

BOOK REVIEWS

CANTOR, N. F.: *The American Century. Varieties of Culture in Modern Times*. Norman F. Cantor with Mindy Cantor. First edition. New York, 1997. 591 pp.

In the 1990s many more researches appeared, whose authors try to interpret the phenomena and processes of the 20th century and accordingly to evaluate them in order to define what place in history was prepared for this roughest and most contradictory century in world history. The new monograph by Norman Cantor is also one of these books. He is a professor of history, sociology and comparative history at New York university, known in academic circles as the author of *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*, *The Sacred Chain* and ten other books.

As the author supposes, both the end of the second millennium of Christianity and the 20th century is especially a time to look back over the past hundred years and to understand the character of what has taken place and to determine, where we stand now and what, probably, will be outlines of the future (p. XII). The 20th century was marked by extremes of human behaviour, being a century of unprecedented intellectual creativity and cultural progress and at the same time a period of terror and genocide, to an extent optimistically minded men of science and dreamers of the 19th century could not foresee. The American scientist thinks, that purely historical works cannot give answer to questions about the reasons for this discrepancy and polarity of the 20th century. That is why he has tried to understand them through a prism of cultural analysis, covering not only art and literature, but also drama, dance, cinema, architecture, philosophy, theology, science, sociology, psychology, formation, technology, political movements, and also such ideological trends as structuralism, conservatism, modernism etc. Such analysis of the 20th century, in his opinion, will help us to comprehend, what ideas and actions have determined the contradictory outcomes of the past hundred years and why our century has become both the most intellectually progressive but most deadly and morally regressive century in history.

To size up the essence and character of the cultural history of the West in the 20th century, it is necessary, as the author of the reviewed book thinks, to take into consideration three key factors for their understanding. Firstly, the origin, distribution and decline of such a cultural movement, as Modernism, which deeply influenced the art of our century. Secondly, the continued interaction between ideas and art, on the one hand, and political movements and institutions, on the other. Thirdly, the increasingly growing – with each decade – significance of the USA in the cultural history of Western society; this country not only made large original contributions to philosophy, science, art and literature, but also absorbed major aspects of Western European culture, which have reached their final form and greatest expressiveness precisely in the American context.

The book consists of seven large chapters. In first – “The Cultural world of 1900” – a review of the condition of culture at the beginning of the 20th century is given, it was marked by the gradual emergence (first of all in the large cities) of such phenomenon, as Modernism, which has become the genuine cultural overturn that challenged the consciousness, moods and artistic imagination of the previous eighteen centuries (p. 3). Modernism, in Cantor's opinion, was the one of four great cultural revolutions (after the Reformation, age of Enlightenment and Romanticism) in the history of Western civilization since 1500. In this chapter, the phenomena and processes that became forerunners of Modernism are considered as well as characteristic features of the Victorian culture, which was changed by Modernism.

In the second chapter, named “Modernism”, the author traces the spread and manifestation of the given phenomenon in novels, poetry, criticism, drama, music, dance, fine art, philosophy, science, social sciences, history and theology: a separate section is devoted to Modernism in the First World War.

The author stresses, that psychoanalysis was one of greatest intellectual movements of the 20th century, and a separate chapter also is devoted to it in the book, where a lot of space is given to the

origin of this phenomenon and to "the founding fathers" of psychoanalysis – Freud and Jung. He elucidates the deep influence of their concepts not only on the self-perception of the individual, but also on our perception of the world as a whole. Psychoanalysis, on the Cantor, has changed the sexual behaviour of the person of Western society, being the main cultural movement in the 20th century, in a certain sense – its main intellectual achievement (p. 170). He also explains the reasons for broad spreading of psychoanalysis in the USA.

From the end of 1980s – early 1990s in works and statements of the historians, political scientists, philosophers, publicists of former European socialist countries destructive criticism of Marxism and the historical experience of socialism, and also anti-Communism became some kind of ritual, or "good form". Against their background the contents of the fourth chapter – "Marxism and the Left" – is notable for its quiet, weighted approach, with objectivity and scientific character obviously prevailing over emotional spells and pseudo-scientific appraisals, which conceal the political engagement or frank conformism of their authors. In this chapter, of 100 pages, the fundamentals of the socialist doctrine are stated, the historical destiny of the leftist movements (American progressivism, anarcho-syndicalism etc.) and leftist philosophy in the 20th century is traced. The paragraph – "Leninist and Western Marxism" is read with great interest, where views of G. Lukács, A. Gramsci (whose theory has become very popular in 1960s both in USA and in France), W. Benjamin and Th. Adorno are considered rather explicitly. By the way N. Cantor names the latter the most fruitful and esteemed Marxist thinker and one of the six most influential thinkers of our century, and, possible, even of the 21st century. He also told about the philosophers of the Frankfurt school, in particular of G. Marcuse. The creators of significant Marxist theories in 1960s – 1980s include the Parisian philosophers Lucien Goldman and Louis Althusser and professor of sociology and philosophy of the Free University of Berlin Jürgen Habermas, who is probably the most interesting and original Marxist theorist of the last 30 years.

In general, the sixties take a special place in a history of the leftist movement. Arguing against a note of the writer G. Brodkey in "New York Times Book Review" in 1986, that "the sixties culture changed everything and accomplished nothing", Cantor proves, that these years, on the contrary, did accomplish many things. First, the sixties produced the movements for civil rights and black liberation, second, the sixties produced a new popular culture – the rock culture (however, it soon was commercialized), third, the sixties made television an acceptable cultural element, fourth, the sixties introduced Marxism into the universities, creating a whole generation of young scholars from yesterday's radical students, fifth, the sixties validated various sects and subcultures within American society, that promoted an amplification of tolerance in the public life of this country, and sixth, the sixties created the tradition of hating America, as the bastion of capitalism and imperialism (pp. 310 – 311). In general the fundamental achievement of the Left in Western Europe and on the American continent in the 20th century has been the creation of the welfare state and no freely elected conservative regime, no matter how committed to the doctrine of the free market, has been able to undo this condition. The welfare state, the American scientist supposes, must be seen not as a temporary instrument, but as a certain period of history like feudalism and commercial and industrial capitalism, and it will take centuries to play itself out (pp. 227 – 228).

After this large chapter, numbering 100 pages, the author states, that a main problem for Western Marxism from the mid-thirties to the late fifties, was the Stalinist terror, which threatened the moral credibility of the movements of the leftwing spectrum, nevertheless it successfully survived the threat of ethical and emotional association with the discredited Stalinist legacy, began to revive in sixties and achieved in the seventies and eighties an unprecedented penetration into the more respectable academic circles (p. 328). Moreover, N. Cantor considers, that Marxism emerged as a major intellectual movement in the American universities and in Western culture in general, and it will become ever more so in the decades to come (p. 228).

The fifth chapter is about the culture (ideology) of the Rightist groups and movements of various nuances, but with the common fundamentals that it is possible to consider the necessity and even usefulness of inequality, anti-Communism, theism, formalism, sermons on ethnic and national unity and solidarity, leadership principle, militarism and anti-Semitism. In the twenties and early thirties the greatest contribution to the shaping of rightwing philosophy were made by J. Ortega-y-Gasset, V. Pareto, B. Croce and G. Gentile.

The culture of the Right found its practical embodiment of the most complete kind in Nazism, whose essence and characteristic features are analysed in a separate paragraph. Evaluating fascism, as a sociological phenomenon, Cantor specifies its points of contact with Modernism, exhibited in using technical innovations that the 20th century has given in such abundance, and also in adherence to moral relativism (as is known, Nazism rejected normative ethics, gravitated to irrationalism, recognized the

reality of sadomasochism in human nature), however underlining that they contradicted one another in many respects, for example, the fascist approach to culture was populist, whereas Modernism was elitist. And as a whole fascism, in the opinion of the author of the reviewed book, became a terrible caricature of Modernism (p. 405).

The internal structure of the sixth chapter that has the title "Postmodernism" is, in our opinion, slightly amorphous and eclectic, with chronological "skipping over" in an account of material that does not promote integrity in perception of the author's conception. The first paragraph that in the 1970s a new era emerged – "without fanfare and almost imperceptibly" – namely the era of Postmodernist culture, whose manifestations by the beginning of 1980s became already quite visible. Three technological innovations (biotechnology, computer applications and instantaneous world information distribution through communications satellites) comprised a material and scientific infrastructure for this new era. The second great change ushering in a new age was the rise of Pacific Rim led by Japan. True, it is not absolutely clear, why the author refers the given phenomenon to the phenomena of the cultural order. After that he returns back devoting a separate paragraph to structuralism, which had become the leading cultural theory in the two decades after the World War II. He sees the reason for its emergence first of all in the decline of existentialism. Further, there is an analysis of deconstruction, which has become a radical variant of structuralism, the role of universities in the intellectual life of American society, feminism, analysis of Postmodernism in art and literature and, finally, those processes and phenomena, which the author names "neobaroque culture".

The seventh chapter is titled "A Millennium and a Century End: A New Era Begins". The so-called "neoconservative wave", which had its most complete embodiment in the policy of the Reagan and Thatcher governments, has not resulted in the emergence of clear philosophy and has failed. The harsh application of market principles and preferences conflicted with the principles of traditional conservatism giving priority to such values, as family, community, nation and church.

The author's comparison of the "Cold War" with the Peloponnesian War is successful. Like Athens and Sparta locked in mortal combat for hegemony in ancient Greece, the USA and Soviet Union exhausted one another in long-term struggle. Drawing some historical parallels, N. Cantor makes an assumption, that if the important consequence of the Peloponnesian War was the creation of favourable conditions for the rise of Rome, an outcome of the geopolitical changes stipulated by the end of the "Cold War", may be the financial and probably military "take-off" of China in the next century (p. 503). Such processes and phenomena, as the failure of Anglo-American neoconservatism, the end of the "Cold War" with its uselessness for the well-being of the peoples of the USSR and USA, revival of the geopolitical power of Germany have resulted in radical changes in the political situation, which has become, as a matter of fact, the starting-point and base for new millennium and new century.

In appendices a brief review of 100 films is offered which can be used as important initial material for cultural analysis of the century.

Careful analysis of abundant literature (the selected bibliography takes 42 pages) has allowed the author of the book to draw an impressive panorama of the ideological and cultural evolution of the human community in the century in all its many-sidedness, polyphony and contradictoriness. It is necessary to refer to the undoubted dignities of the author's style, the precise selection of the reasons, features, or factors describing various phenomena, processes and events. The biographies of prominent thinkers, analysis of their views and concepts, the review of cultural currents and schools are successfully put into their historical context.

Being a multiplane research making broad generalizations, written with real professional skill the reviewed book at the same time is not deprived of defects, not all its content is of equal worth. There are separate repetitions, for example, in the descriptions of differences of Modernism from the Victorian culture, some of the author's references, judgements and estimations are marked by an excessive categoriality. So, in the list of films, which supposedly have reflected to the greatest degree main intellectual searches and cultural trends of the 20th century, many worthy pictures, and not only from the artistic point of view, but also rather interesting for cultural analysis of a rough history of our century have not appeared, in our opinion. It is not absolutely clearly, for instance, why such a well-known film as R. Attenborough's "Gandhi" appears in a heading "Traditions on the Right" (as an example of condemnation of colonialism?). By the way, Tarkovsky's films were not found at all in this list (as not relating to any of the cultural trends?). And the estimates of a number of films have got the touch of subjectivity.

It is possible to argue against the author and on other problems. The place of the USA in world cultural processes (certainly if not to treat it very widely, characteristic for many Western scholars) obviously seems exaggerated, and its contribution to the spiritual life of human society is far from being

so worthy as the author believes. In that time G. Flaubert predicted with foresight: "The world is entering an era of nonsense, militarism and Americanism." The negative sense of the latter notion is quite obvious. Therefore the title of book can hardly be recognized as successful or, at least, it is rather motivated.

Nevertheless Cantor's book will certainly attract the attention of the historians, philosophers and other scholars as an interesting and in many respects successful attempt to interpret the deep tendencies of the 20th century through a prism of the analysis of its cultural contents.

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PROFANTOVÁ, Zuzana: *Little Fish are Sweet. Selected Writings on Proverbs*. Bratislava, Ústav etnológie SAV (Institute of Ethnology, Slovak Academy of Sciences), 1997; 109 pp. ISBN 80-967781-5-3.

The attractive scholarly work deals with the enchanting world of popular wisdom and the inexhaustible treasury of its verbal manifestations. The book consists of seven chapters, introduction (Instead of Introduction), Editorial Note and Selected Bibliography.

The historical survey (To the Beginnings of Paremiology in Slovakia) is followed by a study devoted to the classification of paremiological material, from the first Slovak collectors (A.P. Zátarecký, P. Dobšínský) to the present time (On Classification of the Slovak Paremiological Treasury).

In the following chapter (Concerning One Possibility of Logical-Semiotic Invariants of Weatherproverbs) methodologies used in paremiological investigations (O. Zich, Z. Kanyó, G.L. Permjakov, and others) are analysed. The author warns against an undue identification of folk proverbs with folk philosophy and discusses the implications of a similar approach. In the subsequent analysis of weatherproverbs, *implication* is considered as basic logical formula. The predominant implicative structure of weatherproverbs is manifested in expressing relevant dependences between thematically associated phenomena, such as weather, crops and agricultural work, like crop rotation, tillage, manuring, digging, etc. The *if-then* scheme may be either explicitly expressed or tacitly understood.

The chapters that follow deal with related topics (Christian standards in the Slovak proverbial tradition; antithesis as a functional means of expression; ethnoidentification in conversational genres of folklore; semantic gesture of death).

Thematic relationships, as assumed for weather-related proverbs and popular sayings, may apparently be much broader than those presented as typical in the present work, and may considerably exceed their purely material and economical context to resume a social or even jocular ring, as in the following Italian proverb:

Quando piove e luce il sole
Tutte le vecchie vanno in amore (Aquilina 1972: 511).
"When it rains and the sun shines,
all old women fall in love."

The rain, sunshine and innocent love affairs of grandmothers are favourite themes of a great number of proverbs, humorous sayings and doggerels in the whole Siculo-Maltese Mediterranean area, as in (Maltese examples are presented in official Romanized orthography):

Ix-xita u x-xemx,
In-nanna u San Lawrenz,
In-nannu jilgħab il-boċċi,
In-nanna tilgħab il-lewż.
"It's raining, it's shining,
Grandmother and St. Lawrence,
Grandfather playing bowls,
Grandmother playing at almonds" (ib.).

The old-women weather-inspired romance may sometimes adopt a less innocent and more explicit ring, as in: