowadays came to the stage of demythologizing. A brief review of the works, published after Elias Canetti's death and books about him were presented earlier by the author of this article (Shastina, 2014). In 2014, another book was published, on which pages Canetti, in his specific way, speaks about the eternal. "The book against the death" ("Das Buch gegen den Tod") is dedicated to the rejection of death: a theme, which became a key theme in Canetti's original mythology (Canetti, 2014), the book also includes notes from different periods of his life. The book editors used the writer's archive, based in the Central Library of Zurich— the city, where Canetti spent the last years of his life and was buried.

The idea to bring together the thoughts, confirming the strong rejection of the death, was not fully implemented during the life of the writer. Of course, addressing animals is also present on the pages of this book, for example: "Certainly the animals are conscious of a very real uneasiness in the presence of the death of one of their own kind. None of them, however, make any pretense of burying their dead ceremonially. The first recorded examples of the latter come from the age of the so-called Neanderthal men, some fifty to one hundred thousand years B. C. (Canetti, 2014, p. 10).

2. Methodology

Methodological bases, used by the author of the article, follows the traditional historical-cultural approach to literature, which combines the experience of classical literature, domestic and foreign. These are, above all, the biographical method, as well as the methods of comparative literature and lingvo-stylistical analysis.

Biographical method allows setting the relationship between the writer's biography and "the animal context" features, created by him. An (auto)biography is seen as a defining moment of creativity. Special attention is paid to the disclosure of such terms as "autobiographical myth" and "biographical myth". Basing on the autobiographical myth, a biographical one is born, pinning the facts of the writer's life presented by the author himself into the mass consciousness of the popular readers. Consideration of some new publications about Canetti, as well as the analysis of previously unpublished books of the Austrian writer, lets the author of the article study his biography from a new point of view.

The comparative-historical method (comparativism) involves the identification of common elements in various national literatures for a sufficiently long period. Animalism, rooted in mythology, is a characteristic phenomenon of literary works of different epochs and cultures representatives.

For the comparative literature, unlike the traditional comparative-historical one, on the one hand, the process of updating terminology is typical. The vocabulary is enriched with universal concepts and categories (anthropological animalistic, animalism, author's myth, etc.). On the other hand, an active assimilation of modern techniques, in particular, of intertextual ones, is obvious.

Linguistic methods of analysis traditionally refer to various methods of analysis of the text and its language. Beside the general linguistic methods, its own stylistics produces, corresponding to the subject of the study and the analysis purposes. Keeping records of Canetti's individual style promotes a more thoughtful reading of his works.

3. Results

The perception of reality through the animal world lets one talk about the artist's worldview: "Er denkt in Tieren, wie andere in Begriffen" (He thinks by means of animals like by means of other concepts) (Canetti, 2002, p. 95). Animal figures add to human traits typification, making the author "free" from excessive detail. Canetti is an artist-animalist in the sense that he treats animals as creatures standing in one row with a man, moreover, his animals are "more human" than people. Admiring the 'younger brothers' immensely, he creates his "animal context". His fiction world has its own specific character, because the writer with a particular mythological thinking filled the created context with mythical animals. "Having mixed" various mythological systems in his different in genre works—from Sumer-Akkadian mythology to Greek-Roman and Eastern ones, Canetti demonstrated the efficiency of myth-poetical method of depicting reality not only in literature, but also on the pages of his philosophical study "Crowds and Power", as well as in flash fiction—"Jottings". "Anthropological animalistic" by Canetti is a unique phenomenon, as the animal world in the works of the Austrian writer appears not just in a "personified form". When the animal world is depicted, anthropomorphic and animalistic traits "compete" with each other depending on the situation and the author's intent.

4. Discussion

In the world literature there are many examples where the writers, showing the "truth of life", describe animals, that's why the topicality of the art animalism problems in modern literature is undeniable. The famous fairy tale-parable of the English writer J. Orwell's "Animal farm" (Orwell, 2012), full of humor and sarcasm, foreshadowed the post-war social experience. The example of a modest farm shows the model of dictatorship, because the laws dominating the "barnyard" are taken from human life, the totalitarian society sends its "citizens"—animals—to the slaughter. Canetti is far from simple socialization, although in some cases his criticism of homo sapiens is no less urgent than the J. Orwell's.

4.1 *Animalism and mythology*

As you know, in the most general form of animalism represents a sensible human relationship to the animal world, it is therefore natural that the animalism roots go back to the primitive society, in which depths myths are formed. The role of animals, as well as of the animalistic element in world mythology, is great. It is determined by the value the animal had at the early stage of the humankind development. That's why the mythologized animals are present in the mythological system of different world peoples.

As for his "biased" attitude to myths, Canetti repeatedly claimed that myths are wisdom treasury for him, which has

the inexhaustible potential, "the myths are more amusing as they are full of transformations" (Canetti, 1990, p. 288). The world, seen "through the myths", according to Canetti, appears in complete truthfulness, in the myth, there is no opposition between the world and the human perception of it. Thus, Canetti formulates his own approach to myth, the study of which is necessary for the comprehension of the author's artistic world. Addressing the myth became the writer's method of reality cognition, because he understands not only the "the old myth", descriptions of customs, rituals and ceremonies of primitive peoples and disappeared cultures but also historical messages about travels, diaries, biographies, as well as psychiatric practice descriptions. Such a wide range of myth interpretations is another feature of Canetti, which distinguishes him from many "mythologizing" authors. In the work "Jottings", dated by 1947, he wrote: "Myths mean more than words to me, and this is the deepest difference between me and Joyce. But my piety to the words is of another kind, too. Their sovereign integrity is almost holy for me" (Canetti, 1990, p. 268).

According to K.-P. Zepp, all Canetti's works are filled with myths, and this allows to speak about the special type of the author's mythological thinking, according to which the recreated mythopoetic world model fills the text space, becoming one of the dominant principles of poetics (Zepp, 1990, 42).

Canetti's system of the world perception is based on "myth making", according to P. Angelova, (Mythos von der Verwandlung) (Angelova, 2005, p. 131). As a kind of "myth-man" (Mythoman) (Hornik, 2006), Canetti believed that "bad poets erase traces of transformations, while good ones openly demonstrate them" (Canetti, 1990, p. 262). It's necessary to dwell upon what Canetti calls "transformation". In his opinion, the poet is the keeper of the transformations, the keeper in a double sense. First, he absorbs literary heritage of humankind, so rich in transformations, at the same time, he is prone to transforming himself. The biographer of the Austrian writer S. Hanuschek, notes that the creation of the protean artist's biography, which is undoubtedly true about Canetti, is a risky thing, since it is difficult to grasp the essence of the individual, performing different roles, riven by transformations (Hanuschek, 2005, p. 15).

4.2 "Anthropological animalistic" of Elias Canetti

Oxymoron "anthropologic animalistic", in our view, perfectly reflects the originality of Canetti's artistic world, in which quite real animals live and carry the burden of human problems. According to H. Timmermann, Canetti creates such sketches, whereby "each animal can be perceived as a man" (jedes Tier als ein potentieller Mensch angesehen worden wäre) (Timmermann, 1985).

Contrasting a human versus an animal, with the latter being better, is another feature of Canetti's artistic thinking. His animals are creatures, without which a human life is impossible to the full: "You haven't any friends among the animals. Do you think that this is a life?" (Canetti, 1990, p. 352).

Staring at a human through the eyes of an animal, he frequently gives a verdict to the humankind: "Es ist nicht auszudenken, wie gefährlich die Welt ohne Tiere sein wird" (It is hard to imagine how dangerous a world will become where there are no animals) (Canetti, 2002, p. 13). Animals are able to watch with the human eyes, while a person is able to transform into an animal: "Von den Tieren sind wir abhängiger als sie von uns: sie unsere Geschichte, wir ihr Tod. Wenn es sie nicht mehr gibt, werden wir sie alle mühselig aus uns erfinden" (We are more dependent on animals, than they are on us: they are our history, we are their deaths. If they disappear, we will look for them in ourselves) (Canetti, 2002, p. 45).

In the "Jottings" by Canetti there are so-called "changelings" (Umkehrungen), in which this opposition is absolute: "Der Hund nahm seinem Herrn den Maulkorb ab, behielt ihn aber an der Leine" (The dog took off its owner's muzzle, but left him on a leash) (Canetti, 2002, p. 59).

Elias Canetti tried to find in world religions the answer to an important question—what should be the attitude of a person to death. Buddhism does not satisfy him because it refuses too much, but does not answer the question about death. Christianity is much closer to him, because here, at least, dying is central, the theme of the cross and crucifix is present in all forms of Christianity. There is not a single Indian teaching, according to Canetti, which really would be about death, so Canetti creates his own religion. He is against death itself as death is horrible, he denies it the right to have any positive sense, deprives death of its attractiveness and false glitter.

"The main brevity of life is that it hates death and those religions that tend to obscure this hate, are contemptible and hopeless in their desperation." (Canetti, 1990, p. 257). However, the rejection of death requires continuous awareness of its existence, so Canetti creates his own author's myth of death, criticizing fashionable at that time theories. So, Freud's "instinct of death", according to Canetti is the sibling of ancient and gloomy philosophical teachings, which is much more dangerous, "as it is camouflaged by biological terms with the attraction of modernity" (Canetti, 1990, p. 307).

Canetti includes animals into the process of thinking about the human life sense: "Wir sind *ernster* als die Tiere. Was wissen die Tiere vom Tod!" (We are *more serious* than animals. What do animals know about death! (italics

hereinafter belongs to Canetti) (Canetti, 2014, p. 10)

Experience accumulated by humankind during the two world wars, had a great influence on the formation of the writer's artistic thinking. Canetti's rejection of death should not be understood literally, he speaks, first of all, about death as a social phenomenon. The majority of humanity is passively watching the death of the warring parties, thereby supporting the death. In "The book of death" (Totenbuch), which includes a thematic compilation of notes, one of the sketches is called "Ants and death" (Ameisen und Tod), which starts with the words: "An ant knows nothing about epidemic and all of our diseases" (Canetti, 2014, p. 7-8). People are experimenting, checking the "ant" 's persistence in "inhumane" conditions, eventually coming to the conclusion that learning about death is the "event" of human history ("Die Erkenntnis des Todes scheint das folgenschwerste Ereignis der menschlichen Geschichte zu sein. ") (Canetti, 2014, p. 7-8), so people should learn from insects that are humane, even when fighting: «Er will in die satte und wunderbare Welt wiederkehren, wenn niemand mehr stirbt und die Menschen ihre Kriege durch Ameisen, die sehr human sind, austragen lassen» (Canetti, 2014, p. 17) (He will return to this wonderful and well-fed world, if no one else is dying and people show their war on the ants, which are very humane).

In 1936, Canetti's speech on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Hermann Broch contained important ideas on the writer's mission, the relationship of the artist with the time in which he lives, his responsibility to the time, as a real writer is always at the mercy of his time, he his its "last slave" (ihr niederster Knecht) and " its dog" (Hund seiner Zeit). It is clear that the word "slave" carries fewer positive connotations than "a dog" that is indefatigable, his wet nose poking around, missing nothing, it is unsaturated (Canetti, 1990, p. 24).

4.3 Canetti's animalistic motives

On the pages of the first book of his autobiographical trilogy, "The Tongue Set Free", Canetti outlines a series of events where there is such an animal as a wolf. It is known, that a wolf is a mythical animal in many cultures, it is connected with the idea of the werewolf, fearful for the humans. The totemic myth about a werewolf is transformed in the child's minds into the fairy-tales about the werewolf, heard in Rušuk (Rustschuk) the hometown of the writer, located on the lower reaches of the Danube in Bulgaria (today's name is Rousse) (Canetti, *Die gerettete Zunge*, 1994, p. 16-18). In addition, these tales are complimented by the scary stories related to wolves' attacking people, the memorable image of a father under a wolf mask is associated with fear (Canetti, 2002, p. 63-64).

In the afterword to the book "About animals" a famous German writer B. Kronauer writes about Canetti's two-dimensional attitude to the world of "younger brothers"—helpless sympathy and distanced admiration (Canetti, 2002, p. 109). Telling the story of his childhood, Canetti uses opposition, which explains his attachment to the world of animals and the lack of understanding between mother and son, evolving over the years. Two worlds—"the world of mother without animals" (tierlose Welt der Mutter) and the world of the child who is experiencing "hunger", yearning for an animal (ausgehundert nach Tieren)—do not intersect. In this case, it is difficult to overestimate the role of animals in the writer's inner world, animals show his associative perception of reality: the world, which has a place for the animals, is filled with kindness and, on the other hand, the absence of animals indicates a lack of emotion.

It is noteworthy that in the novel "Die Blendung" the descriptions of nature are practically absent, animals are also almost unmentioned. This is hardly by chance, if to take into account how Canetti treated animals. The idea of the novel was to show "the world in a state of collapse," at this the writer assumed that "the world is no longer possible to depict like in previous novels" (Canetti, 1990, p. 126). The poetics of the novel, which in 1981 was awarded the highest award—the Nobel Prize, deserves a separate discussion, beyond the scope of this article. The inhumanity of the world in the approach to the anthropological disaster represented by the Second World War, is reflected in the "new reality", where a person as a part of nature, is actually alone. The human world without animals is, according to Canetti, deprived of humanity.

At the same time, the author "compensates" the lack of animals' real images" in the text of the novel, widely using metaphors involving animal images. For the main character Peter Kien, his wife Teresa is the "angry cat", "the bloodthirsty Tiger", in her eyes, he is "a beaten dog". A retired police officer, a sadist Pfaff, who beat his wife to death, is calling itself "a red cat", ready to destroy the entire district: "Let them know their mouse hole! I'm a red cat. I'll bite and eat them" (Canetti, 2000, p. 461). In the eyes of George, Peter Kien's brother, a successful psychiatrist, he is a "ravenous beast", "a lion in his den", which does not speak but growls. Eventually, Pfaff becomes the owner of the Zoo, which is logical.

An allegorical figure of the cat is transformed on the pages of the novel "Die Blendung" into the image of a tiger, a jaguar, a red cat. George on the eve of the meeting with his brother dreams about two cocks" the bigger one was red and weak, the smaller one was sleek and sly" (Canetti, 2000, pp. 517-518). It is obvious that it is about the two brothers. The

"dream" script describes further events development—the elder brother's disputes—the red cock—with the younger brother, the smaller cock, the denouement of the novel is logical, which is described in the chapter "the Red cock" ("Der rote Hahn") (Canetti, 1999, pp. 502-510). The red cock is burnt, a predicted outcome, guessed in a dream, it becomes a cruel reality. A red cock for Peter Kien, who is a sinologist, the "main China specialist" of his time, according to the Chinese tradition should serve as a talisman against fire, but the plot makes it a symbol of fire.

Canetti often uses metaphors in naming the animals in various comparisons—when describing the appearance of the person and his character, when characterizing the phenomena of social life, since "a man" is not a miracle for him anymore. Miracle for him is "the animal" (Canetti, 1990, p. 356).

In the third book of his autobiography "The Play of the Eyes" Canetti writes about G. Broch. When describing the great contemporary, Canetti uses a visible comparison with "a big and beautiful bird"—"every poet - has his own animalistic heraldry" (Averintsev, 1996, p. 327) but this is a bird with clipped wings, looking at which, you see that it lives by memories of that past time when it still could fly (Canetti, 1994, *Das Augenspiel*, p. 28).

In 1954 year Canetti took a trip to Marrakesh, a city located in Southwest Morocco, in the foothills of the High Atlas. The impressions of this journey are the fourteen sketches—different in the size and in the content. He published them only thirteen years later, as reflected in the title: "The Notes after One Trip" ("Aufzeichnungen nach einer Reise"). Thus, Canetti emphasizes that the book appeared later, that it was not based on the traveler's notes meeting the exotics of a faraway African country, but the book is the thoughts of what he saw and heard. The author being distanced in time reveals the nature of impressions—only the most important things are worthy of mentioning. The book "The Voices of Marrakesh" (Canetti, 2004) takes a special place among the works of Elias Canetti. Unlike all the prose, here real people are described, not the 'figures' which only replace human images. Canetti was looking for the traces of the ancient culture his ancestors belonged to, in the variety of Eastern life.

Canetti is prone to grotesque imagery, his grotesque in the accentuated perception of reality, nothing is smoothed, on the contrary, it is dramatized, a special voltage is created and passed to the reader. The first chapter in the book is called "Meetings with the Camels" ("Begegnungen mit Kamelen"), it is dedicated to human abuse of frightened animals, which feel the approach of death. Their destiny is clear - they all have to be slaughtered. The man is strong and cruel at the same time, he defines the fate of others. The crowd, which has no rights, in this case - a herds of camels, and unlimited power over it exercised by a some people - isn't it the main conflict of humanity, present in all cultures. Canetti devoted a study, which took him almost thirty years, to the dichotomy of "crowds vs power" ("Crowds and Power").

V. K. Donahue writes: "What we witness in "Begegnungen mit Kamelen" (Meetings with the Camels), and, mutatis mutandis, in the book as a whole, is the very process of narrative displacement. While "Canetti" the tourist is adamantly fixated on fulfilling his escapist fantasy of gazing upon the enigmatic camels bathed in the dusky orange light of a North African sunset, the author enters retrospective enough "extraneous" data into the story that in the end the camels themselves transmogrify into haunting icons of human suffering" (Donahue, 2007, p. XII).

For Canetti the central paradigm of human activity is "hunting", which is a projection of all major anthropological categories, such as "mass", "power", "transformation", "survival". The human ability to transform, according to Canetti, became the main feature that distinguishes the human from the animal. At the same time, the animals had been exposed to transformation earlier than the humans, however, it took a man a century to come out of the world of animals and to become "a homo sapiens".

The artist also "hunts", but his trophies are different. He hunts for impressions—seen and heard, he is "a keeper of transformations".

In the book "Crowds and Power" Canetti dwells on the mechanisms of transmutation, he relies on numerous myths and tales involving animals and insects. Discourse on the nature of authority is also supported by using animals' images. For example, the difference between violence and power Canetti illustrates with the relationship between a cat and a mouse: "The cat, which caught the mouse, is expressing violence towards it. She overtook her, grabbed and will now kill. But if the cat begins to play with the mouse, a new situation arises. <...> Space, blocked by the cat, moments of hope, given to the mouse, though the cat follows it carefully, cherishing the thought to destroy it, all this together—space, hope and intention of destruction—is the true body of the power or the power itself." (Canetti, 2012, p. 346-347).

In the novel "Die Blendung" the author himself speaks via psychiatrist George Kien's words: "Monstrous, untamed, mighty and sweaty beast, it wanders in us all, it boils in the depths, much deeper than the mother's womb. Despite its antiquity, it is the youngest living creature, the most important creation of the Earth, its purpose and its future (Canetti, 2000, p. 440). Thus, Canetti created a unique image of the mass, using vivid metaphors, which let us imagine the "beast" personally: it is inseparable from human nature.

To our mind, right is the idea that in the "Jottings" animals play a special role. Thus, the book of notes "The Pain of

the Flies" ("Die Fliegenpein") Canetti describes an insect's "sufferings" after becoming a human's "victim" (Canetti, 1995). Canetti, telling the terrible story of a "living necklace of flies" on the neck of some lady, once again draws attention to the problem of man's inhuman attitude to nature, the problem of so-called "mind outlay". Canetti remains true to himself here, his permanent attitude to animals—worship, call for humanity, as well as a look into the depth of human nature: "He tore off the spiders' legs and threw them, helpless, to their own net". Animals are taking places carefully around the edge and watching the men caught."(Canetti, 1990, p. 312).

5. Conclusion

When describing the "anthropological animalistic" the question is the uniqueness of the writer's art, his ability to learn and show animal images. Canetti's «animalistic» worldview is similar to myth, since it contains the features of the eternal, imperishable. Canetti convinces humanity to save humaneness, the measure of which will be the animal: "Der Mensch ist das Maß aller Tiere" (Human is the measure of all animals) (Canetti, 2005, p. 47). The presence of animalistic images in Canetti's texts indicates genetic affinity of his attitude to mythological poetic traditions. Anthropological animalistics is a system of images and motifs of the fauna, which includes animalism as artistic interpretation of reality. The study of the artistic world of the Austrian writer, Nobel prize laureate Elias Canetti opens new perspectives of studying his work and art specifics.

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