

The Roving Shadows Book Review

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In 2002, the Prix Goncourt was awarded to Pascal Quignard for the work *The Roving Shadows*, which is an amazing combination of several genres: a novel, philosophical essay, and poem. The author was not only a master of words and a virtuoso, but also a scholar in many fields of art and culture.

Pascal Quignard was born in the town of Verneuil-sur-Avre, Eure department, France, on 23 April 1948. His childhood and youth were spent in Pascal Le Havre, where he studied music with enthusiasm. Among his interests was also the study of ancient languages. Prior to 1968, he studied philosophy. He was taught by Paul Ricoeur and Emmanuel Levinas. The following year, he published *The Existence of Mumbling*, his first novel, exploring the identity of Sacher-Masoch. After the publication of his first novel, Quignard began to regularly write and publish novels, operas, and fairy tales. Along the way, he became an editor at the publishing house Gallimard, and founder and director of the International Festival of Opera and Ballet Theatre in Versailles.

The Roving Shadows is the first part of a multi-volume epic, which the author intends to write to the end of his days. He said: "I do not know how many volumes it will be, ten or twenty." In 2002, three parts were published: *The Roving Shadows*, *Once*, and *Abyss*. They are all united by a common name: *The Last Kingdom*.

Quignard says in *The Roving Shadows*: "In April 1994, I left the Louvre, looked at the blue sky, on a glowing white walls of the museum and suddenly quickened the steps. I came out into the Sebastien Bottom street (the address of the publishing house "Gallimard"), pushed the massive wooden door and refused from all of my functions in a moment." The decision to retire from active work, prestigious classes, and social life was natural for a writer. He tells in the novel what prompted him to make such an important step. You can guess the reasons for this decision if you look at his previous work. All his life he wrote about hermits, people living alone, praising their indifference to the outside world and success, and especially for him it was the inner world of man.

The Roving Shadows is a fragmented novel, where each passage is in the right place and is associated with other fragments into a single whole with a highly poetic language. It collects the life fragments of an outstanding writer, philosopher, and thinker. For himself, Quignard's work became a kind of Noah's Ark, with the help of which he could escape the

reality that is alien to a writer. In *The Roving Shadows*, the author puts the inner life at the forefront, admiring the wonders of life, criticizing reality and focusing on the important little things.

The writer opens the curtain of his creative workshop for his reader, and explains what techniques he uses and how he writes his work. Creating many pages, he cuts to the heart of what is written, resulting in an amazing concentration of deep thought, erudition, and a collection of perfect syllables. The writer has found his mystical city of God in loneliness and reclusion. He has stepped back from the outside world to dissolve into the inner world. This happened a few years ago, but the writer's joy and satisfaction about his decision only increased over the years.

The book contains many interesting and original statements. It would be desirable, as it was in childhood, to rewrite clever and profound phrases in a separate notebook. But then, all of the pages would need to be rewritten.

According to the structure, the book is divided into 55 short chapters, and its title was taken from the book *Confessions* by St. Augustine. In this work, Augustine contrasts the city of God to the earthly one, like Quignard opposes the inner world to the outer world. Chapters are short, often taking only one page, even one or two small paragraphs.

The structure of the novel has a certain logic. The author quotes one famous old man and starts a dialogue with him, or develops his idea, either rejecting or arguing with it, proving the opposite. Or, he describes a historical event and the consequences of its projects on our reality and even the future. The language is really beautiful, and an impressive display of erudition of the author, but to understand the course of his thoughts, the book should be read more than once and quite thoughtfully.

An example of the writer's style is as follows: "Happiness welled up inside me. I read. I was engulfed by happiness. I read all summer long. Happiness engulfed me all summer long." And for another example: "The crowing of the cockerel, the dawn, the barking of dogs, the gathering daylight, a man rising, nature, time, dreams, lucidity—everything is fierce" (p. 3).

The fragmentary style of writing in the novel met with criticism among the Goncourt Prize judges, who referred to the fact that the product can't be attributed to any genre. But the president of the academy stood up for the book, referring to the will of Edmond Goncourt, who wrote that "any work can participate in the competition, regardless of the genre, but with

fantasy and imagination. Even diaries of impressions.” Thus, Mrs. Edmond Charles-Roux convinced the remaining members of the jury of the book’s exceptionalism, so the award found its hero.

So what is *The Roving Shadows* about? It is about the glorification of the inner life, the criticism of reality, the youthful admiration and wonder of life, and of ancient authors, and attention to detail, which only seem to be so. The book can be compared with the sea, on one side of which is knowledge, and on the other is trivial everyday thoughts and facts, and the author floats in his ark, without knowing to what shore to stick.

Pascal Quignard continues to lead a modest life of a hermit to this day. He works away from the world and seems to be enjoying the remoteness from the outside world and the opportunity to explore his inner world.

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