



REPORT

By a Member of the Dissertation Committee of the Dissertation of KONSON Grigoriy Rafaelyevich on the subject of the “Manifestation of ‘Non-Self Conception’ and the Experience of Catastrophe in European Artistic Practices from the 15th to the 20th Centuries,” submitted in accordance with the requirements for the doctorate degree in cultural studies of the St. Petersburg State University

In his dissertation, which has a theological basis, Grigoriy Rafaelyevich Konson introduces the term “non-self-conception” to name a critical approach to understanding the experience and representation of catastrophe in European art from the 15th through 20th centuries. Ideas of the Self and the Non-Self are informed by scholarship in aesthetics, psychology, critical theory, and semiotics as well as art history and cinema studies. The “non-self-conception” is conceived as an artistic response to catastrophe. “The basis of the structural-semantic invariant of the ‘non-self-conception,’” Konson writes, “is formed by the pretensions on success and on their unrealizability.”

Literary works considered include Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, Chekhov’s “The Black Monk,” and Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita*, among others, with the aim of elucidating conceptions of the self as doubled. The emblematic example that emerges is the selling of the soul to the devil in literary works by Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, and of course Goethe. The “non-self-conception” emerges, Konson argues, as a parallel to the doubling in Romantic aesthetics between ideal and real, another (transcendent) world and the current lived reality. Romanticism itself doubles the Enlightenment, of course. A protagonist thus comes to embody this split with the Self apart from the non-self. Key here is the emergence of the Devil in literature, especially the legend(s) of Faust. The many catastrophes in Russia during the 19th century then spurred authors like Pushkin to explore the selling of the soul and bifurcated consciousness. Dostoyevsky suffered personal tragedies—the death of Pushkin and of his mother both in the same year—that informed his work. The Devil in *The Brothers Karamazov* is less a deceiving trickster than a truth-teller. “The hallucinatory image of the devil in the catastrophic consciousness of Karamazov turns out to be not simply an emanation of his fantasy,” Konson explains, “or a mold of his ailing soul, but a surrogate means of defense in a moral judgment which Ivan evidently and subconsciously carries out on himself.” In discussing *The Brothers Karamazov* and Chekhov’s “The Black Monk,” Konson surveys various interpretations, then demonstrates how the lens of the “non-self-conception” helps illuminate key, and often confounding, issues in the texts. In “The Black Monk,” for example, “the dialogic communication of the double comprises its structural core,” explaining the doubled consciousness of the protagonist and “his death by means of a

mirage.” Ultimately, Konson concludes that the “non-self-conception” takes the form of the antichrist and the criminal as concerns deeply rooted in Russian history, culture and religion.

The grotesquerie of the catastrophic (or catastrophe of the grotesque) is explored in paintings by Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel, while in music early modern work by Giacomo Carissimi and Georg Friedrich Handel serve as prelude to that analysis of Tchaikovsky’s *Romeo and Juliet* (the overture-fantasy) along with Shostakovich’s film scores for *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. Again concepts of the self and non-self are rooted, in the visual arts of the 15th century, in ideas about human divinity: the union with the divine offering a sense of self whereas the crucifixion of God and specter of the antichrist define the non-self. Bruegel in particular was interested in portraying communities as gatherings of distinctly drawn individuals, often engaged in various sinful, earthly activities. Their colorful, visually dazzling canvases concealed their debased subject matter: positive aesthetics doubles a negative ethics. As Konson demonstrates, “reflection of such a bifurcated reality, characterized by the overthrow of the spiritual and the diabolization of the earthly, was closely connected with the duplicity of the worldviews of Bosch and Bruegel as philosopher and as artists.” The catastrophe here is the fall, and the non-self-conception embraces the absurd as a debasement of daily life.

The oratorio as a genre proves crucial in the study of the “non-self-conception” in music and the role of the dialogue—between body and soul, heaven and the world, restraint and pleasure. Cavalieri’s early oratorios provides religious education for the masses, with “self-conception” containing the sacred values as distinct from mundane ones in the “non-self-conception.” Carissimi then consolidated features of the oratorio as a genre while moving away from philosophical and allegorical thinking to focus instead on people rather than precepts. A newly tragic sense of the “non-self-conception” emerged, reflecting the historical shifts of the Counter-Reformation. “The dramatic qualities of Carissimi connected (unlike the picturesque juxtaposition of allegories in Cavalieri’s work) with the implementation of eventful plots of the Biblical narratives, was the result of the reflection of the processes of the Counter-Reformation,” Konson notes, “which at the time of the wars devastating the country resulted in the conflict between the human and the regulating ecclesiastical elements.” Thus Carissimi’s *Jepthe* “was composed in line with the ethical directive towards the fulfillment of the moral duty that obliged people to sacrifice what was most dear to them.” Considered together, Cavalieri and Carissimi can be seen to define the “two characteristic types of European oratorio: the allegorically abstractive and the concrete-narrative.”

Konson spend considerable time exploring the history of the oratorio outside Italy, namely in England, to contextualize the works of Handel, noting that Handel was not only influenced by the Italian tradition but also by English practice, then “at the stage of a catastrophic decline.” Handel’s “self-conception” in his oratorios was shaped by his librettists. Thomas Morell, for example, enhanced the sense of tragic fate and added in images of “non-self-conception” in the form of evil as virtue undone. Dramatically active plots shift to become more tragic and psychological.

Tchaikovsky takes a novel approach, in Konson’s view, toward the “non-self-conception,” insofar as the church and God himself as presented as dark forces. In his fantasy overture on *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, the “non-self-conception” is expressed no as between two families, but consists in a nodular entwinement of three

images,” including the chorale as a symbol of the church. The melodic, identifiably Slavic chorale becomes in the second section of the introduction an assertive march: the true character of the killer. Enmity and love are the second and third images. Thus the church in *Romeo and Juliet* is the “non-self-conception” of a dual nature: prayerful in its presentation, but inwardly destructive and bound up with the dark forces of fate.

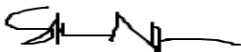
Shostakovich, as a Soviet composer, crafted a different “non-self-conception” that perhaps has the same weight of fate but take the form of repression. His music for *Hamlet* and *King Lear* captures the inner turmoil of the “self” as well as the emotional and intellectual struggles of Shakespeare’s protagonists. Moreover, the distinct conceptions of the prologue to *Hamlet*, as constructed by director and composer, lends the “non-self-conception” a tragic duality. The “question” intonation, which Konson describes with sophisticated sensitivity, seems at once personal to Shostakovich and altogether universal; the intonation pervades both film scores. In *King Lear*, the “non-self-conception” is checked, according to the principle of relief in Shostakovich’s music, by the surprisingly lyrical music for the Holy Fool. Likewise Ophelia’s lyrical song serves as a “lightening rod” than attracts the repressive power of the “non-self-conception.”

Thus in music, the interpersonal dialogue in Cavalieri’s work gave way to the interpersonal conflict in Carissimi’s. Then, in the 18th century, Handel embraced the tragic to explore the antichristic “non-self-conception.” The very real tragedies and catastrophes of the late 19th and 20th centuries in Russia inform Tchaikovsky’s and Shostakovich’s turn to the “non-self-conception,” the former composer expressing a fear of retribution, the latter of repression.

Thus ranging through some four hundred years of Russian and European art, literature, and music, Konson reveals the many manifestation of the “non-self-conception,” from the devilish to the absurdist, the repressive to the apocalyptic as an “authorial psycho-philosopheme” reflecting the struggles and successes of the human experience.

The Dissertation of KONSON Grigoriy Rafaelyevich on the subject of the “Manifestation of ‘Non-Self Conception’ and the Experience of Catastrophe in European Artistic Practices from the 15th to the 20th Centuries” meets the basic requirements of Order No. 6821/1 of September 1, 2016, “On the procedure for awarding academic degrees at St. Petersburg State University.” The candidate, Konson, Grigoriy Rafaelyevich merits the awarding of the doctorate degree in the area of 24.00.01 – “Theory and History of Culture. Clause 11 of the aforementioned Order has not been violated.

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