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RELIGIOUS MOTIVES IN JOACHIM RINGELNATZ'S WORK THROUGH BAKHTINIAN LENS

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РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЕ МОТИВЫ В ТВОРЧЕСТВЕ ЙОАХИМА РИН- ГЕЛЬНАТЦА СКВОЗЬ ПРИЗМУ ТЕОРИИ М. БАХТИНА

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The following article questions stereotypical view on Joachim Ringelnatz's grotesque and corporeal poetics as superficial, and not constituted by complex intentions. Highlighting a parallel between Ringelnatz's and François Rabelais's corporeal, anti-ideological approach to religiosity, we argue that Ringelnatz's grotesquery is constituted (along with other factors) by his anti-dogmatic faith.

Key words: Joachim Ringelnatz, Mikhail Bakhtin, François Rabelais, grotesque, faith.

В настоящей статье мы полемизируем со стереотипным взглядом на гротескную, телесную поэтику Иоахима Рингельнатца как на поверхностную и не обусловленную комплексными намерениями. Подчеркивая параллель между телесным, антиидеологическим подходом И. Рингельнатца и Ф. Рабле к религиозности, мы утверждаем, что гротескность в произведениях Рингельнатца определяется (наряду с другими факторами) и его антидогматическим восприятием религиозности.

Ключевые слова: Иоахим Рингельнац, Михаил Бахтин, Франсуа Рабле, гротеск, вероисповедание.

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With his grotesque poems and short stories being constantly republished, Joachim Ringelnatz (Hans Gustav Bötticher, 1883-1934) belongs to most read

authors of the Weimar period. Despite his considerable popularity, for literary scholarship, he still remains an «undiscovered author» [1. P. 167], as Walter Papes monography (1974) and two essay collections edited by Frank and Friederike-Schmidt Möbus (2000) remain only efforts to fill the scholarly gap. The main cause of Ringelnatz's scholarly marginalization is the non-acknowledgement of his grotesquery as an object of noetic value. Already during his lifetime, Ringelnatz was deemed by literary criticism as a frivolous «comedian», whose texts offer only a facile entertainment requiring no «serious» intellectual engagement [2. P. 189–192]. Generally accepting such marginalizing outlook at his work, subsequent scholarly readers also have not acknowledged his grotesque poetics as worthy of study.

Challenging popular belief that Ringelnatz's grotesquery is only a superficial vacuum, we illustrate that it is (along with other factors as the need to respond to the trauma of WW1) constituted by his anti-dogmatic approach to religion and faith; a carnivalesque, «noble truths» degrading stance to religiosity which he approvingly observed in works of French renaissance humanist François Rabelais (* 1494–1553) and subsequently incorporated into his own artistic world by adapting a basal Rabelaisan anti-ideological practice – a degrading transposition of what is «sacral», abstract, «noble» and conventionally perceived as distant to the body, into a materialistic (contra-abstract) and therewith anti-ideological corporeal sphere [1. P. 303–407].

Responding to escalated religious conflicts of the Reformation period, Rabelais opposes any monological, constrictive, and life-schematizing dogma by elevating the sphere of material-corporeal existence over abstract-ideological impositions which subjugate authentic bodily life to clerical dogmatic rules, through concentrated juxtaposing of «sacral» signs with corporeal motives of copulation, digestion and excretion. Although the word «God» frequently neighbours the word «shit» in his texts, such degrading juxtapositions do not represent advocations for atheism (as that would not be possible in Renaissance), but attempts to (according to Bakhtin's famous reading) achieve non-dogmatic and therewith more profound faith. Rabelais' religion does not fit the categories of «Catholic, Protestant, or the religion of Christ of Erasmus», but is «wider and deeper-rooted. It ignores all intolerant seriousness, all dogmatism» [3. P. 132].

Equally Ringelnatz refuses to accept any religious doctrine. In his autobiographical writings, he relates to «an instance of God, in which I (Ringelnatz) personally believed and which I (Ringelnatz) could not affiliate with any known ecclesiastical depiction» [4]. His faith was not just antidogmatic but

also intensively lived. In his personal correspondence, he attributes his ability to face life's difficulties to his «belief in God and in Gods' all-overcoming superiority» [2. P. 292].

Ringelnatz was fond of Rabelais, with whom he shared intensive religiosity and anti-dogmatism, even before the first world war and before his poetics took a significant grotesque, bodily-oriented turn. In a highly poetological story *Durch das Schlüsselloch eines Lebens* (1913), the autobiographical protagonist Berthold observes a publication of Rabelais at the bookshelf [5. P. 656].

After his traumatic experience of WW1, which gave him a life-long aversion to any ideological pathos, Ringelnatz adapts Rabelaisian, highly subversive, corporeal mode of degradation. Whereas Rabelais purified faith from ideological layers of reformational conflicts, Ringelnatz had also a reason to protect faith from ideological accretions, as conservative spectrum of German society interconnected religious faith with patriotic devotion to «nation».

The transposition of «sacral» to «bodily» and «profane» highly manifests in poem *Alte Winkelmauer* (1928), simultaneously devoted both to God and urination. The lyrical subject attributes to the wall on which he regularly micaturates a presence of «heavenly gleaming»: *Alte Mauer, die ich oft benäse, / Weil's dort dunkel ist / Himmlisches Gefunkel ist / In deiner Blässe* [5. P. 285]. The bodily act of urinating here correlates with an experience of Godly presence – the religiosity is not experienced in the abstract sphere of «noble truths», but contrarily, in the profane bodily life. The very anti-ideological dimension of such at-God oriented urination is underlined by narrators' utterances – the wall, as a place of regular urination, «instructs» him more than any «book» or «image», because it does not «preach» nor «settle» [5. P. 285]. The experience of Godly presence is here positioned in the profane bodily life, while this corporeal deed opposes subjugation to non-corporeal ideological appellation (to «book» or «image»). The very act of relating to God is in the final stanza compared to «Notdurft» (a bodily/physical need) [5. P. 285], further emphasizing that (Ringelnatz's) God is not to be found in «preaching» (in ideological appellation) but in the ideologically untouched corporeal experience.

Similarly, in children-poem *Zweites* (1929) does the bodily deed of urination intersects with manifestation of faith. In order for the little boy to «dream» about God, he firstly has to «pee»: «Lieber Gott, recht gute Nacht. / Ich hab noch schnell Pipi gemacht. / Damit ich von dir träume» [6]. Likewise, in the poem *Wenn ich allein bin* (1921), the sacral motive of «prayer» is juxtaposed with a profane motive of «fart»: «Wenn ich allein bin, pups ich lauten Wind. /

Und bete laut (...)» [5. P. 130]. As in *Zweites*, equally here the bodily deed (farting, urinating) precedes the act of faith (praying, dreaming about God), with an intention to break conventional Christian dichotomy between the abstract, «noble» Godly «truth» and earthly, corporeal-material life. Ringelnatz's positioning of Godly presence into the non-ideative bodily sphere reaches its peak with his christological figure Fidje (named after latin word *fides* – faith), the main protagonist of the short story *Der arme Pilmartine* (1922). Like Christ, also *Fidje* flies to heaven and faces trial. Subjugated to interrogation, he refers to bodily events of sleeping, eating and defecation (diarhea): «Ich aß sechs Monate lang Leberwurst. Dann bekam ich den Durchfall, übergab mich und radelte davon» [5. P. 835]. This Ringelnatz-Rabelais connection in approach to religiosity opens many questions for future inquiries of Ringelnatz. The specific character of his assimilation of Rabelaisian method is only to be explored.

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