



ARTÍCULOS

UTOPIA Y PRAXIS LATINOAMERICANA. AÑO: 25, n° EXTRA 10, 2020, pp. 135-141
REVISTA INTERNACIONAL DE FILOSOFÍA Y TEORÍA SOCIAL
CESA-FCES-UNIVERSIDAD DEL ZULIA. MARACAIBO-VENEZUELA
ISSN 1316-5216 / ISSN-e: 2477-9555

Method and Style of Religious and Philosophical Criticism of Vasily Rozanov

Método y estilo de la crítica religiosa y filosófica de Vasily Rozanov.

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Este trabajo está depositado en Zenodo:
DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4155265>

ABSTRACT

The appearance of a significant and new figure in criticism cannot be accidental. Criticism as a specific form of activity presupposes an equally special mindset for which somewhat different tasks are important than, for example, for a philosopher, an artist or a scientist. The purpose of the present article is to show how the specific method of working with text and the unique literary style of Rozanov determined his way from philosophy to criticism. Methodological principles and stylistic features are discovered in V. Rozanov's literary and critical heritage, which later become attribute features of Russian religious and philosophical thought.

Keywords: Literary criticism, Religious philosophy, silver age, Vasily Rozanov.

RESUMEN

La aparición de una figura nueva y significativa en la crítica no puede ser accidental. La crítica como una forma específica de actividad presupone una mentalidad igualmente especial para la cual las tareas algo diferentes son importantes como, por ejemplo, para un filósofo, un artista o un científico. El propósito del presente artículo es mostrar cómo el método específico de trabajar con el texto y el estilo literario único de Rozanov determinaron su camino de la filosofía a la crítica. Los principios metodológicos y las características estilísticas se descubren en la herencia literaria y crítica de V. Rozanov, que luego se convierten en características de atributos del pensamiento religioso y filosófico ruso.

Palabras clave: Crítica literaria, filosofía de la religión, edad de plata, Vasily Rozanov.

Recibido: 25-08-2020 Aceptado: 28-10-2020



INTRODUCTION

The development of religious and philosophical criticism was carried out in parallel with the development of the ideas of its representatives. In this connection, it is problematic to determine an original feature of a critic and a stamp being common to the entire religious and philosophical current. To solve this problem, it is necessary to refer not only to works written in the "mature" period of critics' works, but also to their early literary work.

The fame of V. Rozanov as an original thinker in the province of literary criticism was preceded by a certain preparatory period, the background of his entry into criticism. Comprehension of his critical method, genre, style originality has already begun in modern works about Rozanov. However, researchers do not take into account the very same preparatory period. Turning to the origins of the formation of literary critical position allows us to comprehensively consider this sphere of activity in Rozanov's heritage. For this purpose, we have referred to Rozanov's early philosophical work *On Understanding*, as well as to his correspondence with N. Strakhov (Rozanov: 1989).

METHODS

This study is based on the first principles of hermeneutic analysis (M. Heidegger, G. Gadamer, M. M. Bakhtin, E. J. Hirsch and others), which suggest the presence of several dimensions in the interpretation of the text. So, one of these dimensions, according to Hirsch, is a metaphysical one, which is designed to describe the "result of an objective historical study of the text" (Hirsch & Cultural Literacy: 1988, p.2125). Analyzing Rozanov's work through the prism of this dimension is the first step into the hermeneutic circle. Furthermore, the study uses the historical-functional method with a general description of the critical heritage of the Silver Age (Pashkurov & Razzhivin: 2016), the comparative method (Bekmetov: 2015), and the receptive method when considering the ways of interacting with critics and fiction (Vafina & Zinnatullina: 2015), literature and philosophy (Bekmetov et al.: 2019).

RESULTS

Research in the field of religious and philosophical criticism traditionally begins with determining which attributes are inherent in a given direction. This, in turn, allows us to determine how original or, on the contrary, the secondary thought of the representative of religious and philosophical criticism is. An essential feature for attributing a critic to a religious-philosophical direction is the context in which the author's judgments are exercised (Ma & marion: 2019).

So, T. V. Oblasova argues that the main distinction of religious and philosophical criticism is the analysis of plot conflicts in the context of philosophical problems (Oblasova: 2002, p.22). D. N. Dianov claims that the main feature of the trend is that the interpretation "takes place in the context of the Orthodox-Christian worldview" (Dianov: 2004, Villalobos et al.: 2018; Ramirez et al.: 2019). V.N. Konovalov points out that in addition to philosophical issues affecting ontological, epistemological and other theoretical issues, the term "philosophical criticism" reflects an intention to schematize the literary process (Konovalov: 1995, pp.102-109). Finally, V. V. Shabarshina points to the "antinomy of the philosophical system of the world" inherent in this criticism (Shabarshina: 2005, p.185). This antinomy is primarily associated with the dissemination in Russia of Hegel's ideas to have indirectly influenced all spheres of public life (Lamb: 1987).

Besides, rethinking of the basic religious postulates was characteristic of the religious consciousness of the Russian intelligentsia of the late 19th – early 20th centuries. Many scholars associate this fact with a reorientation of the thought of the Russian intelligentsia from religious to political interests: while the role of

politics increased, the influence of the church weakened and led to the need for religious and moral search (Read: 1979).

Consequently, the following can be distinguished as the main features of religious and philosophical criticism:

1. Understanding the conflict in a literary work from the perspective of religious or philosophical problems;
2. The desire to contrast writers, religious and philosophical currents, literary elements of the text;
3. The schematization of the literary process;
4. The intention to rethink the traditional forms of social consciousness.

Correlation of Rozanov's early works with those features that modern scholars identify as attributive allows us to argue that if the influence of Rozanov's works on religious and philosophical criticism could be exerted, then it is needless to mention about the opposite effect (of direction on his representative). Rozanov's debut as a critic took place not in *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* (1891), but in several pages in the book *On Understanding*, published in 1886. Speaking about the different types of artists, Rozanov writes about religious creativity and the artists' attitude to faith:

1. The faith of objective artists (or observing artists) is pure and tranquil (they don't think about it but are always orthodox). Such artists, according to Rozanov, are A. S. Pushkin and I. A. Goncharov.

2. The faith of subjective artists (or psychological artists) "is always more likely a thirst for faith" (Rozanov: 1989, p.516). Such, according to the writer, is the faith of M. Y. Lermontov, F. M. Dostoevsky and L. N. Tolstoy. The faith of psychological artists is very specific, "It is full of analysis, it is never orthodox, and – let our words not seem strange – religion, as an established cult, are not in a danger as these sometimes fiery defenders and interpreters of it" (Rozanov: 1886, p.518).

We see that in this work, the opposition between L. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, having become constant in religious and philosophical criticism, is outlined. Both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky for Rozanov are such perfect psychologists like in no other literature (Porter: 2019, pp.1-43). But the "primacy in the perfection of the image belongs to L. Tolstoy, and the primacy in the depths of the image belongs to Dostoevsky" (Rozanov: 1989, p.521). In Rozanov's judgement, it was Dostoevsky who had expressed a lot for the first time on earth. Dostoevsky, for example, discovered the ability of the human spirit to combine the opposite in himself: Sodom and Madonna. With tremendous power, according to Rozanov, Dostoevsky portrayed atheism in *The Demons*.

Here the premise of that new, extraordinary interpretation of Dostoevsky's work, which will appear in 1891, is laid down. According to Rozanov, in *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* "terrifying atheism intertwined incomprehensibly with the deepest, enthusiastic faith". To unravel a mystery of Dostoevsky, one needs a critic who will be his soulmate. In the meantime, Dostoevsky "was neither appreciated nor understood during his life and after his death". Not much time will pass, and Rozanov's work on Dostoevsky will have become the first stage religious and philosophical interpretation (Jackson: 1993, p.457).

DISCUSSION

In the work of 1891, Rozanov's views will take shape, and the method will even more gravitate toward the search for opposing phenomena (Lawrence: 1961). Dostoevsky's novels will be treated as an argument for the idea of atheism, a counterargument for which has yet to be found by future generations. For Rozanov, not only what Dostoevsky said but also what he did not mention will become important (Ministry of education and culture: 2019). Therefore, for example, the most severe seizures for Rozanov will be not the attacks of Ivan described in *The Brothers Karamazov*, but the undescribed seizures of Smerdyakov; for the same reason, Rozanov will insist that Dostoevsky's strongest idea is not the atheistic rebellion of Ivan Karamazov, but the Orthodox idea that Russian writers have to find.

The specific stylistic features of Rozanov's work in his work *On Understanding* are still not so pronounced. Correspondence with N. Strakhov (from 1888 to 1896) demonstrates that Strakhov, as a "senior", tries to orient "younger Rozanov on choosing more specific subjects of writing. In one of his letters (1889), referring to philosophical articles and the book *On Understanding*, he accuses Rozanov of "uncertainty" and "abstraction" and advises writing about "something concrete". The fateful advice sounds in the same letter, "I would advise you to write something about literature, about Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Shchedrin, Leskov, Uspensky, etc. You can say a lot of good things and everyone will read" (Rozanov: 1989, p.38).

A continual motive of the epistolary dialogue between Strakhov and Rozanov is a discussion of questions of form, language, style of works. Strakhov advises to write articles of a small size (no more than 1½ or 2 printed pages), to write in brief (the last wish generally moves from letter to letter). Why, for example, the article *Beauty in Nature and Its Meaning* does not contain any name, any excerpt, any "entertaining paradox"? Rozanov's note-consent to Strakhov's letter, which contained these reproaches, was very important, "I consider it important and very true in content. But there is no form, it is something monotonous, lifeless" (Rozanov: 1989, p.57).

Thus, the brief aphoristic form of utterances, hints and unfinished hints which Rozanov's work abound with was not borrowed from F. Nietzsche, who, influencing the method of many Russian religious philosophers, forced them to adopt the aphoristic form (Rosenthal: 1991, pp.50-219). Lev Shestov, for example, drawing parallels between L. N. Tolstoy, A. P. Chekhov, F. M. Dostoevsky on the one hand and F. Nietzsche on the other hand, borrowed many stylistic features of the German philosopher (McCabe: 2003, p.112). For Rozanov's style, reference to a shorter and more capacious form of expression of thoughts goes back to the dialogue with Strakhov (Piccarozzi et al.: 2018, pp.1-24).

CONCLUSION

Rozanov, as a philosopher, constantly refers to the problems of faith, and later the writer's work is more like a prayer than a literary critique (Dimbleby: 1996, p.598). L. Shestov, for example, claimed that Rozanov loved God, but could not find the "seeds of faith" in himself. All books by Vasily Vasilievich are a search for God and an expression of disappointment due to the impossibility to find him.

In connection with this single vector of Rozanov's works, it can be said that Rozanov's arrival in literary criticism is inevitable. It was in the field of criticism that all the attempts of the Russian intelligentsia to resolve ethical, religious and philosophical problems were concentrated at the turn of the century. And the type of criticism to have been chosen by Rozanov suggested a certain way of thinking. A critic of this turn should have been a religious person, and not necessarily a believer. Rozanov himself discloses this paradox as follows,

It even seems to me that an atheist with a distinct confession (according to his/her education, school) can still be a religious person. I can distinguish a religious person when he tells how he buys a thing in the market; I can recognize a religious author from 1 1/2 pages of a book, somewhere in the middle, anyway. Religiosity is a "style of man", a style of building his/her soul, and depending on this - building his/her whole life ...

However, Rozanov's religiosity and his aspiration for philosophical generalizations is not the only thing that allows us to speak on the predetermination of the philosopher's arrival in the religious and philosophical criticism. When correlating the features characteristic of criticism with the features of V.V. Rozanov's method and style, we managed to demonstrate a way that Rozanov came to become a great literary critic. An important role on this path was played by Rozanov's debut work, in which the problem of the relationship of religious consciousness and artistic creativity was raised.

Rozanov's debut work attempts to explain artistic endeavor through the peculiarities of religious outlook, and this attempt definitely represents a certain schematization of the ways of faith. Oppositions have already been outlined in the scheme, which eventually become a kind of philosopher's claim to fame. So, for example, the opposition of belief and unbelief by L. Tolstoy and F. Dostoevsky as two different types of psychologist, the opposition of what has been said and unsaid, all of those antitheses that will have been presented in later works of the philosopher are reflected in his first test of the pen.

The analysis of Rozanov's writing style suggests that the aphoristic writing style, borrowed by many literary critics of the Silver Age from F. Nietzsche, is for Rozanov a natural consequence of following the recommendations of N. Strakhov, the "senior" correspondent.

In brief, the analysis of Rozanov's early work allows us to mention those intentions in the work of the philosopher that are conducive to the genre of literary criticism. Correspondence with Strakhov, in which the recommendations of the senior comrade pushed Rozanov to choose a more specific object of study and to a more concise form of expression of thoughts, outlined those stylistic features to be traced in the mature work by Vasily Rozanov.

The writer's turn to religious and philosophical problems was partly due to the objective historical reasons that manifested themselves in the breakdown of the traditional way of life of the Russian people, and partly could be attributed to the scientific interests of Vasily Vasilievich, for whom the problem of the relationship of religious faith to artistic creation was the most urgent (McCabe: 2003, p.110).

Attributive features of the religious and philosophical criticism of the silver age when correlated with the stylistic features and the sphere of interest of the writer give us an opportunity to make the conclusion about Rozanov's destination for the genre of literary criticism. So, for example, the intentions to schematize, contrast and rethink traditional forms of literary works are equally inherent in Rozanov and in the whole line of religious and philosophical criticism.

Acknowledgements

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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