

On the Republication in Post-Soviet Russia of V. Rozanov's Anti-Semitic Work

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Vasily Rozanov (1856-1919) belongs to the collection of Russian conservative thinkers whose work was banned from publication in the Soviet Union. On the staff of the arch-conservative, monarchist newspaper *Novoe vremia* (New Times), Rozanov was the most politically controversial philosopher of the Russian turn-of-the-century Silver Age. His death in 1919, shortly after the Bolshevik revolution, interrupted the release of his anti-revolutionary work *Apokalipsis nashego vremeni* (Apocalypse of Our Times) (1918)—the publication of which would become impossible a few years later when the new government put an end to counter-revolutionary propaganda. However, Rozanov's posthumous popularity among Russian intellectuals was so great that Leon Trotsky himself felt obliged to write a vitriolic article in *Petrogradskaia pravda* (21 September 1922) entitled “Mistitsizm i kanonizatsiia Rozanova” (Mysticism and the canonisation of Rozanov), in which he attacked the Russian formalists' sudden preoccupation with Rozanov's supposedly original narrative techniques. Trotsky saw Rozanov first of all as a false coward (p. 318), a “worm-like writer and person” and a “hanger on” (p. 318, p. 319) whose attitude towards the Jews was illustration of his falseness and cowardice: during the Beilis affair in 1913 Rozanov accused the Jews of practising the ritual murder of Christians, while on his deathbed he called them one of the world's greatest people. For Trotsky, Rozanov's praise of the Jews was an even

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greater provocation than his previous claims for the existence of a Jewish blood libel. In this, Trotsky showed insight into the blurred boundaries which separate aspects of Judeophobia and Judeophilia. He also rightly suspected Rozanov of being self-serving, given that his letter requesting the forgiveness of the Jews was written during the post-revolutionary famine when Rozanov found himself poor and hungry and without income. As is clear from the letter itself, Rozanov was simultaneously asking for forgiveness and asking the Moscow Jewish community for financial aid for his family.¹

What Trotsky did not mention in his sarcastic article was that, in a spirit of repentance, Rozanov had also asked for all his anti-Jewish books to be destroyed;² neither did Trotsky mention that Rozanov had considered the arrest and execution by revolutionaries of his former colleague from the *Novoe vremia*, the famous anti-Semite O. Menshikov, to be a sign of Jehovah's judgement.³ Some eighty years after Rozanov's death, his most infamous anti-Jewish book, *Olfactory and Tactile Attitude of the Jews Towards Blood* (hereafter *OTAJTB*), was republished in the country of his birth. While the Soviet Union considered Rozanov to be a persona *non grata* whose work was banned, Perestroika reforms led to the opening of classified files and closed archives. Glasnost saw an upsurge in the publication of formerly hidden material—the “blank spots” of Russian intellectual history were being filled. Rozanov's work became a favourite for publication to the extent that two editions of his collected works were published concurrently in the 1990s—one edited by V. G. Sukach, the

¹In his letter of 10 January 1919, “Moia predsmertnaia volia” (My last testament), Rozanov openly asked the Moscow Jewish community, in exchange for the right of publication of his work, to grant his family a farm with five cows, ten chickens, a dog, a horse, and supply of dairy products and “gefilte” fish. He ended the letter with a proclamation of his faith in the eternal glory of Israel. See “V. V. Rozanov. Pis'ma 1917-1919 godov”, ed. and introd. E. Ivanova, *Literaturnaia ucheba*, 1 (1990): 70-88, 84.

other by Aleksandr Nikoliukin (not to mention numerous editions of individual works).⁴ It is the Nikoliukin edition, sponsored by the government's "Federal Programme of Book Publishing in Russia", that saw the republication of *OTAJTB* in 1998. Fragments and excerpts from this work have been floating about in the Russian post-censorship book market in material published by the Black Hundreds⁵ but Nikoliukin's is the first official government sponsored publication of the book.

Thought to be the most controversial anti-Semitic book after *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, *OTAJTB* is a collection of articles written by Rozanov in the years during the Beilis Affair (1911-1913) and published serially in the *Novoe vremia* and *Zemshchina*. They first appeared in book form in 1914 and it is this edition which was republished in its entirety in the 1998 volume under review. Over the period of time that Mendel Beilis (1874-1934), a Kiev Jew, was unjustly accused, tried and, two years later, acquitted of the ritual murder of a

²Pis'ma V. Rozanova k A. Izmailovu (1909-1918g.g.), *The New Review (Novyi zhurnal)* no. 136 (1979): 121-126, 124.

³V. V. Rozanov, "Obrashchenie k evreiam", *Apokalipsis nashego vremeni* (Moscow, 2000), 185.

⁴In this article, I discuss the following post-Soviet publications: V. V. Rozanov, *Sakharna. Oboniatel'noe i osiazatel'noe otnoshenie evreev k krovi* (Sakharna. Olfactory and tactile attitude of Jews towards blood) (Moscow, 1998); Aleksandr Nikoliukin, *Golgofa Vasiliia Rozanova* (Moscow, 1998); Aleksandr Nikoliukin, *Rozanov* (Moscow, 2001); and V. V. Rozanov. *Listva* (Leaves) (Moscow, 2001).

⁵See "Aleksandr Men' i delo Beilisa", in "Chernaia sotnia", no. 9-11, 1995 where Dr Petr Lanin uses fragments from the *OTAJTB* to show that there exists a blood libel among the Jews and that Jewish Christians like Father Men' conspire to deny the existence of this practice among the Jews.

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Christian boy, Andrei Iushchinskii, Rozanov published articles to the effect that it was quite plausible that Beilis was guilty, since the whole attitude of Judaism towards blood involved a mystery hidden from Christians—a special relationship to blood manifested in Jewish kosher dietary laws which specify the ritual slaughter of animals. Rozanov’s texts construct a parallel between animal slaughter, where blood is let out of the “victim”, and the ritual slaughter of the Christian body. He produced a diagram in which the thirteen wounds on the body of Iushchinskii are interpreted as cabalistic signs, each of the wounds corresponding to a letter of the Hebrew alphabet and ascribed with a deep mystical significance. As I have pointed out elsewhere, Rozanov’s texts always treat animal and human bodies as microcosms, as when, for example, he rather dilettantishly deciphers Ancient Egyptian drawings as symbols of a special relationship between the body and the macrocosm.⁶ In *OTAJTB*, the murderous actions of the accused Jew Beilis are seen as atavistic behaviour resulting from the survival in his memory of the ancient knowledge of blood as a metaphysical category. Talmudic writing has blood as the seat of the soul, maintains Rozanov, and Jews conceal from the rest of the world their knowledge of the link between physiology and metaphysics, or microcosm and macrocosm.⁷

With the publication of the new material, it has become possible to map out diachronically a more complex trajectory for Rozanov’s views on Judaism and the Jews. As I have outlined elsewhere, his thinking in this area has a starting point in his period of Orientalist fantasies concerning Jewish sexuality in his 1903 work “Judaism.” It then develops into an evaluation of the Jews as anomalous Others with perverse sexualities, which culminated in his work at the time of the Beilis Affair and afterwards. It ends with his

⁶Efim Kurganov and Henrietta Mondry, *Rozanov i evrei* (St. Petersburg, 2000).

⁷E. Kurganov and H. Mondry, *ibid.*

reevaluation of the Jews after the Russian revolution of 1917.

In the first period, the Jewish body is construed as part of an ancient civilization which is contrary in nature to the frigidity of Christianity. Essentialist Jewishness is depicted as an exemplary representation of sensual culture; a way of being which Rozanov believed should be emulated by his contemporaries. During the second stage of Rozanov's thinking, a time when Mendel Beilis, a Kiev Jew, was accused in the ritual murder of the Christian boy Iushchinskii, Rozanov represents Jewish sexuality as dangerously anomalous. Here the actual body of Beilis is regarded as atavistic and unconsciously guided by primordial calls of nature. In the Jewish body, culture and civilization are overridden by nature. The touch and smell of blood, as well as erotic intoxication by the sadistic infliction of wounds, become markers of Jewish sexual pathology. In the third and final stage of his thinking on the Jews, Rozanov was influenced by the bloody Revolution of 1917, which he saw as testimony of Christianity's inability to halt the violence of the Russian people. He now begins to speak of Judaism as a religion of high moral values, and of the Jewish people as carriers of ethical, political and family values which the violent Russian peasants would do well to emulate. An evaluative inversion takes place, and the Russian, not the Jewish body, is viewed as genetically and racially faulty. Finally, since the Jewish body comes to be seen by Rozanov as a metaphysical body, the body in a sexual covenant with the body of God, it becomes a channel for his own immortality. The Jewish body at last reveals itself.

Let us now consider how the publisher and editor of Rozanov's work, Aleksandr Nikoliukin—also publisher and author of the three other books discussed here—handles this explosive material. Unfortunately, in his edition of Rozanov's book there is not a single reference to the work done by Western scholars on the Beilis Affair, or to the literature on Rozanov's attitude towards Jews. The fourth volume of Leon Poliakov's *The History of Anti-Semitism* (1985), containing a discussion of the Beilis Affair and Rozanov's book, is not

mentioned. Neither is Laura Engelstein's (1992) discussion of the parallels between Rozanov's depiction of Beilis as a sadistic murderer intoxicated by the taste of his victim's blood and other racist turn-of-the-century discourses on psychopathology.⁸ There is no reference to the work on Rozanov and the Beilis Affair carried out by Leonid Katsis in Russia. Katsis showed that Rozanov relied heavily on the anti-Jewish statements of A. Shmakov and I. Liutostansky – the very same work which he considered to be anti-Semitic in his earlier period. He sets out a typology of anti-Jewish opinion in the subculture of the Russian Silver Age and argues that Rozanov's views both reflected and formed the anti-Jewish moods of contemporary discourses.⁹ Nikoliukin is silent on the subject of these works which would contextualise Rozanov's writings for modern readers. Instead, he provides a commentary at the end of the volume entitled "K voprosu o mifologeme natsional'nogo v tvorchestve V. V. Rozanova" (Towards the question of the ethnic mythologeme in V. V. Rozanov's writing) (pp. 414-420). In this short essay Nikoliukin tells the story of Rozanov's expulsion from the Religious Philosophical Society resulting from his anti-Semitic stance on the Beilis Affair. Nikoliukin expresses his dismay at the fact that this most original of the Russian thinkers was expelled from the society, and he presents it as a case of Dmitry Merezhkovsky and Zinaida Gippius exercising their power and domination over the society. Avoiding an analysis of the core issue of the Beilis Affair, Nikoliukin instead explains Rozanov's writing of this period with reference to an inability to see Jews as real people rather than a mythopoetic idea (mythologeme). He quotes a few examples from Rozanov's

⁸See Leon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, vol. IV, *Suicidal Europe, 1870-1933* (Oxford, 1985); Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siecle Russia* (Ithaca, 1992).

⁹Leonid Katsis, "'Delo Beilisa' v kontekste 'Serebriannogo veka'", in A. Tager, *Tsarskaia Rossiia I Delo Beilisa* (reprint). (Moscow, 1995)

letters to Mikhail Gershenzon in which Rozanov speaks of his special liking of the Jewish people, and he also mentions a letter written by Rozanov shortly before his death, where he again claims to admire the Jews. However, Nikoliukin contradicts his argument that Rozanov saw the Jews as a mythologeme of his own invention, a part of his own “virtual reality”(p. 419), when he mentions that Rozanov also treated actual Jewish people with “suspicion, mistrust, expectations of ‘misfortune for himself’”(p. 416), and he slips into cliché in assigning Rozanov with “antinomical thinking” (p. 416) in his attitude towards the Jews, so reducing his own arguments *ad absurdum*: If the Jews were just a mythologeme for Rozanov, a figment of his imagination, why should he have feelings of mistrust towards real Jews? Unlike Trotsky and Engelstein, Nikoliukin refuses to see that, in Rozanov’s case, Judeophilia and Judeophobia form the same converging continuum, rather than “antinomies”.

Nikoliukin’s apologetics become apparent when he absolves Rozanov from responsibility for the way his writing has been interpreted: “Rozanov always was inclined to talk about ethnicity (natsional’nom) in an intimate way, not thinking at all about how he could be understood and interpreted” (p. 418). This line of argument is especially inapplicable to the *OTAJTB*, a set of passionate essays on the subject of blood in Hebrew literature, regarding which he frequently points to the authority and expertise of his “learned friend” and priest Father Pavel Florensky.¹⁰ Rozanov’s position in this book is that of a fervent believer unequivocally convinced that Jews have a special, anomalous attitude toward blood.

In his edition of the *OTAJTB*, Nikoliukin also neglects to mention Rozanov’s fears and anxieties about Jews, a manifestation of his belief in a worldwide Jewish conspiracy.

¹⁰Three essays in the book were written by Pavel Florensky who used the Greek letter Omega as a pseudonym. See E. Kurganov, *op. cit.*

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Rozanov regarded Judaism itself as a religion with something to hide, with secret written sources—for Rozanov the very language of the Hebrews was a secret one whose hidden meanings are accessible only to a chosen few, hence the titles of the three chapters in the book: “Judaic secret writing” (pp. 276-280), “Do Jews have secrets? (An answer to the responses of 400 rabbis)” (pp. 281- 283), and “Once more on the Jewish secret (An answer to Mr. Pereferkovich)” (pp. 283-285). In summary, readers of the Nikoliukin edition are left to find their own way through a plethora of anti-Semitic discourse underpinned by conspiracy theories of world domination by Jews, and claims for the existence of Jewish secret rites and mysteries directed at the physical, spiritual and economic destruction of Christians—and Russians in particular.

Nikoliukin’s attitude that *OTAJTB* is a serious work which deserves to be published is not singular in Russia today. A. Solzhenitsyn’s book on the history of Russian Jewry, *Dvesti let vmeste* (Two hundred years together), came out in the same series—*Russkii put’* (Russian path)—as Nikoliukin’s 1998 biography of Rozanov. Solzhenitsyn’s discussion of the Beilis Affair and Stolypin’s murder by D. Bogrov relies on Rozanov’s book as a worthy source and quotes Rozanov on the role of the Jewish press in the Beilis Affair without explaining Rozanov’s position.¹¹ Solzhenitsyn expresses the opinion that the Beilis Affair was a shameful page in Russian history but it would not have taken place had Stolypin been in charge of the Russian government. He fails to mention that Beilis was arrested six months before Stolypin’s murder.¹²

In the first full biography of Rozanov, written by Nikoliukin in the Soviet and post-

¹¹A. Solzhenitsyn, *Dvesti let vmeste (1795-1995)*, vol. I (Moscow, 2001).

¹²See Leonid Katsis, *Russkaia eskhatologiya i russkaia literatura* (Moscow, 2000).

Soviet Russia (1998, 2001),¹³ the Beilis Affair does not receive any extensive treatment. In *V. Rozanov* (2001), Nikoliukin repeats verbatim his post-scriptum to the *OTAJTB*. He introduces the matter of Rozanov's exclusion from the Religious Philosophical Society by way of a discussion of the anti-Russian mood prevailing in the Russia of 1911. He cites Rozanov's distress at the murder of the Russian Prime Minister Stolypin in 1911 as a turning point in his disposition towards the Jews, quoting the letter to Gershenzon (1912) in which Rozanov claims that Jews feel they have a right to kill Russians and that the actions of the Jewish assassin Bogrov typify this feeling. By these and other means, Nikoliukin depicts Rozanov's anger towards the Jews as a patriotic response to the political situation between the two Russian revolutions. Significantly for the purposes of this investigation, Nikoliukin begins his discussion of Rozanov's anti-Jewish writing with a reference to Rozanov's article on political emigration, where Rozanov objects to political exiles being allowed to return to Russia. Speaking of the destructive force which the émigré community would become once within Russia, Rozanov likens their impact to the ruinous consequences of anti-Jewish pogroms. Nikoliukin rather skilfully manipulates the matter of the Jewish question in Russia at the time of Stolypin murder and the Beilis Affair, subtly deflecting the discussion from anti-Jewish pogroms towards the notion of a pogrom against Russians. Russia is the country which pioneered government-manipulated pogroms against the Jews in times of political and economic tension,¹⁴ but Nikoliukin doesn't discuss these. Instead, he quotes a fragment from

¹³Erick Gollerbakh's *V. V. Rozanov. Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* came out in St. Petersburg in 1922. Gollerbakh's biography remained the most comprehensive one until Nikoliukin's *Golgofa Vasiliia Rozanova* (Moscow, 1998). Much of this book came in the "Zhizn' zamechatel'nykh liudei" edition of 2001. Passages relating to Rozanov's expulsion from Religious Philosophical Society in 1913 are identical in both books.

¹⁴See the discussion of pogroms in turn-of-the-century Russia in Poliakov, *op. cit.* pp. 67-137.

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a patriotic letter of Rozanov's: "...revolution is a pogrom of Russia, and emigrants are pogromschicks of everything Russian, Russian education, Russian family, Russian children, Russian villages and towns, of everything that the Lord organised and blessed" (p. 407). The identity of the alleged émigré-pogromschicks is clear to the contemporary Russian reader familiar with Igor Shafarevich's famous article, "The phenomenon of emigration" (1989), condemning Russian emigration as anti-patriotic and russophobic.¹⁵ Nikoliukin does not mention this article and relies on his reader's familiarity with it, thus forming an intertextual connection with this landmark of Russian cultural history. Shafarevich compares the Russian Andrei Siniavsky's *Progulki s Pushkinym* (Strolls with Pushkin) with Salman Rushdi's *Satanic Verses*, and proposes that the same measures be taken against Siniavsky as were taken against Rushdi by Islamic fundamentalists. For Shafarevich, Third Wave emigration from Russia in the 1970s, a predominantly Jewish phenomenon, has a direct historical link with the emigration from nineteenth-century tsarist Russia by socialist westernisers like Aleksandr Gertsen. Also, Siniavsky uses a Jewish name, Abram Tertz, as his pseudonym. Shafarevich's article operates in Nikoliukin's text as a veiled allusion to the cultural phenomenon of emigration, and as such Nikoliukin strategy is to forge a patriotic alliance with his contemporary Russian readers. The subtext of ethnicity in Shafarevich's well known article, in combination with selected patriotic passages from Rozanov's texts, are thus used by Nikoliukin to deflect the discussion away from the persecution of Jews in tsarist Russia and towards the notion of the subjugation of things Russian by the revolutionaries. "Revolutionaries" thus becomes a euphemism for the Jews. An additional result of this strategy of Nikoliukin's is to make invisible the phenomenon of anti-Jewish pogroms.

The ethnic component of Nikoliukin's politics is more clearly defined than in

¹⁵Igor Shafarevich, "Fenomen emigratsii", *Literaturnaia Rossia* 8, no. 9 (1989): 3.

Rozanov's politics: Nikoliukin does not mention Rozanov's article in the *Apocalypse of Our Times* (1918): "Why must one not organise pogroms against the Jews?",¹⁶ in which he took an anti-pogrom stance and acknowledged the barbarism of the pogroms in Russia. Nikoliukin does not take this opportunity to address the remarkable changes in Rozanov's views about Jews and Russians following the October Revolution. As demonstrated in Mondry and Kurganov's study, Rozanov inverted his love/hatred schema of the Jewish Other and moved Russians to the pole of the hated nation.¹⁷ In Nikoliukin's biography, which silences anti-Jewish pogroms and fails to examine the dynamics of the Beilis Affair, Jews become not the victims but the villains of the piece, and Russians are the victims of an anti-Russian Jewish conspiracy which crosses borders between East and West, Russia and Europe.

This smuggling of Jewish stereotypes into contemporary discourse also takes place in the collection of Rozanov's work published by Nikoliukin under the title "Listva" (Leaves) (2001) and appearing under the aegis of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The book consists of extracts from Rozanov's work from 1913 to 1918, such as *Sakharna, Mimoretnoe* (What is transient), *Poslednie list'ia* (Last leaves) and parts of the manuscripts of the *Apocalypse of our times* and *Vozrozhdaishchisia Egipet* (Resurrected Egypt). Part of a series called "Zolotaia proza Serebriianogo veka" (Golden prose of the Silver Age), it is addressed, as the cover page announces, to "pupils of schools, lycees, colleges, university students, teachers and all lovers of Russian literature" (p. IV). The collection contains an essay by Nikoliukin in which neither the Jewish problematics in Rozanov's writing nor Rozanov's expulsion from the Religious Philosophical Society receive any mention. However, the collection does include a number of anti-Jewish passages from *Sakharna* (1913), written by Rozanov at his

¹⁶V. V. Rozanov, "Pochemu na samom dele nel'zia evreiam ustraiivat' pogromov?", "Apokalipsis nashego vremeni", in *Mimoretnoe* (Moscow, 1994), 442-450.

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friend's Bessarabian estate of that name at the time when Mendel Beilis was acquitted of murder. As I have shown elsewhere,¹⁸ *Sakharna* contains the most open and venomous anti-Semitic statements to be found in Rozanov's work. Nikoliukin included in this collection passages where Rozanov's attacks the Jews for their domination over the Russian press (p. 30) and industry (p. 26), for their exploitation of Russian workers and peasants (p. 26), and for his expulsion from the Religious Philosophical Society resulting from his stance on the Beilis Affair (p. 78, p. 119). The editor also included pieces where Rozanov compares the "victory" of the Jews in the Beilis Affair to the defeat of the Russians in the Russo-Japanese war (p. 90) and insists that Iushchinsii's murder was an act of Jewish ritual (p. 91).

To include Rozanov's *maximes* (or "scattered leaves") without extensive commentary in a book partly aimed at the juvenile market is like having Hitler's *Mein Kampf* or *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* on student reading lists without providing any literature which critiques these works. But such is the high price to pay for the post-Soviet end to censorship, when *The Protocols* is available on sale in the Moscow State University's bookshop alongside Rozanov's controversial fabrication of Talmudic ritual murders.¹⁹ On the subject of literature and ethics Emmanuel Levinas once wrote, "A book is interrupted discourse catching up with its own breaks. But the books have their fate; they belong to the world they do not include, but recognise by being printed. They are interrupted and call for other books and at the end are interpreted in a saying distinct from the said" (p. 80).²⁰ The fate of

¹⁷See E. Kurganov and H. Mondry, *op. cit.*

¹⁸See E. Kurganov and H. Mondry, *op. cit.*

¹⁹On *The Protocols* and their popularity in Russian today see Svetlana Boym, "Conspiracy Theories and Literary Ethics: Umberto Eco, Danilo Kis and the Protocols of Zion", *Comparative Literature* 51, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 97-122.

²⁰Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as the First Philosophy", in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand

Rozanov's infamous works is similar to that of the books to which Levinas refers: treated as sacred texts which fill in the "blank spots" of Russian history, they contribute to the proliferation of contemporary culture's discourses on conspiracies and world domination—even though the author himself redeemed his work by leaving written instructions for the books to be thrown into the purifying element of fire. But in Russia, as we learned from Mikhail Bulgakov's schizoid hero, manuscripts do not burn.