

The Writer in a Time of Change: Relation to the Sacred

On the work of Bulgarian writer Georgi Gospodinow, who made his debut in the
1990s

SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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The purpose of this dissertation is to attempt to answer the question concerning the spirituality of the modern human by drawing on the work of Bulgarian writer Georgi Gospodinow, who made his debut in the 1990s. Two of the writer's novels and his poetry were analyzed. The analysis required proposing a new methodological tool in the study of the literary subject.

1. The first chapter of the thesis discusses the basic concepts of subject analysis in literature. The state of research on the subject in contemporary literature after 1989 in Poland and Bulgaria is reviewed. A new theoretical and literary tool has been proposed to study the sphere of the sacred and the spirituality of the subject in literature: *the personalistic literary subject*. This notion is inspired by the personalistic current in philosophy and its influence in Polish literary criticism. The analysis of the Bulgarian writer's work was inspired by various ideas from contemporary psychology, philosophy, the works of religious scholar Mircea Eliade, Paul Ricoeur, Jungian studies, and the Jungian interpretation of the myth of Theseus and Ariadne. The aim of the literary analysis is to isolate the image of God held by the literary subject in the works of the Bulgarian writer. The research question is: Does the subject's relation to the sacred change in a time of change? Does the collapse of the grand narrative of the One God cause the void to be filled with an increased need for spirituality and finding meaning in everyday life? What significance is attributed to Christian motifs in literary works of this period?

2. The second chapter outlines the profile of a contemporary Bulgarian writer and analyzes his first novel, *The Natural Novel*. The analysis was focused on the key themes of the novel, looking for an answer to the question about the image of God possessed by *the personalistic literary subject* in this work: 1) The self in the face of pain and suffering: private apocalypses; 2) The self in the face of the mystery of life and existence: the trivial – the transcendence of the everyday; 3) The God of holy childhood; 4) Language – God. Nature = text; 5) References to Christianity, its symbols and motifs; 6) Other religious motifs (of Zen Buddhism); 7) The image of God – summary.

From the analysis, the following conclusion was drawn about the relationship to the sacred and God of the literary subject of the novel: Loss, a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness, and the

need to tell one's own and others' stories are the basic motifs in Gospodinow's work. The image of an absent or incapable father as a moral authority can be clearly seen. This image of the father corresponds perfectly with the image of the absent God. It is very possible that the experience of an 'absent father' and an 'absent God' is characteristic of the late 20th and early 21st century.

3. The third chapter analyzes the literary subject of Gospodinow's second novel *The Physics of Sorrow*. The main keys to analysis and interpretation in this section are Eliade's idea of integral man, Jungian analysis of the myth of Theseus and Ariadne, and Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity.

The analysis of this novel gives the fullest picture of God and the sacred of the literary subject: According to Eliade's concept of the "integral man", *the personalistic literary subject* of Gospodinow's novel compensates for the lack of the sacred and religious faith in God by creating meaning, by telling stories, by withdrawing into himself and thus by experiencing himself and his work more clearly. Meaning is not given in advance by a grand spiritual narrative about the order and sacrality of the world, *the personalistic literary subject* must create it, find it. This causes his loneliness. He goes through the initiation of puberty, faces his shadow, integrates the Anima (the subject is male), experiencing death and rebirth and received help from the feminine side of his own psyche. *The personalistic literary subject* refigures his story, weaving into it the stories of other members of the ecumene, and thus the existential circle becomes a poetic hermeneutic circle. Peace and meaning are achieved, salvation also becomes possible. The subject finds it in telling stories and appreciating both everyday experiences moments and moments of enlightenment. He achieves this by remaining open to the sensitivity of the child and by valuing the presence of children in the world.

4. The fourth chapter is devoted to the image of God that the literary subject in Gospodinow's poetry possesses. The main interpretative key is Harold Bloom's theory of anxiety of influence. The discussion of the relation to the sacred of the literary subject is organized around the following issues: 1) The self in the face of God; 2) language of the child; 3) language-God; 4) Christian and biblical motifs in Gospodinow's poetry. From the analysis of selected poems by Gospodinow, the image of an omnipresent, all-seeing and all-knowing God was extracted. This is a God who is good and just, who wisely creates diverse beings, who endows creatures with a spark of talent. The existence of God is self-evident, he is as real as possible. Attention has been given to two poems by Gospodinow that reflect his actual attitude towards God and testify to the direct relationship of *the personalistic literary subject* with God. One of these poems is a confession – a plea to God for forgiveness, for trying to live outside His place and destiny. The second poem, God of Berlin, is a prayer by a writer who sees and feels the pains of modern, lonely and lost man. The analysis of this poem, as well as the messages of the other poems in which sensitivity to the individual dimension of human existence is present, testify that Georgi Gospodinow's poetry is in some sense evangelical.