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## **The Sacral Function of Language, Literature and the Bible in the Context of Borislav Pekić's Novel *The Time of Miracles***

### **Introduction**

It is a challenge to talk about the affinity between literary discourse and the discourse of the Bible, while at the same time respecting their heterogeneity. The former is aesthetics *par excellence*, although not without rhetorical elements, the latter rhetorical, although not without aesthetic elements. The challenge is to compare the discourse of literature (whose production is enormous throughout history) to the discourse of biblical "letters" that constitute a single, although extensive, Holy Book. The affinity between literary and biblical discourses is a multifaceted one. It relates to their genre and stylistic hybridity (idiosyncrasy)<sup>1</sup>. Both discourses (biblical and literary) were simplified in the era

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<sup>1</sup> *The Bible* is idiosyncratic discourse because it combines various texts, authors, styles, oracles, kerygma, gospels, epistles, moral teachings and sermons, prayers, hymns, psalms.

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of Realism, Naturalism (which is a sort of “radical Realism”), and Postmodernism, when a desecrated and demythologized image of the world was promoted. It also relates to the fact that both discourses contain traces of pre-conceptual language code (Freidenberg, 1986). This is particularly evident in the biblical myths on the miracles of Christ (Miracle Plays, Mystery Plays).

Yet, on this occasion, I will focus on one other affinity between literary and biblical discourses – the aspect that concerns the *cosmogenic (ontic)* dimension of both discourses, their capability to create fictive worlds and illusions of worlds with a high degree of autonomy. One of the most common forms of the cosmogenic feature of narrative fiction (novel, short story and novella) is its *mythogenic* aspect which is, on its right, inextricably connected with their *ability for miracle creation (the thavma-genic)*<sup>2</sup>. Namely, both literary and biblical discourses are initiated on a certain mythical ground (a story, image, and paradigm).

*Miracle creation (miraculousness, thavma-genic)* is a wider notion, so it will not be elaborated in detail here, but it should be said that it is structured differently and with different intentions in biblical and in literary discourses: biblical miracles are memories and rituals of some sacral act of physical transformation and an argument of God’s existence, whereas literary miracles are mostly metaphysical, linguistic and aesthetic. Moreover, the miracle (mystic participation) becomes effective in the act of reception.

This transfer of the effect of miracle creation in the reception by itself requires that the biblical and literary works are interpreted as *perlocutionary speech acts* and should be treated by the theory of speech acts developed by John Searle and John L. Austin.<sup>3</sup> Perlocutionary “speech acts”, unlike locutionary and illocutionary (which are largely descriptive), are concerned with the effect, reflection and the consequence of a speech act on the auditor. This effect could be realized as

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<sup>2</sup> From the Ancient Greek noun θαύμα (*thávma*), which means miracle, supernatural event (in religion) and marvel, wonder (figuratively). The author of this essay draws a terminological parallel cosmogenic-mythogenic-thavmagenic (in Macedonian: светотворност-митотворност-чудотворност).

<sup>3</sup> According to the speech act theory, there are three levels of performativity and three kinds of speech acts: *locutionary* – which means the act of speaking and it is a communication act, *illocutionary* – which is linked to the intention which produced statements and *perlocutionary* – which shows that with the performed linguistic utterances we influence the listener / reader. The British philosopher of language J. L. Austin was the first to make the above distinctions and also the following classification of speech acts: declarative, representative, expressive, directive and commissive (Austin, 1975, pp. 148–164).

a belief, fear, inspiration, awe, enlightenment, awakening and as other affectations by the auditor. This demonstrates that linguistic propositions could, in certain circumstances, affect “the image of the world” in a person or in a community (auditorium, interpretative, religious or ethnic community).

This *perlocutionary* level of speech is effective and produces actions (and in that sense also cosmogenic) and therefore it is reminiscent of an archaic magical function of speech which used to be activated in short speech formulas (incantations, curses, blessings, prayers, confessions). It is an archaic, magical dimension that is often disregarded as a relic of the primitive consciousness, and I will leave it aside, since the magical function presupposes strict formulaity and rituality, which is not the case with literary works. Formulaity and rituality are only partially characteristic of certain biblical and religious genres and works (prayers and psalms, “Song of Songs”, passages from the *Old and New Testament*). The perlocutionary character of literary and biblical discourse also allows for selected and rare speech acts to be perceived as generators of *the sacral function of language*, which has not only strictly religious, but also social and cultural character. And not only on the individual level, but also on a collective level and range. From the perspective of the structural model of linguistic communication (Bühler, 1934; Jakobson, 1960) the sacral function of language is mostly connected to the conative function – the receiving factor, but it actually also activates other speech factors and would therefore relate to the speech act as such (as opposed to the poetic/aesthetic function that relates to “the message as such” or “the sign as such”).

The sacral function is characterized by a high degree of *effectiveness*, whether established in a literary, religious or other rhetorical speech constellation<sup>4</sup>. It is actually the superior psychagogic effectiveness of the Word, because “it leads the soul from ignorance to knowledge” and causes the feeling of revelation and belonging to the Community, even though it often ends up in the form of mass delusion or fanaticism. Actually, some speech acts are subject to sacralization, although the texts are not “sacral” in terms of their genre. The sacralization of the speech act shows a tendency to extend to the collective (community), especially when it comes to religious ritual acts and those that contain a religious dimension (ideological rhetoric, artistic performances).

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<sup>4</sup> The parts/factors of the linguistic message/communication suit the following functions: 1. sender–expressive or emotive function; 2. context–referential or representational function; 3. receiver –appellative or conative function; 4. code–metalinguistic function; 5. contact/channel–phatic or mediation function; 6. message–aesthetic, stylistic, poetic function.

I will talk about the sacred dimension of language, particularly of literary and biblical texts, because the sacrality is an anthropological invariable of humanity, whether it occurs in the form of primordial urge for the sacred, or as a nostalgia for its embodiments, rituals, and institutions.

## **The sacral effect of the perlocutionary function**

The modern era, based on the principle of desacralization of the view of the world (Ricoeur & Lacocque, 1998), is subversive in regard to the inherited value systems, including the Christian. On the other hand, it had created conditions for the emergence of a pluralistic, non-canonical interpretation of biblical texts. Interpretive pluralism promoted the Bible as sensible literature and, thus, incited a cultural discomfort. The traditional religious optics, conservative by nature, is skeptical towards the external, literary perception of the Bible. It claims that the Bible, understood as a Holy Book (sacral book) *per definitionem*, should be a coherent whole, and each part should be read as a higher noumenal message.<sup>5</sup> But not every part of the Bible is sacred, nor the Bible is a coherent literary unit (Northrop Frye saw it as a hybrid “bricolage”). If read independently, in an improper context, canonical biblical texts are marginalizing their own sacral dimension. One could suggest that only in specific communication and speech constellations certain biblical texts achieve additional sacral effect (also additionally by evoking some sacral events and miracles from the history of Christianity).

On the other hand, in particular circumstances some literary texts act as sacred. Moreover, the effect of sacrality is experienced even in certain pragmatic and profane rhetorical and social situations. Therefore, a question is raised about what kind of sacrality we are talking about. Can one discuss

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<sup>5</sup> From the Latin word *sacrum* – holy or sacred, one that is dedicated to the gods and divine, heavenly and mystical, divine discourse, contrary to the profane discourse. Texture is a term designating the contextual coherence of a text in textual linguistics and sacred texture has specific features. Sacred texture is a texture that is intertwined with each of the other four textures (inner, inter, social/cultural, and ideological), and refers to the manner in which a text communicates insights into the relationship between the human and the divine. This texture includes aspects concerning deity, holy persons, spirit beings, divine history, human redemption, human commitment, religious community (e.g. ecclesiology) and ethics.

sacred texts, the sacral function of language or sacred speech acts? And in that sense, whether and how the sacral function fits into the structure of language communication?

The well-known linguistic message models of Karl Būhler (1934) and Roman Jakobson (1960), the former organonic and the later structural, haven't presupposed this function, at least in taxative manner, but it is being evoked with the appellative/conative function of the receiver, which is referring to the receiver (listener, reader, viewer). Būhler and Jakobson analyze the components of linguistic communication without further interest in the entire context of the speech act in which the basic functions become upgraded and emanate, always unpredictably, an additional psychological and metaphysical property.

That particular property is often complemented by changes in the psyche of the auditors on the level of their perception of the world and self-perception, on the level of identification with the collective or some "Idea" and also on the level of any pragmatic actions (for example, in a case of a fire alarm, earthquake or war). The appellative/conative function is considered the oldest and pre-semiotic function of the language, since in its particular speech situations, the language is primarily directed towards the interlocutor, the auditor and the audience.

The additional effects of a speech act are marked by the perlocutionary function which is essentially performative. It has a predisposition to be ritualized, especially in the community, through the performance and theatricalization of the particular linguistic statement (text, literary work)<sup>6</sup>. The perlocutionary effect is psychological, natural, intuitive, and nonconventional. It originates

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<sup>6</sup> "The perlocutionary act is the act performed *by* saying something. So, by saying 'there is a bull in that field,' I may frighten you. The perlocutionary act is one that results in an actual effect on the hearer" (Cummings, 2010). The perlocutionary act (or perlocutionary effect) is a speech act, as viewed at the level of its consequences, such as persuading, convincing, scaring, enlightening, inspiring or otherwise affecting the listener, it is performed by a speaker upon a listener by means of an utterance. The first to define it was J. L. Austin, first in his Oxford lectures after WW2, then in his Harvard lectures in 1955 and later in his 1962 book *How to Do Things with Words*: "Intuitively, a **perlocutionary act** is an act performed *by* saying something, and not *in* saying something. Persuading, angering, inciting, comforting and inspiring are often perlocutionary acts; but they would never begin an answer to the question 'What did he say?' Perlocutionary acts, in contrast with locutionary and illocutionary acts, which are governed by conventions, are not conventional but natural acts). Persuading, angering, inciting, etc. cause physiological changes in the audience, either in their states or behaviour; conventional acts do not." (Austin, 1975, p. 121)

from the particular linguistic statement and from the manner in which it is performed. It reflects on the auditor as admiration, joy, empathy/sympathy, fear, confidence, incentive and readiness to do anything, euphoria. It is sometimes described as the “accordion effect”. The perlocutionary act means that by saying something, something else could be derived, another action or series of actions to be initiated. It is thus that, depending on the context, the perlocutionary act is defined both as a performative act in which something occurs on a psychological level, as well as on a pragmatic level. In some constellations, such “series of effects” may take even a “sacred” dimension. In the biblical myth of the “Resurrection of Lazarus” (John 11:43), the dead Lazarus resurrects upon the call from Jesus: “Lazarus, come forth!” This is how one of the greatest miracles of Jesus happens. But, just after the resurrection, Lazarus becomes a pretext for a conflict between the followers and opposers of Jesus.

Both the organic structural theory of linguistic communication and the theory of speech acts suggest the power of certain speech situations to influence the consciousness of auditors/readers on an individual as well as on a collective level. In this sense, talking about the sacred dimension of speech means talking about its performative power, i.e. its perlocutionary effects of speech. This psychological/conative or performative/perlocutionary power of specific speech situations is exercised in a special way in the oratory art (religious, propagandist, political, judicial, epideictic/panegyric), in literature and in sacral rituals.

This “property” arises from the ontic character of the “message” in a communication which involves the art of language (the “message” here is meta-meta-encoded, since it is both linguistic and artistic). It stems from the perlocutionary function of speech acts. Especially in the context of a community, it has a predisposition to be ritualized through the performance and theatricalization of the particular linguistic statement (text, literary work). Such properties can be named *sacred* because they refer to the capacity of some literary and rhetorical texts to affect people’s consciousness, on individual and collective level. A separate phenomenon is the identification of the collective in certain propositions and visions of the world that are not necessarily literary nor biblical, but utterly pragmatic (in ideological or political sense). After all, as indicated by the name, the conative function (from the Latin word *conatio*, *conatus*, an act of heroism, endeavour/venture, attempting) suggests certain teleological, although not necessarily also rational or cognitive reactions of the reader (same as the perlocutionary act). Paradoxically, the conative, i.e. perlocutionary function, is dominant, not only in the literary art, but also in the deliberative and homiletic oratory art. There is a level of reception at which the effect on the consciousness

and on the behavior of the auditors of political, religious, and literary “speech acts” is (almost) identical. This effect is psychagogic, cathartic, transformative, persuasive, political, religious, and even with elements of some “revelation”.

Therefore, I think that the sacral function is not autonomous and constant linguistic function in a formal sense, but rather a variation of the basic appellative/conative function. With the terminology of the linguistic theory of speech acts, the sacral function is *de facto* “perlocutionary” and is activated in particular speech acts and during the reception of particular literary (written and oral) biblical texts. The sacral function is characterized by a significant level of effectiveness, regardless whether it is established in a literary, religious, rhetorical, initiatory, or occult speech constellation. It is established in the very speech act as an ultimate psychagogic and ideologic effectiveness of the Word.

But although the sacral function of language is arbitrary and variable, sacral consciousness, or rather sacral unconsciousness, is the anthropological constant of humanity. Sacral consciousness is closely related to the ritual sense and possesses immense mimetic power for transforming itself. It is legitimized through its ontological effect, which is mythogenic, cosmogenic, effective, or poetic (in the original sense of the word). It has the power to encourage the mental, moral, and spiritual transformation of the subject interacting with it (e.g., reader, mediator, author). Human spiritual transformation involves the transformation of consciousness, which is unthinkable without the transformation of language. Consciousness is language and language is consciousness, and that is why language affects the consciousness and consciousness speaks through language. The sacralization of the speech act is experienced intimately, but it shows a tendency to extend to the collective (the community), especially when it comes to religious ritual acts.

It is undeniable that there are “affinities between art and the sacred” (Pernot, 2009)<sup>7</sup>. Although religious consciousness differs from literary consciousness, it has imprinted traces of mytho-poetic awareness. There is a reason to believe that the biblical texts which have achieved a high degree of aesthetics are more sensitive toward the sacred than those that were not subjected to the process of aestheticization. Very often, the ultimate aesthesis represents a prologue to the sacral, while the sacral is experienced as an aesthetic form (the Ancient

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<sup>7</sup> “The dialogue between these two realities, religion and rhetorics, can be explained by the affinities that exist between art and the sacred. Religious discourse takes rhetorical forms [...]” and “the orator is somehow sacred” (Pernot, 2009).

Greek word *aesthesis* – αἴσθησις/*aísthēsis*, which suggests awareness/experience/perception of sensory stimulation or something/someone that exists and reflects the essence of beauty and art). The idea of perfection suggests a certain sacredness which in the theory of literature is sometimes identified as enigmaticity, miraculousness, metaphysical quality, or vision.

To avoid misunderstanding: even the referential scheme of linguistic functions (Bühler, Jakobson) includes, implicitly, the sacral effect of language within the appellative/conative function (aimed at the listener/reader) in the form of a psychological effect. But the theory of speech acts predicts it explicitly within the perlocutionary speech act. Namely, speech acts are performed in a variety of speech situations, not just in psychological ones: rhetoric, pragmatic, ideological, religious, occult, and even certain quasi-sacral situations. The pragmatic rhetorics (ideological, religious, judicial, marketing-propagandist, occult) is mainly accompanied by certain theatrical, ritual elements and is aimed at man's/the collective's physical, not only metaphysical, being.

On the other hand, in a narrower sense, the sacral effect is achieved in speech acts that have a literary-aesthetic or spiritual, but always deeply intimate character. The sacral dimension has left an impressive mark on language itself, both in the literary and in the folk tradition, which has at its disposal numerous examples of genres (short forms, etc.) based on the concept of the effectiveness of the live word (the speech act as an act of energy): blessing, curse, praise, pledge, pardon, promise, prayer, prophesy, formulae for magic and for healing. If the word (*logos*) is God and is in God, its link to the creation of the world and its sacral function coming into being over and over again are by no means accidental<sup>8</sup>.

## **The mythogenic function of literature and the Bible**

Towards the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Myth & Ritual approach to literature (Fergusson, 1979; Meletinski, 1983; Weisinger, 1998) saw the renewed “renaissance” of myth in literature and turned literary hermeneutics towards modernist forms of mythologization and re-mythologization of the worldview

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<sup>8</sup> In more radical terms, the alphabet itself has a sacral function (for instance, the Glagolitic alphabet). The saying: “A golden key opens every door” evokes the effective power of the live word.



(James Joyce, Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, William B. Yeats, William Blake). A group of eminent Soviet theorists, such as Olga M. Freidenberg, Aleksei F. Losev, Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Vyacheslav V. Ivanov, Vladimir N. Toporov, Sergei S. Averintsev, and Vladimir Y. Propp,<sup>9</sup> explored the role of myth in the development of literature and the mythogenic role of literature in a way that differs from the Myth & Ritual approach, from the Archetypal Literary Criticism of Northrop Frye (1957, 2001), and from the so-called Mythopoetics of Gilbert Durand (1979).

On the other hand, the literary scene of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the appearance of a *new mythologization*. *Biblical mythologism* was rather prominent in the literatures of Christian cultural and religious heritage (Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky, Mikhail Bulgakov, Miloš Crnjanski, Borislav Pekić, Radoslav Petković, Slavko Janevski).<sup>10</sup> In this context, biblical mythologism differs from the general mythologism which is based on ancient mythical and symbolic systems. Although there are similarities between the general and biblical mythologism, the latter (the biblical) is a specific system of symbols and functions that deserves to be studied separately.

Northrop Frye clearly emphasizes the “central structural principle” according to which “literature derives from myth”, and that is precisely why literature has continued to possess communicative power throughout the centuries and has kept its identity, despite numerous historical, social and ideological changes. The literary work is, in essence, the fruit of the imagination, same as ritual, myth and folk tales, which are considered as “pre-literary categories” and form a part of both the local and the global cultural heritage. Literature unifies the previous “experiences of the imaginary” within itself, which is why it can be considered as the “central and most important extension of mythology”. Literature is characterized by a high level of synchronicity and cannot be interpreted independently from other forms of the imaginary. Furthermore, according to Frye, literature “inherits, transmits and diversifies mythology” (Frye, 1990, p. xiii).

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<sup>9</sup> In European science, the theories on myth of Ernst Cassirer, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, René Girard, Mircea Eliade, Joseph Campbell, and James George Frazer are all unavoidable.

<sup>10</sup> Another group consists of the novels such as Meša Selimović’s *Death and the Dervish* or Orhan Pamuk’s *My Name is Red*, which are based on the intertext of the Quran and build structures of *Islamic mythologism*.

The three phases in the development of language and linguistic consciousness emphasized by Frye are also of interest to us:

1. The *first phase* is the mythopoetic, metaphoric<sup>11</sup>, hieroglyphic, iconic, polytheistic, polysemic, plural, oral, pagan, ritual, magical, and creational, because the word has the power to bring into being what it says (“the Word was made flesh” (John 1:14), “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Genesis 1:3))<sup>12</sup> It is a culture of memory, which understands language as speech (*langage*), does not distinguish between subject and object, behind the word is God, the names and the objects are in tight correlation, not unlike the relationship between man and nature. The first phase believes that the act of uttering a name or a formula releases certain “energy”. It believes that speech has the magical power to bring into being that which it says, as in the case of the biblical *kerygma* and the holy secrets.<sup>13</sup> It knows that a speech act can be sacralized, as well as the time of its ritual repetition (Frye, 1982, p. 48) with the help of the community and its tradition (ethnic, religious, linguistic, political, gender-based). It emphasizes the existence of a “sacral time”, the time of religious and pagan rituals, when, alongside the ‘annunciation’, there always comes into being the miracle, the resurrection, the salvation, the stigmata. God, within this phase, is not yet regarded as transcendental, but omnipresent, in everything that exists, and that is why we have: God of the sun, God of war, God of the seas, God of love, God of the underground.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> I will cite examples of a metaphor of double analogy which capture the identity of Jesus: “I am the bread of life (John 6:35), “I am the bread which came down from heaven” (John 6:41), “the Word was God” (John 1), or “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). But there are examples of a more radical metaphor where the subject has been omitted with the description: “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” (John 2:20), he means Himself. Or: “Be my rock” (Psalm 71), he says, meaning God!

<sup>12</sup> The mythopoetic, metaphorical language emancipates itself by breaking free from the constrictions of magic formulae and ritual, thereby making itself individual (Frye, 1982, p. 25).

<sup>13</sup> *Kerygma* (from the Ancient Greek verb κηρύσσω, meaning “to cry or proclaim” as a herald of God, to carry his message, as did Jesus of Nazareth, an apostolic and evangelical annunciation of holy miracles (the Ancient Greek word εὐαγγέλιον means ‘good news’). It is translated as “proclamation”. The *kerygma* is a proclamation that comes into being every time it is said out loud, through sacral ritualization and connection with the myth of salvation.

<sup>14</sup> There is an essential difference between the biblical notion of time, the biblical chronotope and the pagan one: the biblical has an absolute beginning and ending, whereas the pagan is cyclical and repetitive.

2. The *second phase* is the *metonymic phase*, the time of the heroic epic and prose. Established in ancient times (Plato), it promotes the logos of aristocracy and philosophy. It is more intellectual than it is sensitive or sensory. This phase sees the separation of subject and object, the replacement of reality with speech and text. It witnesses the creation of a new “written culture” which defies oblivion. It believes that the written word, as a form of proclamation or ‘kerygma’ has a greater ‘magical’ power than the oral (Frye, 1985, p. 277). The second phase is characterized by the cult of monotheism, hence its striving to transcend concrete meanings into universal notions. “The origins of the Bible are in the first metaphorical phase of language”, but contains elements of supreme “oratorical rhetoric” (Frye, 1982, p. 27) from the second, metonymic phase.

3. The *third phase* appears towards the 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century, in the time of the Humanism and Renaissance, when history sees the emergence of vernacular languages and cultural carnivalism, as well as the need to distinguish between illusion and reality, and the creation of the “cult of plain sense” (Frye, 1982, p. 54), leading up to the appearance of Realism, Naturalism (19<sup>th</sup> century) and Social Realism (20<sup>th</sup> century).

Myth is susceptible to conservation; it keeps its archaic language and makes its meaning archaic through each new literary or religious actualization. Mythic records are a constitutive part of the palimpsest and the rhetorics of the Bible, which repeats biblicalized myths with centuries on end in accordance with its own canonized ritualistic religious system. Literature, whose history precedes the Bible’s, contains mythical records too, but it also freely creates, with a *ritual* of its own, new literary worlds marked by myth.

A significant part of literature (be it prose, drama, epic or lyrical poetry) is inspired by biblical myths—referring to the Christian biblical corpus of myths. Biblical texts perform the function of a hypotext in many literary works of the New Age. What is most productive from the Bible for literature has to do with mythical fictions and narrations (legends, stories, legacies, wisdoms, prophesies, apocalypses) and, correspondingly, with the mythical logos (understood as speech and worldview). The actualization of biblical myths in literature moves between two extremes: from radical apology to radical parody. Theory puts forward several modes of actualization: imitation, reinterpretation, metafiction, grotesque, parody, revision, recreation, reconstruction. But neither literary nor biblical texts have their integrity from myth alone and should not be narrowed down to their mythical basis.

## Borislav Pekić's *The Time of Miracles*

"[...] because one doesn't really expect miracles to help, only to change. One doesn't expect the greatest of miracles to distort the present, but rather to clear the way for the future." (Pekić, 1994, p. 309)

The wonderful novel-bricolage *The Time of Miracles* by Borislav Pekić (1994, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1965) is comprised of two parts— "The Time of Miracles" and "The Time of Dying". This novel is a carefully constructed collection of stories based on the seven miracles of Jesus in Judea and four deaths<sup>15</sup>, integrated as a literary unity. Pekić retells the biblical narratives by way of fiction, closer to the basic notion of the "art of the word", rather than meta-historiography.<sup>16</sup> He performs a literary recreation of the biblical miracle stories, replacing the mythobiblical context with a mythopoetic one.<sup>17</sup>

In the first part of the novel, "Time of miracles", Pekić demystifies the extreme effects of the miracles of Jesus and creates a new mythopoetic chronotope of "miracles and deaths". Opposite to the usual categories—mythical time, historical time, profane time, time of dreams—he introduces the category "time of miracles" or "miraculous time". It is an "inter-time" that has its own discrete sacral dimension. It sees the intersection between that which is secret and that which is sacred. That time of miracles repeats itself almost ritually, from narration to narration, reminding us of the archetype of the Wizard, the Magician and the Demiurge, of wizardry and magic, regarded as a worldview in which philosophy and literature, religion and culture, come into contact. Such an imaginary chronotope of mythical mysteries inspires the cosmogenic role of literature, thereby making Pekić's metabiblical narratives seem unique and autonomous fictions.

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<sup>15</sup> Beside the miracle of the blind man who began to see and the miracle of the mute man who began to speak, it also explores the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus, the healing of the leper, turning water into wine, etc. By the way, this hybrid and fragmented work by Pekić introduces, in an avatar way, the poetics of postmodernism in the years of Serbian and Yugoslav modernism.

<sup>16</sup> The second part of the novel (comprised of four chapters) reinterprets apostolic/evangelical stories of death from the point of view of Judas, presented as a passionate supporter of the prophesies about the saviour and the salvation which is not there and has not happened, because the story about the crucifixion of Jesus is not real.

<sup>17</sup> According to Nikola Milošević, Pekić's novel is "philosophical, satirical and historical" (Milošević, 1984).

Pekić's narratives also evoke a *turning-point time* which attempts to illustrate with "actions", not just with words, the power of the new Faith, in dramatic social circumstances of conflict between the imperial paradigm and the culture of the indigenous peoples, between the rich and the poor, between the rulers and the slaves, between the educated and the ignorant, between polytheistic and monotheistic consciousness, and, in that context, between Judaism and Christianity.

We shall illustrate this with two examples from Pekić's *bricolage*.

### **1. *Miracle at Jerusalem: the mute speaks***

"Miracle at Jerusalem" talks about the mute beggar Mesezeveilo, nicknamed Mute, and about his healing by the supernatural power of Jesus Christ (Pekić, 1994, pp. 71–85). When the Mute speaks, having been alienated from the world of language for a long time, drama ensues: Mute displaces himself from his natural state and natural "chronotope of a mute", his being is destroyed, so he, naively and unconsciously, commits his first public sin. He breaks governing practices and laws, written or not written, and gets arrested immediately as a dangerous element. He naively shouts in public protest or, as they say in plain street talk, he "barks his brains out" in front of the procurator himself (Pontius Pilate): "Down with Rome!", "Down with the Emperor Tiberius!", "Down with the procurator of Judaea!", "Let us kill the Roman usurpers!", "To the flames, O Israel!"... (Pekić, 1994, p. 85). Ignorant of the rules of public communication, the Mute begins expressing sincerely his thoughts and his feelings to the point of vulgarity (hatred towards Valerius Gratus and the rich Romans – the Praetorians, envy towards other beggars, contempt towards the Syrians and the newcomers, greed, vulgarity).<sup>18</sup>

Mute is not aware of the sensitivity of the rulers to publicly spoken words, thoughts, feelings, ideas and, in general, to freedom of speech. He ignores that the powerful have a low threshold of tolerance for critical thought, but great power to punish and take revenge. He is unaware of the power of public speech, of the power of the "speech act". He has never thought of himself as someone "dangerous" in the domain of public life. But the Roman procurator is hypersensitive to public demonstration of rage and wastes no time to sanc-

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<sup>18</sup> It should be emphasized here that the interpretation of the semiotics of the body made by Valerius Gratus (convinced that he knows the mentality of the Judeans, after having spent many years in Jerusalem as procurator) is among the most impressive illustrations of the grotesqueness of the narrative situation in *The Time of Miracles* (Pekić, 1994, pp. 71–85).

tion the offender. So Mute is immediately arrested, mercilessly beaten and, eventually, crucified alive.

Pekić develops not only the story, but also the psychology of the person deprived of the ability to speak and the psychology of the person who gains the ability to speak. Pekić captures the essential difference between speech that is sincere, uncontrolled, prosaic and clear, and speech that is well-thought, sophisticated, diplomatic and equivocal. That difference in speech reflects the social, educational and cultural difference. Pekić captures how suddenly, after gaining the ability to speak, the perception of the “language of his body” changes, too. While mute, the language of the body of Mute (grimaces, mimics, jumps, arm movements, his staff) was interpreted as loyalty to the Romans, regardless of the fact that he, even then, *de facto* thought the same, but did not utter it only until later, loudly and clearly. Mute, in silence, damned the Romans constantly and called for his god Yahweh to annihilate them to the very last, but his muteness protected him from the law. He then realizes that the worth of a spoken word is different from the worth of a tacit one. Public speech has the power to instigate collective anger and rage and is sanctioned in authoritative countries as a “verbal delict”. Therefore, when Mute speaks, he experiences a “total disaster”, an existential collapse.

As consequence of the absolute *vulgar freedom* of speech, uncontrolled and self-censored, Mute commits an offence, a public conspiracy against the empire. There is a deep, philosophical irony here, rather than a straightforward and hyper-realistic parody that would scorn the phenomenology of religious, social and human anomalies or the differences between the European West and the Asian East. There is an atavistic contempt of the rules for freedom of speech, considered as an unacceptable offence that must be sanctioned harshly. In this story, Pekić discretely points to the ambiguity, and even the absurdity of salvation.

This miracle of Jesus gives rise to the knowledge that the gods are not always aware of the dark side of their noble deeds, of the inseparability of good and evil, of the difference between the imagined world and reality. The reconstruction of this miracle of Jesus is paradigmatic of the perlocutionary power of speech to be an undesirable and dangerous public act and an offence that is severely sanctioned (essentially with the death penalty). Mute and silent, Mute has the right to live. Voluble and loud, Mute loses the right to live. The reader understands this, with the help of Pekić’s narrative, fictional and powerful in its essence.

The story captures the image of the mysterious healing of Mesezeveilo with the help of the magic word “Ephphatha” or “Open”,<sup>19</sup> then the soft touch of Jesus on Mesezeveilo’s mouth, standing silently or in deep prayer, ritually, over the mute beggar. The miracle of healing occurs in several moments of the biblical “time of miracles” and is followed by a series of consequential reactions: the fierce, unwilling proclamation on the square in Jerusalem, before the two Roman procurators Pontius Pilate and Valerius Gratus, as well as the gathered masses, the order issued to the guards to capture, beat, and crucify him. The consequences of the “offense of his Roman majesty”, the emperor Tiberius, are far from naïve and far different from the effect that Jesus’ magic word “Ephphatha” has (Pekić, 1994, p. 84). Speech has opened, but in the most dangerous of ways!<sup>20</sup>

Here we see juxtaposed two examples of the different use of language and the different effects of the perlocutionary power of the speech act: first, when the ritual and discrete use of the word achieves a mysterious and sacral healing; second, when the vulgar-political and indiscrete use of the word causes the disruption of public order, calls for rebellion, expresses hatred towards the Roman Empire and the emperor and is sanctioned together with its speaker.

## **2. *Miracle at Siloam: the blind sees***

In “Miracle at Siloam” (Pekić, 1994, pp. 86–95, based on The Gospel According to John, Ch. 9), the blind Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, the beggar from Jericho, begins to see after the healing touch of the Savior. But as soon as he begins to see (O, the irony!), he comes face to face with the horror of the world he lives in, with the deformities of the people with which he shares his everyday life, with their inherent and social ugliness (crazy, lepers, deaf and mute, crippled, poor, and dirty people). Disgusted to the point of wanting to return to blindness, he refuses to see. According to the biblical myth, Bartimaeus walks through Judea for a certain period of time with the intention of finding at least something *Beautiful* that would make life with open eyes worth living, but fails to find it. He suddenly realizes (“it hits him”) that seeing in itself and of itself is neither the solution nor the condition of happiness.

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<sup>19</sup> “Ephphatha” is the Ancient Greek variant of the Syro-Aramaic verbal vocative “Be opened”.

<sup>20</sup> “When I was dumb, at least I could think what I liked. But the minute I uttered the first word in this hell of a life, the procurator’s soldiers thrashed me.” This is how Mesezeveilo explains his condition to Bartimaeus, while hanging from the cross (Pekić, 1994, p. 93).

The blind who sees wishes, paradoxically, to be blind again. And not only that. Bartimaeus, unable to see harsh reality eye-to-eye, decides to pluck out his own eyes. He refuses to see even if he could have the chance to regain his sight, miraculously, at some point in the future. He condemns himself to blindness because that option seems to him more humane than seeing with open eyes the misery of the world. So, this miraculous healing of Christ ends in tragedy, too.

There are so many weird evils in this world that one cannot know which is greater and which lesser! The blind man sees better before he has the ability to see, the mute is freer before he gains the ability to speak, this dark world is darker when hidden from eyes and ears... The “philosophy” of the blind man narrows down to the following: if the Savior cannot recover the sight of the entirety of the “blind world”, then it is safer not to see. The world is more beautiful when invisible. There is something rather mystical in the inability to see the world as it is—vulgar, dirty, wicked. There is a certain guaranteed freedom of the imagination when the blind man imagines the world he lives in.

A question poses itself at this point: “Is it worth to have eyes?”, when it is clear that the eyes possess the power to “make even beauty seem disgusting” (Pekić, 1994, p. 91). Asked what good his eyes do, Matthew—of the company of Jesus of Nazareth—replies: “With their help you’ll see your God” (Pekić, 1994, p. 92). To that Bartimaeus replies: “I’ve already seen my own God, but how do I see our common God?” (Pekić, 1994, p. 92). If God is present in all things around him, Bartimaeus asks himself, then why does that almighty God find himself among such ugly things and so ugly a world?

This story actualizes the archetype written in the saying “The blind who began to see”, which, however, is related to a negative moral connotation in South-Slavic traditions—with sight (knowledge, power) comes evil too, people become wicked, inhuman; they lose empathy towards the poor and the powerless. As a matter of fact, the biblical myth of the original sin and the banishment from Paradise evokes the idea that knowledge in itself does not make life more beautiful, that knowledge is a forbidden zone for common people, that the secrets of the world are granted only to those who have been initiated and are dedicated, that knowledge gives power to rule over people.

Two other aspects are interesting in this story: first, the blind man becomes a disciple and follower of Jesus, taking to heart his advice to “save himself” (if he weren’t blind, he would have been crucified for glorifying Jesus and his faith, but, being blind, he was left alive); second, there is a fragment here of



the story of the crucified Mesezeveilo, who explains how much safer it is to be mute than to be able to express your thoughts and feelings publicly.

The Miracle at Siloam (the healing of the blind man) is performed by Jesus through a speech act, too. He told the blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, the beggar from Jericho, “Go wash in the pool of Siloam!” and performed a ritual: he anointed the eyes of the blind man with his healing saliva – “holy water” (Pekić, 1994, p. 86). This story too evokes the ambiguity of salvation through healing: the first meaning illustrates the performative (perlocutionary) power of the word within a miraculous, discreetly performed ritual, whereas the second shows the consequences of the miracle and the tragedy of salvation. In this story we see Bartimaeus’ dramatic internal monologue (as an act of revelation) and his voiceless address to Jesus, when he describes the advantages of blindness, the freedom of the imagination that the blind man has and that he loses when confronted with reality (Pekić, 1994, pp. 87–89). The absence of sight is the blind man’s natural state, which he has made the intimate home of his Being and has no desire to move from that home. The miraculous words of Jesus are the reason why the blind Bartimaeus has been thrown out of his existential and essential core. In order to revert back to who he was, Bartimaeus decides to condemn himself to perpetual blindness. Not all men are equal before the light and the dark!

Here too we see a whole series of consequences derived from the performance of the miraculous word: healing, shocking confrontation with dire reality, questioning of the meaning of sight, the feeling of existential dread, self-punishment in the form of plucking one’s eyes out, the knowledge that man is God-like when he has absolute freedom of imagination and when he imagines the world based on his own measure for harmony and humanity, the painful knowledge that man himself “made it filthy” with his eyes (Pekić, 1994, p. 90), that the better man’s sight is, the worse his worldview is.

We, on the other hand, through aesthetics, in an instant, come to the realization that not all revelations bring salvation and good fortune and that it is not enough to save a few individuals, it is necessary to save the whole world. But that requires countless Saviors, not just one! This story actualizes the biblical myth of the Promised Land, which Bartimaeus makes it his quest to find in order to test whether it is worth to see in this world. If that Land doesn’t exist, then seeing is worthless—it is better to be blind.

This story also shows that same words, just like same actions, can be interpreted differently by different people in different situations, regardless of their

intention, worldview, interest, education, culture, religion. That is why the world is condemned to misunderstanding, which causes numerous consequences: personal and collective traumas and tragedies. If it is any consolation and if it can result in salvation, through suffering we learn how to save ourselves rather than wait for someone else to do it for us, even if that someone should be the Savior! And it would be good, for once, if we drew a lesson from other people's suffering rather than wait for the same tragedy to hit us too, and see history repeat itself!

## Basic interpretative implications

There would be no 'literature' for readers of works of art if biblical myths were re-drawn within the strictness of the canon. So, the first condition for the creation of a work of art is that it should abandon and break the canon. Pekić abandons the canon, but without contempt, with mild irony, humorously, with a dose of empathy and a sense of disillusionment. These two stories from Pekić's novel are enough to illustrate the way literature can use biblical myths and create its own<sup>21</sup>. Through them, Pekić performs a meticulous, historical, social, political and psychological reading of the coded language of the mytho-biblical version of reality, but, instead of subjecting it to a radical parody, he demythologizes and re-mythologizes the most sensitive, sacral bits in its mytho-biblical paradigm: the miracles of Jesus.

The first part of the novel *The Time of Miracles*, entirely devoted to the Christian miracles, poses the question of the *unnecessity* of Salvation, the vainness of the miracles, the "misfortune" they cause to the ones that have been healed. Healed does not mean saved! The thesis that is suggested here is that this world would not be what it is if there were no illnesses, suffering, and invalidity, that people's misfortunes are too much an integral part of God's law, that it is better for the world to prevail the way it is, rather than suffer a radical change, uncalled for, unprepared and not tuned in for the new scenario. If that change does not emerge from within and it is not thoroughly devised, if the entirety of the world and the social reality in which we live are not changed, then it is better for that change never to come at all.

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<sup>21</sup> A characteristic example is the resurrection of Lazarus, who, upon rising from the dead, becomes a tool in the battle between the followers and the opponents of Jesus Christ.

Pekić's novel demystifies the development of the affairs, the consequences of the miracles, the ironic meaning of the miracle of healing (of people who used to be blind, mute, deaf, lepers, crippled), the fateful identification of people with their own invalidity, man's worldview conditioned by his condition, his body and soul, including the absurdity of empathy towards the people we imagine as powerless!

Pekić's interpretation of the Miracles and the Miracle Creator is far more *sceptical* and *empathic* than it is parodic. It demystifies the discourse of power of the Roman Empire, showing its perfidious anomalies (it explains how they see the public benefit of invalids—the blind, the crippled, the deaf and the mute—because they “allow us to be merciful for a few coppers, instead of straining our generosity for a new aqueduct which would cost us who knows how many gold talents”) (Pekić, 1994, p. 75). Behind biblical and literary myths there usually lies a hidden archetype that testifies about the stability of spiritual existence of humanity. For example, the archetype of the Miracle Worker (magician, wizard, Savior) actualizes in many cultures, religions, and arts (Fraj, 1985, pp. 62–63).

Pekić supplements the biblical discourse with the discourse of history and fictitious (literary) reality in his novel (a version of the biblical miracles) by adding elements of caricature and the carnivalesque. But his carnivalized interpretation of the biblical myths is far more critical towards the socio-political paradigms of imperialism than it is towards Christian miracles. The irony is that there is such a huge gap between class, social and existential differences in slave-owning and imperial societies that being blind, mute, deaf and crippled is *for the better*.

In dramatic social circumstances, such as slavery, people choose “the lesser evil”, feeling powerless before the greater one. If God helps people, let him help them free themselves from the greater evil, as they can deal with the lesser one themselves. Healthy, but socially voiceless and humiliated, men have no capacity to fight the injustices of the dire imperialist reality, just as they feel powerless today before the neoliberal version of capitalism. In that regard, Pekić's vision of the biblical miracles is a lamentation of the powerlessness of religion to make the World more humane, as well as nostalgia for a lost sense of harmony and justice.

Pekić's novel, sensitive towards the antinomies of reality and the aporiae of human psyche, reaffirms the principle of functionality and shows that literary works based on biblical narratives need not end in metafictional paraphrase. It

is fiction which warns us that neither religion nor history can be understood correctly if one ignores the paralogical within them, if one denies the mythic layers of the mystical and the mysterious, if one suffocates intuition and ignores the collective unconscious and, with it, suppressed urges, feelings, thoughts, and desires. Fiction allows the speech act to open the doors of the unconscious wide open and to let the dark sides of the collective unconscious gain consciousness. That occurs intuitively, cathartically, not through cognitive operations.

The novel *The Time of Miracles* is one of those works of fiction that can exert a strong conative/perlocutionary effect on the reader and their consciousness. It shows that the very act of creating a literary world is a symbolic performance of birth, a speech act that, eventually, initiates the sacral function of language. It knows that the strict, canonical interpretation of the Bible profanes the effect of the sacral. So, the novel *The Time of Miracles* is experienced as an act in which the sacral power to transform the worldview and indirectly to transform the “world” itself is activated. The impact exerted by Pekić’s novel *The Time of Miracles* is so effective (dramatic) that, for a moment, we, the readers, become believers in literature, and from believers we are turned into readers of the Bible. And, for a moment, we have the feeling that we are at liberty to decide on our own salvation here-and-now! Later might just be too late!

## Final interpretative conclusions

1. It is logical to talk about a certain *sacral dimension of language* in its biblical, aesthetic, magical, ideological and pragmatic use, having in mind that, publicly or secretly, these discourses *de facto* apply the *rhetorical (persuasive), creative, and psychological (individuation) and ritual power of language*. Hence the typology of sacrality as biblical (religious), aesthetic (literary), magical, ideological, and pragmatic. The sacral dimension of language is not strictly linguistic, but also translinguistic and metalinguistic.

We understand the sacral dimension as a latent energetic and metaphysical characteristic of language—to exert an effect over or to influence the psyche, the consciousness, the entities and the world it signifies. Such an effect is created only in certain “speech acts” and communicative situations, never automatically. The sacral dimension, therefore, arises from the basic, *perlocutionary function of the speech acts*. It is also *appellative/conative*, but it

does not refer to the hearer exclusively, in a narrower sense of the word, but rather to everything it addresses. But these discourses are so different that it can be said that the sacral dimension is used for different purposes and in different ways:

a) **Biblically**, the sacral dimension is a privilege of God and it is related to the eschatological myth of *Being* ("The Book of Genesis") and the myth of the miracles of Jesus which, in a populist way, served to inspire faith in the Force Majeure, in the embodiment of God's will, as well as in the establishment of Christianity through "testimony":

- originally, the sacral dimension is derived from the biblical myth about God's performance of the creation of the World with the Word. It testifies of the inseparability of the image of God from that of the Word (live word and mind), which Announces the existence of God. In the first chapter of the Bible there are many evocations of the mystical image of the creation of the Light, the Sky and the natural world with the help of Word-Blessing: "Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light." "Then God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.'" By uttering vocative-imperative speech acts ("Let there be light", "Let there be a firmament", "... let the dry land appear") and ritually ("God . . . breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:17), God creates the world and man;
- in the Gospel According to John we find the most metaphysical of all sentences, which evokes and explains the sacral power of language: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1).

b) **Aesthetically, in literature**, for the creation of metaphysical and imaginary worlds in narrative, dramatic, and epic fiction, or for the initiation of the psychagogic and transformative power of the lyrical poem in numerous sub-forms: confessional, ludistic, visionary, hymn, ballad, etc.;

c) **Magically**, to influence thoughts and words onto people and entities through formalized rituals;

d) **Ideologically**, for individual and mass manipulation of people and masses in authoritarian regimes (by manipulating language, the leaders manipulate the feelings of the people, their hopes, their faith, their identity, their consciousness, their sense of empathy, but also their violence);

e) **Pragmatically**, to initiate concrete legislative actions (proclamation of a king, a president, the announcement of death penalty, the order to kill in war, the announcement of peace, the ritualization of forgiveness in the form of amnesty, etc.).

2. The **mythogenic power of language** goes together with the sacral one: both the biblical and the literary speech create mythical images and stories based on inherited archetypal patterns. The biblical myths are, too, an actualization of archetypal patterns, but they are not in the same way universal—they exert the strongest power over individuals who believe in the (biggest) Christian ‘Mega narration’. Literature gives greater freedom to its literary myths and it is therefore more open to readers of all confessions/religions. Literature evokes and actualizes the biblical myths of Jesus’ miracles independently from the biblical ritual of the Miracle as a legitimization of the identity of God’s Emissary. Literature incorporates the biblical myths in linguistic creations and it is, in that regard, autonomous. Literary works of art inspire a critical approach towards inherited stereotypes and actual reality as much as that reality is an incarnation of a negative stereotype or pattern of injustice and evil.

3. **Religious discourse is a kind of ideology**, if we consider that it aspires to legitimize its premises and rationalize its mythic and prophetic images, visions, miracles, parables, and metaphors. That is why the biblical discourse is transformed into an ethic system of values and in an act of differentiation between good and evil, even when that differentiation is impossible. The Christian discourse ritualizes the Miracle as a tool of government by way of dogmas. A Christian “archetype” is the archetype of the Miracle: The Savior is the Miracle-Worker, the Salvation is a Miracle that must be deserved... Resurrection, as the greatest sacral Miracle is a Christian institution, a ritual of faith, thereby suggesting that it is necessary to repeat the same ritual in order for the faith to persist, as an indispensable condition which no monotheistic religion can do without.

4. **Literature** reads the biblical language in accordance with its symbolic, mythopoetic nature, but also with respect to its religious canon. No literary work of art denies the biblical canon, but many literary works are inspired by it. However, literature has the legitimate right to choose a mode of interpretation of the biblical myths (of Jesus’ miracles, of Abraham’s sacrifice, of Joseph and his brothers, of

Rachel's cry, of Cain and Abel, of Job, etc.) according to its own aesthetic canon. Literature's aesthetic canon strives to modernize the ideas/meanings of a literary work of art, even if they evoke a biblical narrative. Therefore, Peki's novel, although based on the seven miracles of Jesus and the Roman Empire, actually aestheticizes and modernizes this biblical narrative in the form of cyclical fiction.

5. That ***meeting of the mythical, biblical and historical with the literary activates the sacral, besides the aesthetic, dimension of language***, which creates a new image of the world and initiates readers to change their way of looking at the canon of biblical miracles. That type of reader experiences the passage from a state of ignorance (delusion) to a state of knowledge (consciousness) and channels his or her revolt towards the social canon, and his or her empathy towards the one who does good deeds and seeks nothing in return. The reader can recognize here the supreme moral law of unconditional love and realize that it is a projection of the celestial law, cosmic and spiritual at once. That knowledge reveals the truth about humankind and it is therefore experienced as a proclamation, annunciation, or *kerygma*. By changing the worldview, the novel incites the change of the world.

6. Such a ***reader understands that the myth of the 'biblical miracles' is just an introduction to the demystification of human weaknesses, social injustices, political manipulations, psychological traps, the system of moral prohibitions...***

The novel *The Time of Miracles* does not negate the biblical axiom that God does miracles out of empathy/mercy towards the poor, the sick and the faithful and that he does miracles to prove with deeds that the *principle of the Miracle* is important in order to maintain the relationship between the sacral and the profane world. The novel *The Time of Miracles* aims at turning the attention of the reader towards something else: towards the governing principle of the profane world, and that is the *principle of Violence*, which generates mercilessness, injustice, sickness, war, fanaticism, hatred, revenge... This novel shows suggestively, with words, that, even though God sends the signals of salvation, the human world is so disharmonic, antonymic, and unjust, that it refuses salvation. Man juxtaposes the "profane miracles" to those of the Bible, that paradoxical and tragic system of extremes, a system that – *in continuum* – repeats the state in which people are forced to choose between two evils and consider the lesser Evil as an essential Good.

Finally, some rhetorical questions are obvious: If we were to generalize, we would say that literature often poses the rhetorical question: can the vulgar possibly replace the sacral? What sort of Devil governs over the people, so that they refuse salvation and subject to the principle of perpetrating violence to themselves and to nature? Why do men perpetrate violence in the name of God? Why do they perform primitive acts in the name of a Higher Purpose? Why can't we draw a lesson from history, which keeps reminding us that the world cannot get any better precisely because people do not want to believe that the world can be better? Is that the reason why evil repeats itself in reality, and good is displaced into the margins of reality, into the world of fiction, myths, fairy tales, legends, and spin?

*Translated from Macedonian  
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## **Sakralna funkcja języka, literatury i Biblii w kontekście powieści Borislava Pekicia *Czas cudów***

W artykule wysuwa się tezę o mitogenezie jako formie kosmogenezy oraz podejmuje problematykę sakralnej funkcji języka w literaturze i Biblii. W pracy zastosowano podejście, zgodnie z którym mity biblijne są stale od-twarzane (Łk 11, Jn 9) oraz stale reaktualizowane są ich archetypowe schematy. W tekście omawia się zatem kwestię aktualizacji mitycznych narracji z Biblii, nade wszystko zaś – uniwersalnego archetypu Cudu (tajemnicy, sekretu). Prezentowana interpretacja oparta jest na dwóch fragmentach z powieści *Czas cudów* (1965) współczesnego serbskiego pisarza Borislava Pekicia (1930–1992).

Borislav Pečić czyta zakodowany język mitologiczno-biblijnej wizji rzeczywistości ze skrupulatną historyczną, społeczną, polityczną i psychologiczną uwagą. Co więcej, zamiast poddać ją radykalnej hiperrealistycznej parodii, demitologizuje ją tylko po to, aby ponownie re-mitologizować najbardziej drażliwe sakralne miejsca mityczno-biblijnej matrycy – cuda Jezusa. Pečić tworzy mitopoetyczny chronotyp „czasu cudów i śmierci”. W przeciwieństwie do zwykłych kategorii – czasu mitycznego, czasu historycznego, czasu snów – wprowadza kategorię „czasu cudów” lub, innymi słowy, „cudownego czasu”. Sam „czas”, rozumiany jako

replika Bycia, inicjuje pytanie o stworzenie cudu jako swoisty typ mitogenezy. Łącząc chrześcijańskie cuda ze śmiercią, Pečić aktualizuje archetypową wizję zmartwychwstania. Wie, że współczesny świat, którego humanizm jest zagrożony, potrzebuje duchowego renesansu (zmartwychwstania). Tylko na fundamentach odnowionej duchowości można bowiem ustanowić bardziej ludzką cywilizację.

Powieść Pečića, wrażliwa na antynomie rzeczywistości oraz antynomie ludzkiej psychiki, potwierdza kreacyjną moc fikcji, niezależnie od tego, czy jest oparta na biblijnych narracjach. W przeciwieństwie do stereotypowej chrześcijańskiej interpretacji cudu Pečić tworzy jego indywidualne przedstawienie, zarówno sceptyczne, jak i empatyczne, biblijne, jak i wyobrażeniowe. Pečić demystyfikuje chrześcijańską historię przez pryzmat przedchrześcijańskiej świadomości, subtelnie wskazując na potrzebę odnowienia niezależnej myśli niekanonicznej. Ten kontekst implikuje potwierdzenie witalności wieloogniskowej i skarnawalizowanej pogańskiej matrycy, nie odrzucając znaczenia chrześcijańskiego. W rezultacie powieść *Czas cudów* odbierana jest jako perlokucyjny akt mowy, w którym uaktywnia się ukryta, sakralna funkcja języka, jego moc przekształcania światopoglądu, a pośrednio – samego świata.

**Słowa kluczowe:** funkcja sakralna, mitogeneza, kosmogeneza, perlokucyjne akty mowy, archetyp, mit biblijny, parodia, Biblia, *Czas cudów*, Borislav Pečić

## **The Sacral Function of Language, Literature and the Bible in the Context of Borislav Pečić's Novel *The Time of Miracles***

This essay promotes the thesis about mythogenesis as a form of cosmogenesis. It also addresses the sacral function of language in literature and in the Bible. It follows an approach according to which Biblical myths are constantly re-created (Lk. 11; Jn. 9) and their archetypal schemata – actualized. Specifically, the paper demonstrates that through the actualization of the mythical narratives from the Bible, the universal archetype of the Miracle (mystery, secrecy) is essentially actualized. This interpretation is made on the basis of two illuminative fragments from the novel *The Time of Miracles* (1965) by the contemporary Serbian writer Borislav Pečić (1930–1992).

Borislav Pečić reads the coded language of the mytho-biblical mysterious vision of reality with meticulous, historical, social, political, and psychological attention, and yet, instead of submitting it to a radical parody of hyper-realistic qualities, he demythologizes them only to re-mythologize the most sensitive sacral places in the mythical-biblical matrix: the miracles of Jesus. Pečić creates a mythopoetic chronotope of a “time of miracles and deaths”. In contrast to the usual categories – mythical time, historical time, time of dreams, he introduces the category of “time of miracles” or, in other words, “miraculous time”. “Time” itself, understood as a replica of the Being, initiates the question of miracle creation as a radical type of mythogenesis. Connecting Christian miracles with death, Pečić actualizes the archetypal vision

of the resurrection. He knows that the modern world, whose humanism is put at stake, needs a spiritual renaissance (resurrection). Only upon the foundations of the renewed spirituality can a more humane civilization be established.

Pekić's novel, sensitive to the antinomies of reality and of the human psyche, reaffirms the principle of the fictional, regardless of whether it has been based on biblical narratives. Contrary to the stereotypical Christian perspective of the miracle, Pekić creates an individual performance of the miracle, both sceptical and emphatic, both biblical and imaginary. Pekić demystifies the Christian story through the prism of pre-Christian consciousness, subtly pointing to the need of renewal of free, non-canonical thought. This context implies the affirmation of the vitality of the multifocal and carnivalized pagan matrix, without rejecting the importance of the Christian one. As a result, the novel *The Time of Miracles* is experienced as a "perlocutionary act of speech" in which the latent, sacral function of language is activated, its power to transform the worldview, and indirectly, the world itself.

**Keywords:** sacral function, mythogenesis, cosmogenesis, perlocutionary act of speech, archetype, biblical myth, parody, Bible, *The Time of Miracles*, Borislav Pekić

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