

Abstract

Elias Canetti's autobiography is in three volumes, *Die gerettete Zunge, Geschichte einer Jugend* (1977), *Die Fackel im Ohr, Lebensgeschichte 1921-1931* (1980), *Das Augenspiel, Lebensgeschichte 1931-1937* (1985), and is a self-portrait of a European citizen *par excellence*. Canetti presents his life from the childhood in the cradle until the death of his mother on June 15, 1937, in Paris. In doing so, Canetti mixes conceptual and metaphorical, documentary and fictitious and realistic and utopian impulses and strategies. Within the work, the autobiography should not be considered as "accompanying literature", but as a stand-alone part of it. A characteristic of Canetti's work is that there are a substantial number of autobiographically oriented texts, in which the autobiographer, either in the form of an essay or in the form of notes, takes up a line of literary problems. As such, in the analysis of Canetti's story of life, the question of relation between his theoretical positions and his poetical-autobiographical work emerges.

The hypothesis proffered in this study centers on the fact that, in order to understand Canetti's way of thinking, it is beneficial to investigate the topics which are evident in all of his works. Only in this way can a reflection on his autobiography, in a production-aesthetic aspect, with an emphasis on the author's intention and an analysis of the context, be realised. The selection of motifs in this study – 'death' (chapter 3.1), 'language' (chapter 3.2) and 'metamorphosis' (chapter 3.3) – is based on the findings, that from these mosaics an image of Canetti as a poet can be synthesised.

Besides the central topics of life, people portraits form a substantial component of the autobiography, and are intertwined throughout the corpus of texts. As such, they contribute to both its essential and formal coherence. Because of the significant presence of these portraits, the question of the function and position in both the autobiography and the entire work arises.

The analysis of the central motifs of life: death – language – metamorphosis, shows clearly that these are segments which play an important role for the development of the individual. These motifs constitute the focus of certain narrative segments, and the "essentials of life", crystallises from them. The episodes from his early childhood allude to Canetti's understanding of the productive power of fear, which determines his whole life and work. His confrontation with death and his opposition to death eventually turn into a principle of sustaining life as a poet instead of destroying it, and this manifests itself in the form of people portraits. In this sense, the story of Canetti's life can be considered a working out of his opposition to death. In refusing to acknowledge temporal limits of human life, Canetti displays an extraordinary "taking-serious" of his own individuality. This is obviously not an

absolute demand on truth, but an insistence on his own recent impressions; ultimately this is a pretension of his own authenticity and his demarcation from authors who think and live differently to him.

The multilingualism of his childhood and the consequential lack of the self-confidence of an own language, manifest themselves in presenting his rebirth through the learning of German. The sound of the words, particularly the sound of people's names, has an extraordinary importance for Canetti. The idea of autonomy of the words is crucial for the whole of his autobiography. *Massa und Macht* is considered as a theoretical basis for metamorphosis, which at the same time, is supposed to mean the subjective adoption of the world, or in an anthropological sense, the integrating of the human being into his or her environs. The process of Canetti baring his heart evolves as an artistic autobiography, a *document humain*. Canetti's story of life is an account of where he has come from, and it portrays the function that he assigns to literature. From the analysis of the portraits, it is evident that for Canetti it is less problematic if personal affection of others is removed than if his work and his poetic talent are not recognised. Accordingly, the level of enthusiasm for his own work determines every literary portrait in the autobiography. By observing selected portraits, one notices that the primary focus is not on people portraits themselves; it is about the importance of their survival in his writing. His resistance to the power of time is remembrance: the poetic forming of the image of the people who were important to him – an image that lives on. Therefore, autobiography becomes an act of resistance to the power of forgetting, which in and of itself is related to death.