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The religious contexts of Olga Tokarczuk's prose in a post-secular perspective.

Summary

The main objectives of the dissertation were to provide comprehensive analysis of the spiritual and religious themes and motifs present in the prose of Olga Tokarczuk; identify and indicate the sources of religious imagery present in the work of Olga Tokarczuk; determine as precisely as possible what meanings and roles the Nobel Prize laureate ascribed to particular religious traditions; find a perspective that allows for a coherent interpretation of elements drawn from different religious thoughts and traditions. The author also tries to answer the question of whether elements coming from different thoughts and religious traditions, present in Olga Tokarczuk's prose, can build a coherent image of the world, man, God and their mutual relations, and if so, why it is possible at all.

The thesis is divided into four parts, the first part of which serves to define the methodological assumptions of the dissertation. The outlined approach to the issue of interpretation, the limits of interpretation, the methodology, authorial intent, and paratexts, is intentionally limited to basic issues and avoids answering questions about the ontology of the text. The author of this paper, as he explains in the introductory chapter, approaches methods and theory pragmatically and instrumentally.

Part two of the dissertation serves primarily to introduce the interpretive chapters and provide theoretical background. The chapter also provides the broader field of intellectual inspiration that laid down the foundations for the interpretative perspectives adopted throughout the work - mostly the concepts proposed by - so called - polish sacrological school and post-secular criticism. Using post-secular thought, the author will stay mainly within the concepts that can be found in the work of Agata Bielik-Robson. In the subsequent chapters of this part of the dissertation, an attempt is made to define as precisely as possible the way in which Tokarczuk's prose understands and uses the key religious ideas in her work: Gnosticism, Kabbalah, Zen Buddhism, and Taoism. The author achieves his goal by problematizing the used categories, finding the sources of the Nobel laureate's knowledge of each, and finally juxtaposing said sources of knowledge with new research in gnostic studies, kabbalah studies, and Far Eastern studies.

The analytical chapters in the fourth, main part of the work, are organized around the triad that is crucial for the post-secular thought, especially the concept of Bielik-Robson: immanence, transcendence and the subject. In the chapters devoted to immanence, the author inspects how time and space are described in Tokarczuk's prose. To adopt a postsecular perspective is to adopt a reading strategy that would reveal and decipher the antagonistic theological horizons of the studied literary material, on the assumption that such a horizon is present in every work - even if it is not obvious on first reading. The analyses carried out show that Tokarczuk's prose can be called post-secular in the sense that Piotr Bogalecki ascribes to this phenomenon, for whom post-secularism is a kind of discontinuation or deconstruction of the grand narrative of European secularism. In these novels, the pure immanence, which Adorno and Horkheimer called the last product of the Enlightenment, reveals its religious horizon and the horror that hides within it. Moments of respite for the protagonists of this prose will be provided only by modern epiphanies, which do not express any sense, do not unequivocally change life for the better, and are not even a message in themselves - their role is, if only for a moment, to open the prison gates, to make a tiny hole in the coliseum of existence. These epiphanies point to traces or remnants of some, unspecified, transcendence, which are opposed by symbols of pre-modern religiosity with its theological absoluteness, symbols such as God, Father, Sovereign, Ruler, and Book. In those novels, these particular symbols are always a threat to the subject and its freedom. Man cannot allow himself to be enclosed in a pure immanence and at the same time he must oppose theological absoluteness. It is a difficult game in which the emancipation of the subject and his freedom are at stake.

Analyses carried out in the last chapters of the work, devoted to the subject suspended between immanence and transcendence, shows that the essence of humanity, according to Tokarczuk, is to behave as if our actions have meaning and significance, even though we have no certainty that they do. This is the situation of a man who does not agree with the reality of a closed circle of being, in which what is individual is worthless and must return to the womb of immovable matter, but at the same time cannot agree with theological absolutism that either, in the Gnostic variant, annuls life in immanence altogether, turning to a radically alien transcendence, or, in the form of great systems of normative religions, seeks to impose one ready-made sense and one possible meaning. This is why the Nobel Prize laureate places her characters in a model of reality that, following Bielik-Robson, the author calls subtly heteronomous immanence, that is, immanence that sustains the influence of transcendence, but only in a form of a trace. Such a vision of reality makes it possible to give meaning to the lives

of the characters (individual and singular, not life in general) without having to completely abolish the trauma of death, and makes it possible to protect the mystery, which gives hope for the existence of some greater meaning, from the temptations of Enlightenment reason on the one hand, and from the equally dangerous languages of the great religious systems of the pre-enlightenment on the other.

The research carried out in this work has shown that the situation of man, a weak being, thrown into the world and into time, searching not even for meaning, but for traces of some meaning, delicate and unknowable influences - again - of some transcendence, which, although will free him from the clutches of the disenchanted world, at the same time will not enslave him, is one of the most important themes in the works of Olga Tokarczuk.

This dissertation has succeeded in identifying and naming the various religious traditions used by the Nobel laureate in her work, identifying her sources of knowledge about them, and thus narrowing the meaning of these categories as precisely as possible so that they are effective in the process of interpreting the research material. The chosen interpretative perspective - Agata Bielik-Robson's post-secular concepts - made it possible to interpret the collected material in a way that not only dealt with the problem of the presence in this work the diverse - seemingly contradictory - religious discourses, but also incorporated this diversity into the interpretation itself. Use of concept drawn from various philosophers, including Bielik-Robson, who are referred to as post-secular, or who are inspirations for those helped with revealing how the Nobel Prize laureate constructs the worlds depicted in her work and how they can be interpreted.