“NOBELIST ELIAS KANETI, ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT HUMANISTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY”

On the occasion of the 115th anniversary of his birth

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Abstract

Elias Kaneti, one of the greatest writers of the 20th century, is, in the opinion of critics, a very interesting phenomenon in the history of world literature. The son of a family of Spanish Jews born in Bulgaria in 1905, he began communicating with others in Hebrew’s Spanish and Bulgarian. In 1911, when Kanet was a 6 year old child, his family moved to Manchester, England, where little Elias became acquainted with English, which later became one of his main languages. In 1913, after the tragic and untimely death of her father, her mother, along with her three sons, moved to Vienna, and at that time she decided to teach Kanet German, her favorite language, which she spoke constantly with her husband. This decision of hers began to exert a great influence on the boy. German lectures were helping him in his rapid intellectual development. German later became the language of his literary work and was also the most intimate language for Kanet. He often says that this was his real mother tongue. German had been the secret language of his parents, the language of their love, youth and happy student time in Vienna. This language served Kanet's parents to express their feelings, to have long discussions about theater, the art of their dreams. This language became very important to Kanet and played a primary role in his life. Long stays, especially in the schools of Zurich and Frankfurt, reinforce his connection with the German language, enriching his knowledge of the language with lexical nuances and expanding his cultural horizons. His immense cultural horizon is beginning to stand out more and more. To explain the connections he would later make with the heritage of past cultures, he would need encyclopedic knowledge that could hardly be found so concentrated in a single person. He returned to Vienna for his university studies, graduated in 1929 from the Faculty of Chemistry, and then received his Ph.D., but is determined to continue his career in the field of literature.
Keywords: Elias Kaneti, Nobel Prize winner, Writer

Introduction

Elias Kanet (figure 1), with his life and works, embodies, more than anyone else, Central Europe, as it is even its personification. He delivered, without ever stopping, different genres: a novel, a sociological-philosophical work, a volume of sociological-literary essays, a collection of aphorisms, a book with a travel impression, an autobiographical trilogy and several volumes of notes. Kanet has lived in Europe's largest capitals and has never joined any ideology or program or political movement. As a sui generis writer, as a cosmopolitan man with a very broad culture, Kanet is considered a complex author in 20th century of the European literature. As one of the most original and convincing voices of this century, he amazes you with the courage he shows to reveal to the reader even the most animalistic instincts of the human being, its most secret and unconfessed desires, its most insane obsessions.

Figure 1: Elias Kaneti

His autobiography, divided into three volumes ("The Saved Language", "The Torch in My Ear" and "The Game of Eyes"), is a compact and exciting work, written as if it were a novel. The events described in the first volume are from the happy childhood, from an idyllic world that did not yet know the world wars. Ever since it was first published in 1977, this autobiographical trilogy has been hailed as a "contemporary classic," as one of those literary works that have secured their long lives and deeply moved the reader. With a clear,
interesting and touching style down to the smallest detail, Kanet treats the memories of his life here, thus giving us that unique story that is for every man the most secretive and enigmatic, the story of his own life. In compiling this autobiography, which, as the foreign press points out, is a mosaic of powerful and very interesting episodes, described in a poetic language full of warmth and light, Kanet has had the credo: “Cowardly, really cowardly, he who is afraid of his own memories!”

The so-called "school of human knowledge" engages Kanet for the rest of his life in a relentless fight against death, against which he is a savage persecutor, determined to fight tirelessly against it. Convinced that the intellectual must perform his duty to remove the mask of death everywhere, the writer, writes Kanet, must become "the dog of his time," and adds: "The writer must loudly express his opposition, must use the scalpel to cut, analyze and remove pus." In this regard, he states: "I grabbed in neck my century!"

At the beginning of the first volume of his autobiographical trilogy, he writes: “I have spent most of my life exposing the bad aspects of man, as presented to us in the historical course of civilizations. I analyzed the power and decomposed all its constituent elements with the same ruthless clarity that characterized my mother when she analyzed the processes that took place within her family. There are few bad sides, both in man and in humanity, that I may not have noticed. And yet, the pride I feel for man and for humanity continues to be so great that I really hate only one thing: their enemy, death.”

"Mass and Power", Kanet's main work, which will engage its author for 35 years, is a truly unique world work, a work that forces the reader to fall into it completely haunted. The author replaces the abstract concept with the well-sifted figure, with the symbol, with the unity between thought and the issue itself. This work is an open book, what penetrates it is fire, water, wheat, gazelles, the sultan of Delhi, the mayor of Shreber, the Shiites on the feast of Muharrem, the exalted throne of the Byzantine emperor, the conductor of the orchestra, Germany of the post-Treaty period of Versailles, the holy fire of Jerusalem, the antipathy of powerful people to the survivors, the dance of rain to the Indians pueblo, Catholicism and the masses, the essence of the parliamentary system, the whirlwinds of power, negativity and schizophrenia, power and paranoia. The work "Mass and Power" is considered by critics as a shocking analysis and as a diagnosis of the delirium of the 20th century, as a unique, extraordinary study of an essayist who is also a writer. This work has been the goal of Kanet's
life, for which he gave up his career, inspired by an intellectual, but so rare nowadays, when intellectuals, as critics point out, have unfortunately become pseudo-intellectuals. willing to make any compromise for the sake of money and glory. "Mass and Power" is the synthesis of a very wide and elaborated information, extracted from various disciplines among them, from psychiatry and anthropology, from psychology and psychoanalysis, from history and sociology, with the aim of unmasking the process that makes the measure manipulate and rule, and to emphasize the need to fight against power, against its most insidious and covert forms, present everywhere, in all human relations.

Elias Kaneti is not only the genius author of "Mass and Power" and the great witness of his autobiography, but he is, first of all, the author of one of the most important novels of the 20th century, a gigantic and shocking book for the folly of this century.

In 1935, at the age of 30, he published one of the greatest works of his century, the novel “Blinding”, a novel in every sense of the word, unquestionably unique in modern European literature, both in style and in style characters, and with a thematic unity prominent in the entirety of this work, shocking and prophetic novel, "stubborn and majestic", as defined by Thomas Mani, alarming novel, but also a shining example of unbearable psychic suffering in the man of culture contemporary, who, aware of his fragility, is afraid of life and closes within the walls that cannot withstand the blows of stupidity and chaos that rule reality and annihilate it. As the critique points out, even with the novel “Blinding”, Kanet could have become one of the world's greatest and greatest writers.

Regarding the origin of this novel, Kanet writes in the essay entitled "My first book: “Blinding”:

"One day I began to think that the world should no longer be described as in the early novels, that is, starting from, as it were, from a writer's point of view, the world had disintegrated, and only if you had the courage to show it in disintegration her, it was still possible to give her a genuine idea. But this did not mean that you should cling to a chaotic book, where nothing could be understood, on the contrary, you had to invent with the strictest consistency extremist individualities, such as those that actually made up the world, and these individualities had to be described in all their extremism, bringing them closer together with the particular characteristics of each. Among the characters in question were a fanatical
religious, a visionary technician who lived only on space projects, a collector, a truth-teller, a scatterbrain, an enemy of death, and finally a man of books in the sense of full of speech. If I were to ask myself today where I got the rigor of my working method, the thought would lead me to extremely heterogeneous influences. I had just finished the eighth chapter of “Blinding”, a chapter entitled “Death”, when I came across Kafka’s “Metamorphosis”. Luckily, this could not have happened to me at that moment. There I found, in the highest perfection, just the opposite of literary irresponsibility, which I hated so much, there I found the rigor, which I longed for wholeheartedly. Something I already wanted to find with my own strength had already been achieved in that book. I bowed before this model, who is the purest of all models, knowing full well that it was unattainable, but still it gave me strength.”*

One thought ruled him over all other thoughts: the thought of death. He wanted to remove death from the face of the earth, he wanted no one to die anymore. He did not accept death, while everyone else accepted it. Concerning this, Kanet writes: “The most courageous thing in life is to hate death. You have to hate death, you have to hate everyone's death the way you hate your death, you can agree with everything, but never with death. "He tried to achieve immortality for all people: a concrete, serious, accepted goal, which he aimed with all his might. In the essay entitled "The Writer's Mission", which is included in his work "Consciousness of Words", Kanet writes about this:

"It can't be the writer's job to leave humanity at the mercy of death. The writer, who will not be known by anyone, will be shocked to learn that death exerts an ever-increasing power on many people. Even if it seemed to everyone a futile undertaking, he would rise up against such a phenomenon and not give up in any way. It will be a source of pride for him to oppose the casteists of nothingness, who are becoming more and more numerous in literature, and to fight them better by other means than by their own means. The writer will live according to a law that is his, but not according to his measure. This law says: Do not push anyone towards anything, not even what he would like himself to do. Seek nothing but with the intention of finding a way out of it, and to show this way to everyone. To endure grief and despair is to learn how others are saved from them, but not by despising the happiness that belongs to human beings, even though they are disfigured and torn apart.” *
A very important place in Elias Kanet's literary work is occupied by notes, published in various volumes, which together exceed a thousand pages. In the preface to the first volume of notes, he writes, among other things: “Man, and this is his greatest destiny, is diverse, is a thousand times more diverse, and can only for a while live like him was not such. In those moments when he sees himself as a slave to his purpose, only one thing can come to his aid: he must give in to the variety of tendencies he has, and so write down everything that comes to mind. These should float in such a way that they do not come from nowhere and lead nowhere, in most cases they are short, quick notes, often lightning fast, unverified, unrestrained, without ambition and without any purpose. The one who writes and usually holds the reins tightly becomes, for a moment, a persuasive toy of unexpected ideas. He throws on paper things he would never have imagined in himself, such things as contradict his history, his beliefs, his own ethics, his shame, his pride, and his and with his truth, which he usually insists on. The pressure with which all this starts, finally leaves him, and it may happen that he, so suddenly, feels light and, with a kind of happiness, throws on paper the most sincere things. The ones you put on paper like that, and there are so many, it's best to set them aside without paying attention. If he really manages to do so for many years, it means that he maintains confidence in spontaneity, which is the oxygen necessary for this kind of note, because, if you lose your spontaneity once, then these notes are no longer valid for anything, and he can do nothing but remain in his true work. Much later, when everything already looks like it was written by someone else, the notes may come across things that may have once seemed absurd, but suddenly take on meaning for others. And, since he himself is now part of these others, he can select what works for him without any particular effort.”

But his published notes are just the tip of an iceberg, the other gigantic part of which, about ten times more than that, is in the archives of the Central Library of Zurich, in 150 boxes containing his literary legacy: diaries, letters and notes of any kind, made only partially available to scholars. In one of the volumes of notes, published since he was alive, Kanet writes: "I am overwhelmed with disgust when I think that others will go and mess with my life." The will states that 20 of these boxes, certainly the most "scorching" boxes, can only be opened when 30 years have passed since his death. So many of this writer's secrets will remain sealed until 2024, secrets that will help keep the author's interest alive, because the notes, published or not, include his finest and most critical thoughts.
Recently, the publishing house "SANTORI" has given the Albanian reader a special work of the prominent Austrian writer Elias Kaneti: "Consciousness of words", a collection of sociological-literary essays, the German original of which has been published for the first time in 1975.

In the preface to this volume, the author states that in it are summarized, in chronological order, the essays he wrote in the years 1962-1974, with the exception of the lecture on the famous Austrian writer Herman Broh, held in Vienna in 1936, on the occasion of His 50th birthday. Explaining in a nutshell the content of this volume, Kanet writes, among other things: "At first glance, it may seem a little strange to find here together figures such as Kafka and Confucius, Byhner, Tolstoy, Karl Krause and Hitler such as the Hiroshima catastrophe, and literary observations of how diaries are written or the origin of a novel. But this placement of these figures next to each other was important to me, because they only seemingly do not match."*

The volume "Consciousness of words" closes with the lecture "Writer's Mission", which summarizes in itself the whole his interior. Concerning this, Kanet notes: “In this lecture, held in Munich, Bavaria, I tried to say something about this issue. When I was writing it, it seemed to me like something independent, but when I finished it, I was convinced that its place should be at the end of this volume, as the embodiment of my hope that others would achieve and fulfill it, too. better than me, her demands. ” In his Lecture on the Writer's Mission, Kanet further writes: with the same pleasure, perhaps even with more pleasure than what is felt among men, and, giving both after words and after men, but nevertheless with greater confidence after words, is able to uproot these from their seats and then releases them even more boldly to sit down again, asks them, touches them with their hands, caresses them, scratches them, carpets them, paints them, even is able, after all those intimate shamelessness of their own, to be scorned again out of respect for them. Even, as often happens, even when he behaves with the word as a wrongdoer, even then he is still a wrongdoer out of love.” *

"If the word writer," Kanet continues, "has become a boze for many people, it was because they associated it with a false image and a lack of seriousness, with a kind of avoidance of one who does not want to make a living for himself." incredibly difficult. Certainly it was not appropriate to inspire respect for the attitude of those writers who continued to deliver the most refined and diverse aesthetic fiction on the eve of one of the darkest periods in human history, a period they did not were able to understand her even when she slapped them; their
false belief, the erroneous assessment of reality, which they tried to treat with a contemptuous
disregard and denying any connection with it, their deep alienation from all that was actually
happening, all these were not things that they could be understood in the language used by
them, but in the meantime one can understand very well the fact that those eyes that looked
more insistently and accurately, turned aside terribly in the face of such great blindness.”**

In his essay "Consciousness of Words", Kanet addresses in detail the great importance of
keeping diaries for a true writer. Among other things, he writes about this issue: “It would be
difficult for me to move forward, in the work I do with the greatest desire, if I do not keep a
diary from time to time. Not that I use these notes, they are never the raw material for the
work I am doing. But a man who knows the power of his own impressions, a man who feels
every detail of every day in such a way as if it were his only day, this man, therefore, lives
truly with genuine exaggerations, and something of such cannot be said otherwise, but in the
meantime he does not fight this tendency of his own, because for him the prominence,
accuracy and concreteness of all those things which constitute a life are important; such a
person would burst or, in other words, be torn to pieces if he did not calm down by writing a
diary. He who really wants to know everything will learn best by using his experience. But
you don't have to spare yourself, you have to treat yourself like someone else, with no less
sternness, even greater.”*

Conclusion

As a novelist, dramatist, essayist and sociologist, Elias Kaneti, who will be 115 years old this
year and has been resting for 26 years in Zurich, Switzerland, next to another great figure of
world literature, James Joyce, has been honored with high awards in various countries and
have been awarded honorary degrees by several Universities. This eminent cosmopolitan
writer, whom critics have called a "living classic" and one of the greatest humanists of the
twentieth century, was awarded, in the 1981, the Nobel Prize in Literature. Regarding this
high price, the motivation of the Swedish Academy states: "For his works, which are
characterized by a broad perspective, a great wealth of ideas and a high artistic level."

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