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The Topos of an Immured Woman and Failed Attempts at Emancipation: The Case of Emiliya Dvoryanova's Novel *Земните градини на Богородица* [The Virgin Mary's Earthly Gardens]

Despite the sustained interest of scholars and collectors of south-eastern European folklore in the songs and legends of the walled-up woman over the past two hundred years, it is still not possible to determine the original source of this topos. Current research (Dundes, 1996) does not provide a common resolution, yet it does confirm the vitality of this motif and its ceaseless (though varying in intensity) recycling in the different layers of the cultures explored.[1] In relation to the Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian, Albanian, Serbian

[1] A grant from the National Science Centre in Poland, affiliated with the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, is being implemented from 2021, which is expected to result in a study of this issue for the whole area of South-Eastern Europe and Hungary. The study will be published in 2025.

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or Hungarian language areas, this is confirmed by many literary texts that reflect on the status of women in the contemporary world and refer, more or less obviously, to the topos of the walled-up woman.

One such text is the novel that I would like to put in the spotlight in this article because – like other prose works by the recognised Bulgarian writer Emiliya Dvoryanova (Врина-Николов, 2015) – it seems to be an important voice in contemporary disputes about the identity of the *Woman*,[2] a voice reviewing different layers of tradition, including feminist and 'revolutionary' ones. The book in question is *Земните градини на Богородица* [The Virgin Mary's Earthly Gardens] (Дворянова, 2006). In her text on Dvoryanova's work, which was written in 2002, that is before the novel was published, Milena Kirova draws attention to certain aspects of Dvoryanova's 'feminine writing' (Cixous, 1993, pp. 147–166) that involve the need to express a femininity free of normative patriarchal thinking – a femininity concretised and embodied (Кирова, 2002). According to Kirova, Dvoryanova's aspiration to overcome the dualism inherited from antiquity is expressed, among other things, in a characteristic struggle for the recognition of the norm-setting status of the female 'body-soul'. One of the elements of cultural tradition that Dvoryanova redefines in this context is, according to Kirova, the metaphorically treated folk motif of the walled-up female body:

> Folkloric thinking in the Balkans propagates the motif of the walled-up body – a feminine one in the persistent conviction of its symbolic meaning. But how can we more precisely express the sacrificial object – the body that continues to breastfeed through an opening mercifully left to do so, or a soul whose ability to give the breath of life was needed to reinforce the edifice-house of collective being? And how can we separate the breast from the soul of a walled-up woman? The sacrificial symbolism refuses to distinguish between the two: it is in its unity that the female body-soul is the mythic foundation of the social arrangement. Once sacrificed through the idea of walling-up, it remains invisible, dead to awareness. The notion of the symbolically dead father appears to be a later way of realising an already constituted mythic function. Indeed, the original sin itself turns out to be read as a sinful sexuality much later, only with the consolidation of a corpus of Christian ideas of an exegetical nature. In the beginning, it is rather an error of the soul; the corporeal is not thought of as a reality-for-itself but in its capacity to be united with psychic relations. (Кирова, 2002)[3]

[2] Following Rosi Braidotti, I understand this term as a concept consolidated in Western culture.

[3] "Фолклорното мислене на Балканите разпространява мотива за вграденото тяло – женско в упоритата убеденост на символичния смисъл. Ала как по-точно можем да

The message of the novel *Земните градини на Богородица* confirms Kirova's research intuitions about the direction of Dvoryanova's ideological quest and its relation to folklore and the Orthodox tradition (Evdokimov, 1991). In the novel's represented world, conflicting models of the world – embedded in Eastern Orthodoxy, Balkan folk culture, liberalism and contemporary ideological currents of Christian feminism – compete with each other in the deep mental structures of the main characters. They function as peculiar operating systems; they represent the order of hegemonic androcentric power and the emancipatory projects competing against it. However, as the Bulgarian philosopher Vladimir Gradev aptly points out, Dvoryanova's language 'derived from the body' means that any attempt to translate the meanings of her verbal expression into the contemporary humanist-reader's system of concepts must, as a rule, lead to trivialisation, to a simplification of the subtle message of this prose (Градев, 2007). Therefore, I make this attempt at interpretation in the hope that, despite these risks, Dvoryanova's intentions can be salvaged.

The space in and around which the novel's events take place is the Holy Mount Athos, the Republic of Monks, which is a particular kind of symbol of women's separation in a patriarchal world (Dymczyk, 2017, pp. 165–194; Стойкова, 2009, pp. 262–270). Women have no access to the Holy Mountain on the strength of the *avaton*, which must have been in force long before the 10th century (Talbot, 1996, p. 69). In his book *Kobiety Świętej Góry Athos. Nieobecna obecność* [Women of the Holy Mount Athos. An Absent Presence] (2017), Rafał Dymczyk proves that the rule of *avaton* was not misogynistic in nature but resulted from monastic practices, the needs of the spiritual life of the monks, and their fears of bodily temptations (Dymczyk, 2017, pp. 49–68). However, the formal reason given for the separation of women was not preven-

изречем жертвения обект? Тяло, което продължава да кърми през милостиво оставен отвор към себе си, или душа, чиято способност да вдъхва живот е била потребна, за да се укрепи сградата-дом на колективното битие? И как ще откъснем гръдта от душата на една вградена жена? Жертвената символика отказва да оразличи двете неща: именно в своята предразделеност женската тялодуша осигурява митичния фундамент на социалната договореност. Веднъж пожертвана в идеята за вградимост, тя остава невидима, мъртва за осъзнаване. Представата за символично мъртъв баща изглежда като по-късен режим на една вече конституирана митична функция. Всъщност и самото грехопадение се оказва прочетено като сгрешена сексуална телесност значително късно, едва с укрепването на корпус от християнски идеи с екзегетичен характер. В началото то е по-скоро грешка на душата; телесното не се мисли като реалност-за-себе-си, а в способността му да бъде единно с психичните отношения."

tive considerations but the will of the Mother of God herself (Naumow, 2009, pp. 21–23). According to the founding legend, she did not want to see other women in Athos as she was guided by her desire to have exclusive possession of the land given to her by Jesus. As Dymczyk writes, historians document instances of women staying legally on the Holy Mountain, generally motivated by their high social status, by their respect for the Republic of Monks, or by threats to their lives. However, these were exceptions. The presence of meritorious Christian women was realised in everyday life in other ways. In fact, in the Athos monasteries, religious veneration was extended not only to iconographic representations of the Mother of God and other holy women, but also to their numerous relics (Kracik, 2002). From the perspective of contemporary research on the anthropology of death (Domańska, 2017), the religious veneration paid to fragmented dead female bodies would seem to be a kind of necrotic reverse of the *avaton*. In Dvoryanova's novel, these relics play a huge role, becoming active and affective observers of events. The remains of the female martyrs, anchoresses and intercessors retain their miraculous power, which in the novel's world admittedly manifests itself with a certain excess,[4] but the hyperbole here is used not to blaspheme but to poetically stylise the mystical experience felt by the body. In seeking the chances of non-bipolar readings of the Tradition, the writer moves on the edge of blasphemy, but she does not cross it. Having made Mount Athos and its surroundings the place of action, Dvoryanova, after all, attempts to reinterpret the legend of this place sacred to the Orthodox Church in such a way that – as it turns out, somehow contrary to the intentions of the religious institution – she saves the most profound message of the Gospel read nowadays (Дворянова, 1992).

Thus, a group of Bulgarian women and men arrives on the Halkidiki peninsula to carry out a research project related to Athos.[5] As planned, the men go to the Holy Mountain, while Mary and the-other-Mary[6] remain outside

[4] For example, the relics are stirred by the sex act that is taking place at the foot of Athos, on its waters.

[5] What is noteworthy is that the non-literary prototype for Dvoryanova may have been a research project actually conducted since 2005. See *Атон в българската култура и словесност - За проекта* (n.d.).

[6] Such names of female protagonists who are namesakes (Mary, the-other-Mary, Mary-the-other) are a reference to the Gospel of St. Matthew 28:1: "After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb." ("The resurrection of Jesus: Matthew 28", 1993). In Bulgarian, the word 'друга' also has the meaning of 'another, 'other, 'different'.

the walls of the sacred space in one of Ouranoupoli's port hotels, hoping for an interesting holiday combined with work. Things get complicated, however. Despite their promises the men do not regularly send their daily reports, and their silence becomes increasingly puzzling. Initially ignoring this fact, both Marys get worried and make successive attempts to clarify the situation. But the men send vague messages, as if ensnared by the mystical mystery of the Holy Mountain. While wandering around the area, Mary becomes fascinated by the nearby island of Ammouliani, from where a mysterious woman in white arrives by boat every day, trying unsuccessfully to get to Athos.[7] The locals call her the 'madwoman of Ammouliani'. When Mary suddenly disappears one day while taking one of her mysterious walks, the-other-Mary calls the third of the friends, Mary-the-other, who had previously refused to participate in this expedition, to come from Sofia.

Bearing the same name and thus preliminarily unified, the heroines are, however, distinguishable: they represent different lifestyles, different ways of thinking, and this makes them reconstruct events differently, as if 'writing' their own versions. Each of them talks about her own need for mystical participation, about love, about unfulfillment, about exclusion. The constant change of the narrative perspective means that the same initial situations seemingly lead to different plot solutions. There seems to be an autotelic play of conventions in this stylised postmodern novel, in which the criminal plot is interwoven with other plots: love, religion, the mystical and, finally, a self-referential one. Even the novel's ending has two variants, which I will discuss later. At the same time, as if against the assumptions of postmodernism, where everything is supposed to be a game, Dvoryanova does not leave readers in an axiological void but leads them towards the zone of ontological penumbra, towards the promise (mirage?) of a world of values, which in the work is symbolised by a seemingly background character, the aforementioned madwoman of Ammouliani, as it turns out in the end – the Mother of Jesus.

Having a kind of conversation with the legends associated with Mount Athos, Dvoryanova constructs this character in the visual sphere, departing from iconographic aesthetics. Attired in white robes (symbolising the presence of the Holy Spirit) and always covering her head, this poor occupant of a shack made of sticks and leaves is totally unlike the heroine of medieval icons,

[7] In Balkan folklore and the apocrypha, the description of the arrival of the Mother of God on Athos is a leitmotiv (Drzewiecka, 2009, pp. 282–289).

apocrypha, and legends, thus creating an image of the victorious Virgin Mary, who in apostolic times arrived on the peninsula on a ship that had deviated from its course to Cyprus during a storm. Equipped with royal attributes (retinue, gold) and working miracles, the Virgin Mary was reportedly warmly welcomed by the local worshippers of Apollo, who recognised her as the Mother of God and the propagator of the right faith (Drzewiecka, 2009, pp. 286–288). Many centuries later, with equal enthusiasm, the miraculous icon of the Mother of God was welcomed at the Monastery of Iviron, where, according to legend, it supposedly arrived alone, lifted by the waves in an upright position (Drzewiecka, 2009, p. 286).

In Dvoryanova's novel, the madwoman of Ammouliani – the Virgin Mary, like the other women – finds herself in the situation of an undesirable person on Athos. As a nameless woman, she makes unsuccessful attempts to get into her Gardens. She keeps repeating the once-taken route, sailing the ship through a zone of maritime chaos, but still encountering resistance. She remains unrecognised by her worshippers. Thus, she fails when confronted with the Tradition formed centuries ago and cannot fulfil her only desire to enjoy the view of the Gardens. And yet, her presence begins to arouse the curiosity of not only the local inhabitants (especially women) but also the monks, who unsuccessfully try to find her on Ammouliani, where the stay of the 'madwoman' is accompanied by an extraordinary bloom of rare flowers (Цочева, 2018) and the strange activity of seaside turtles. In the novel, therefore, the Mother of God is also given the characteristics of a pagan goddess of nature (Георгиева, 2000, pp. 36–53), a tender protector of flowers and animals, full of sensual sensitivity to the beauty of the world. Only her name and the story of her motherhood associate her with the heroine of Orthodox icons. The staffage of the madwoman of Ammouliani attracts Mary and opens her imagination to the mystical depths of Christianity freed from the burden of the Tradition. The Virgin Mary becomes a spiritual guide for her; her attitude of kind concern, free from fears and constraints of religious pre-judgments, triggers a process of spiritual transgression for the heroine.

Nevertheless, Dvoryanova's Mother of God, striving to overstep the principle of *avaton*, does not abandon her roles of Intercessor, Guide and Mother, which the Orthodox Tradition has accorded to her as a 'spirit-bearing' person (Florenski, 2009, pp. 255–310), but brings to them her own understanding of freedom. As Julia Kristeva writes in her essay *Stabat Mater* (1976): "The function of the Motherhood principle as a space in which transformation takes place

has been particularly highlighted by Eastern Christianity, which calls Mary the 'link', the 'heart', the 'space between' […], thus giving her the attributes of the Holy Spirit and opening the door to more or less heretical interpretations of this figure" (Kristeva, 2021, p. 336).[8]

Dvoryanova's Mary, who by virtue of her lifestyle appears to be a modern incarnation of Mary Magdalene, for one night enters into an exchange relationship with the Virgin Mary. She becomes her apprentice and at the same time a guide who helps the ruler of the Gardens to enter her domain. Having recognised the Mother of Jesus in the madwoman of Ammouliani, she undertakes to fulfil the same role as the 'woman with clean hands' who centuries ago helped the Goddess Cybele, who came to the land of Italy to come ashore (Drzewiecka, 2009, p. 289). The fact that the Virgin Mary, in her own words, had been waiting for such a woman for a long time favours such connotations and shows Dvoryanova's discreet revitalisation of an archaic myth in a circular time of repetitions:

> She told her that She had actually known for a long time that a woman would come one day and take Her back to Her Earthly Gardens; this was quite certain, because She desired to return too much, with an inevitable desire, deeply needed, but not because She would stay there – there was nothing for Her to do there and She would naturally go back to Heaven, to the place beside Her Son – but the desire to see Her earthly dominions, even if only for one night, was indeed overwhelming and had to come true … (Дворянова, 2006, pp. 351–352)[9]

Both Marys, after all, make their way on Athos not by boat or ship, but on foot. They take a walk on the sea, just like the icon of the Virgin Mary Keeper of the Gate centuries ago, whose extraordinary arrival was considered a miracle by the monks, who – responding to the then-expressed wish of the Mother of God – placed the miraculous image in the gate of the Monastery of Iviron:

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[8] "Funkcja zasady Macierzyństwa jako przestrzeni, w której dokonuje się przemiana, została szczególnie uwypuklona przez wschodnie chrześcijaństwo, nazywające Marię "połączeniem", "sercem", "przestrzenią pomiędzy" […], nadając jej tym samym przymioty Ducha Świętego i otwierając drzwi mniej lub bardziej heretyckim interpretacjom tej postaci" (Kristeva, 2021, p. 336).

[9] "Тя ѝ казала, че всъщност отдавна е знаела, че някой ден ще дойде жена и ще Я отведе обратно в Земните Ѝ градини, съвсем сигурно било, защото твърде силно желаела да се върне, с неизбежно желание, дълбоко потребно, но не защото ще остане там – там Тя няма какво да прави и естествено ще се прибере обратно в Небето, на мястото до Сина Ѝ – но желанието да нагледа Земния Си дял, дори и само за една нощ, наистина било непреодолимо и трябвало да се сбъдне…"

> It is easy to walk on water when there are no doubts, and when the Hand touches you, then a route is given on the sea, and a safe path among its waves.
> The stroll was long and sweet, the Earthly Gardens were getting closer with every step – the flowers opening and closing their calyxes in eager anticipation, the sap in the evergreen trees growing mad, the birds refused to sleep and filled the night with their singing.
> The Virgin Mary and Mary walked on the surface of the sea, fish flitted around them, and their conversation was cheerful. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 351)[10]

The pilgrims, aware of the presence of God and his power over the elements, also know that they need each other on this journey for the plan to succeed. At the same time, their two-person 'conspiracy' is not directed against the administrators of the Gardens. As the Virgin Mary says, the monks will be forgiven for the *avaton* as it resulted from a mistake: "…do not worry about them, they will be forgiven because it was by accident…" (Дворянова, 2006, p. 353).[11]

This succinct statement seems essential to the further course of events, in the light of which everything said about the violation of the ban turns out to be untrue.

The two women's appearance on the Holy Mountain does not cause the fire predicted by the monks; immersed in a deep sleep, they are not at all aware of either the miraculous (yet so real) visitation by their Lady or the violation of the *avaton* by the intruder. Only the Athosian relics and icons recognise the Visitor and show their joy (Дворянова, 2006, p. 354). The concise description of this solemn event encapsulates the image of the Virgin Mary ascending to heaven on a cloud that is trivialised in Western culture. Her companion, in turn, under the cover of night enters the sea, whose waters close over her forever (Дворянова, 2006, p. 354).

The transformation that Mary experienced during her few days at the foot of the Holy Mountain was expressed not only in a growing openness to mystical experience, but also in a changing approach to the very space of Athos. From the statements of the men associated with the place, the heroine concluded

[10] "По водата се върви лесно, когато липсват съмнения и когато Ръка те докосва, тогава е даден път по море, и безопасна пътека по вълните му.

Разходката била дълга и сладка, Земните градини с всяка крачка се приближавали – там цветята с нетърпеливо очакване открехвали и закрехвали чашки, соковете във вечнозелените дървета полудявали, птиците отказвали да заспят и огласяли нощта с песен.

Мария и Мария вървели по повърхността на морето, рибите се стрелкали около тях и разговорът им бил весел. "

[11] "…не се безпокой за тях, ще им се прости, защото е било погрешка…"

that things are complicated also in their eyes. As one of them understands, the ban on women approaching the Holy Mountain stems from the belief that the 'body of the peninsula' is female (Marinova, 2015, pp. 384–386), hence it should not experience the touch of another woman. The role of men, therefore, is to guard the place against this kind of sacrilege and perversion:

> […] this earth is a sacred body, and this Body is female, and women are forbidden to touch a woman's body; it does not belong to them. You cannot touch yourself; your ways are circuitous, amniotic, but we are not allowed for other reasons and in other ways, though we tread there. We only protect this forbidden place; we protect it against itself so that it does not touch itself. (Дворянова, 2006, pp. 237–238)[12]

The alleged 'feminine' nature of this land, however, makes it an object of the erotic desire of men, which is punished by exile.

> These are the Virgin Mary's gardens and you will never be there, evergreen and sodden with sap, flooded with smells, see on the rocks the waterfall pouring out as from open bowels; but don't think it's just water, it only looks that way, for it comes from the bottom where the fiery magma is raging, from female springs that give a gift, open the earth like a ripe pear: when you split it in two and its syrupy juice flows out, and the taste of this water is such, sweetly insipid, so that it flows into the body like real chrism, anoints the insides, and the human cannot bear it – I could not bear it either, for I can no longer be a monk and look at the sky, I succumbed to the smell of the bay leaf. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 240)[13]

In the erotically lined, passionate relationship between a man and the mystical earth of the Virgin Mary's Gardens, a dark tension is manifested between the 'sublime' and the 'abject', as Roudinesco wrote about in her book *Our Dark Side: A History of Perversion* (Roudinesco, 2009, pp. 6–28). In the opinion of the Athosian sage

[12] "[…] тази земя е свещено тяло, а Тялото е женско и на жените е забранено да се докосват до женското тяло, то не им принадлежи. Не можеш да се докоснеш до себе си, твоите пътища са обходни, околоплодни, но и на нас ни е забранено поради други причини по друг начин, въпреки че стъпваме там. Ние само охраняваме забраненото място, от него самото го пазим да не се докосне само."

[13] "Те са градини на Богородица и ти никога няма да бъдеш там, вечно зелени и нагнетени от сокове, плуващи в миризми, виж на скалите водопада как се излива като от зейнали недра, но не мисли, че това е точно вода, само така изглежда, защото тя идва от дъното, където бушува огнена магма, от женски извори, които даряват, разтварят земята като зряла круша, когато я разцепиш на две и лепкавият и сок потича, и вкусът на тази вода е такъв, сладостно блудкав, тъй че се втича в тялото като истинско миро, помазва вътрешностите и човекът не може да издържи – не издържах и аз, затова вече не мога да съм монах и да гледам в небето, поддадох се на мириса на дафина."

and confessor, however, this is so common as to be sometimes excusable (Дворянова, 2006, p. 240). Meanwhile, Mary, adopting criteria based on a gender dichotomy to describe the peninsula, at first perceives it as ontologically 'masculine'; its shape at one moment reminds her of the body of a lounging Titan, at another of his penis:

> This body […] is male, one has only to look at the map to see the body of a Titan, one can see it as an erect penis making its way through the water, ready to possess the sea, but it can also be a body stretched out, tense in its most important part, where some monk's cell has sat down like a mole. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 239)[14]

However, when she sets off for Ammouliani and then, already with the Virgin Mary on Athos, she adopts a 'masculine' perspective and sees the peninsula as 'feminine', its shape resembles her milk-swollen cow's udder (Дворянова, 2006, p. 348), which suggests its maternal and feeding power (see Zając, 2013, pp. 109–146). This change, with the binary opposition of feminine–masculine maintained in the worldview, seems crucial for the later parts of the work, in which another of the novel's protagonists comes to the fore: Mary-the-other, who is in love with Mary, and, importantly, is a lesbian.

The events depicted so far become part of an oneiric vision that Mary-the-other experiences in the Athosian police building, where she (like the-other-Mary) is interrogated as a witness in the case of her missing friend. An increasingly aggressive investigator demands that the women identify an alleged fragment of Mary's body found during the search for her (or her corpse) – a hand that has been put in a locked case like a relic. Both women recognise the hand of the missing woman, but only Mary-the-other admits this; while contemplating the object that terrifies her and at the same time evokes tenderness, she follows the course of the last few days of her beloved's life in her mind's eye. In response to her testimony, the commissioner makes the incomprehensible decision to change Mary-the-other's status from witness to suspect and imprison her in the basement of the police station:

> and led her down the stairs […] to the lower underground level of the building. He threw her into an empty room with walls of hewn stone. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 356)[15]

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[14] "Това тяло […] е мъжко, достъчно е да погледне човек картата и съзира тялото на Титан, може да види като еректирал член, поел път през водата, готов да обладава морето, но може да бъде и изтегнало се тяло, напрегнато станало в най-важната за себе си част, където като бенка е кацнал един скит."

[15] "и я отведе надолу по стълбата […] към по-долните нива на сградата под земята. Захвърли я в една съвсем празна стая със стени от дялан камък."

The heroine is brutally thrown into the stone basement of the building that adjoins the Athosian wall – at this point a *de facto* rather flimsy fence. Integrated into the structure of the narrative, the testimonies of nameless witnesses about the place of Mary-the-other's imprisonment are presented as uncertain and ambiguous, but they confirm the fact that she was surrounded by stone walls.

> The room (…) didn't even have a window, it was a cell dug deeply into the ground; Mary-the-other was surrounded by walls on all sides. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 357)

> she was in fact thrown down, but not quite underground, but into a basement with a window high up, through which only the sky could be seen. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 357)[16]

The perspective of Mary-the-other, which is a kind of synthesis of these stories, is adopted as the most reliable one, but it is still told in the non-witness mode typical of the Bulgarian language, which suggests the uncertainty of the information given:

> Mary-the-other […], after the men had pushed her to the floor, looked round and saw a very small window through which she could see the sky, and sometimes a round moon (…), for the window was as narrow as an embrasure, so she would have to turn into a snake, a lizard, or a mollusc to sneak through it unhurt and regain her freedom. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 360)[17]

In Dvoryanova's novel, the descriptions of the stone trap, which evoke associations with the folk song about a woman's walling-up, are accompanied by information about the contradictory form of the place: the indestructibility of the main material and the improvised arrangement of it (bars falling apart, plaster coming off, netting full of holes) (Дворянова, 2006, p. 357). The immovable stone (Bartmiński, 1999, pp. 235–246) coexists with constructional bungles that evoke the thought of the instability of this – literally and metaphorically understood – building, its contingency:

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[16] "Стаята […] дори нямала прозорец, била килия дълбоко вкопана в земята, значи Мария-другата отвсякъде е била оградена със стени.
наистина била хвърлена долу, но не съвсем под земята, а в приземния етаж, където стаята все пак имала висок прозорец, през който се виждало единствено и само небето.

[17] "Мария-другата […] след като мъжете я захвърлили на пода, огледала се е видяла съвсем малък прозорец, през който би могло да прозира небе, понякога кръгла луна […] защото прозорецът е толкова тесен, като прозорец на бойница, че трябва да превърне в змия, гущер или в някакво мекотело, за да изплъзне невредима оттам и да си върне свободата."

> Mary-the-other was in fact thrown down, not quite underground but into a basement with a window high up through which only the sky could be seen, and its bars were not strong enough, for everything in the building was makeshift, crumbling and flimsy, as she said herself, and these witnesses can point to this window with its thin netting, which is why she escaped anyway. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 357)[18]

In folk songs, Manole's wife makes no attempt to get out of trouble. She dies so that the structure survives. In accordance with the rules of foundation magic, she becomes a tutelary spirit of the place, and the small window in the wall is her only source of solace during her slow agony as she can feed her baby through it. In Dvoryanova's novel, Mary-the-other is not a nursing mother; she does not accept the groundless sentence but decides to try to escape from the cellar. She is supported by the-other-Mary, who follows all the instructions of the imprisoned woman. Here, then, we have a situation different from that in the folk song, where the entire community turns its back on the woman marked as a victim. Dvoryanova develops the theme of escape, perversely crossing the boundaries of the absurd. Mary-the-other's plan is to dismember her own body, the parts of which she gives to her friend with the recommendation that she take them to Mount Athos, as she expects them to be miraculously reintegrated there:

> […] I have a plan: I will break the windowpane, I will tear the netting, you will help me with it, it will be easier from the outside, and then you'll throw me a big knife, the biggest one, and I'll dismember myself with it. Take me out in pieces, don't be afraid of blood, don't be afraid of my death, it won't be real, because then you will carry me to Mount Athos, and there I will merge into a whole. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 360)[19]

Thus, through the window in the wall, it is not the feeding breast of a walled-up mother that penetrates into the outside world, but the dismembered body of a woman who is overwhelmed with despair and hope of survival. It is not life-giving milk but blood that flows down the walls

[18] "Мария-другата наистина била хвърлена долу, но не съвсем под земята, а в приземния етаж, където стаята все пак имала висок прозорец, през който се виждало единствено и само небето, а решетката му не е била достатъчно здрава, защото всичко в сградата в паянтово, оронено и несретно, както самата тя беше казала, и тези свидетели могат да посочат този прозорец със съвсем рехава мрежа, поради което тя все пак е избягала."

[19] "[…] аз имам план: ще счупя стъклото, ще разкъсам мрежата, за това ще ми помогнеш и ти, отвън ще е по-лесно, а после ми хвърли един голям нож, най-големия, и с него сама ще се разчленя. Измъкни ме на части, не бой от кръвта, не се бой от смъртта ми, тя няма да бъде истинска, защото после ти ще ме отнесеш на Атон, а там аз ще се събера цялата."

of the building, which alters the symbolic message carried by these fluids (Harrell, 1981, pp. 796–823).

The drastic self-defragmentation that Mary-the-other undertakes is a metaphor for the disintegration of her personality, the experience of the death of her former 'self', accompanied by the surprising certainty of an anticipated miracle – resurrection through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians. This act of self-annihilation also represents a subversive reversal of the process of relic formation: devout life – martyr's death – miracles – body dismemberment. Expectations of a miracle are not fallen short of, although the reader learns this from the uncertain testimonies of witnesses interwoven into the narrative. Some claim to have seen the two Marys in Ouranoupoli, one of whom had barely visible scars on her body (Дворянова, 2006, p. 361). Others maintain that they are still on the Holy Mount Athos, wandering around the least accessible parts of the peninsula. The-other-Mary in a way justifies her choice with the yearning for finding a husband, while Mary-the-other justifies her choice with the plan to carry the icon of the Virgin Mary Keeper of the Gate (Вратарица) out of the gates of the Monastery of Iviron in order to open the gates of the Virgin Mary's Gardens to all women with this act – from the monks' point of view, a blasphemous one.

> What happened after that is not quite clear, because it is very difficult to understand what happens on Mount Athos; the mysteries and sacraments are great there, but it is certain that both of them are still in the Forbidden Place, because, according to testimony, no one has seen them for a long time. It is not too difficult for them to hide, especially if they have obtained frocks; there are many wanderers there, **with vague features of their faces**, and the monks' eyes are weak from gazing in another direction, so that their stay is probably undisturbed; one only wonders how it is possible that the earth beneath their feet has not caught fire and its body has not burned out… It is certain, however, that this is precisely what has not happened, for no great fire has been heard to break out on Mount Athos, and straight from the bowels of the earth; nor has the Holy Sleeve of the peninsula turned upside down; no one has heard of that, from which it follows that Mary-the-other has not yet taken [the icon of – GSG] Virgin Mary Keeper of the Gate out. (Дворянова, 2006, pp. 363–364)[20]

[20] "Какво е станало след това, не е съвсем ясно, защото е много трудно човек да разбере онова, което се случва в Атон, тайните и тайнствата там са големи, но сигурно е, че и двете са все още в Забраненото място, защото оттогава, според свидетелството, никой не ги е виждал. Не е особено трудно да се крият, ако са се сдобили някак с раса, там бродници има много, **с неясни черти на лицата си**, а на монасите очите са слаби от взиране в друга посока, тъй че пребиваването им навярно е безпроблемно; само човек

And yet nothing happens. Neither the feminist religious revolution (Adamiak, 1999) nor the apocalypse heralded by the Tradition takes place (Дворянова, 2006, p. 180). The world of signs, symbols, prohibitions and imperatives lasts in a seemingly unchanged form; only at the level of local gossip does Athos become the arena of women's already corporeal presence and their 'body-soul' mystical participation, which is no longer controlled by monks. Surrounded by relics, the Athosian monks persist, admittedly, within the Virgin Mary's Gardens, worshipping religious fetishes (Böhme, 2012, pp. 143–180), but in the novel's world their spiritual competence is partly questioned. The real power over the future of this place seems to be put in the hands of the Athosian nomads in their 'bodies, encore', to invoke Rosi Braidotti's categories of thought – 'the body, encore' (Braidotti, 2009, pp. 219–225). But the transformation that Mary-the-other and her accompanying friend go through does not lead towards their release from the obsession of Athos. On the contrary, the price for using the Virgin Mary's Gardens is the loss of facial features, the concealment of body shapes, the abandonment of relationships with the outside world, and disappearance, that is blending into the order created by men. Through this kind of disembodiment, Dvoryanova's heroines become their own shadows. Their life-non-life resembles the postmortal fate of the 'walled-up woman' from folk songs who transforms into the immortal tutelary spirit of the edifice created by men. As advocates of the feminist revolution on Athos, the two Marys fall into the trap when they take up (as if unintentionally) the role of pilgrims… Thus, Dvoryanova's Orthodox-rooted yet no longer confessional (and at the same time non-heretical) response to the exclusion dictated by the Tradition contains an intuition that was once expressed by Rosi Braidotti. According to this Italian philosopher, any attempt by women to REPAIR androcentric reality is sooner or later threatened exactly by homology, by absorption into phallogocentric categories of world perception and subsequent secondary (and more sublime) subordination (Braidotti, 2009).

An alternative response to this contradiction is the novel's second ending, which seemingly rationalises the mysterious events. Everything seems to return to the common-sense norm: Mary's disappearance was caused by her depar-

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се пита как тъй земята под краката им не е пламнала, как снагата ѝ не се прогорила… сигурно е обаче, че точно това не се е случило, защото не се е чувало голям пожар да връхлита Атон, при това избликнал направо от земните недра, не се е чуло и за някакво преобръщане на Светия ръкав на полуострова вдън самия себе си, от което следва, че Мария-другата все още не е изнесла *Вратарницата*."

ture, and the story told – with its marvelousness and fantasy – is the plot of a novel about the Mother of God written by the heroine. Lending credence to the events, this seemingly trivialised procedure offers the prospect of the heroines returning to their 'normal' lives before the trip to Mount Athos. In this life, they are a friendly group of female support on a daily basis, and unity is their strength. But this layer of the narrative also proves to be a zone of 'ontological penumbra' (Merz & Merz, 2017, p. 2)[21] due to the stones of the Mother of God found by Mary at the foot of Athos and sent to the Sophian address of Mary-the-other. In the represented world, these sea-thrown images of the Mother of God become the most modest yet persistent evidence of mystical forces that affect the women's senses in the space of Mount Athos – forces that the women cannot resist. Written by nature in accordance with accepted iconographic approaches, they evoke 'not made by human hands' images of Jesus, whose prototype was the legendary imprint of his face on the cloth intended to heal King Abgar. Dvoryanova makes these 'miraculous' objects a sense-making component of ideas about the salutary role of the 'spirit-bearing' Virgin Mary, who in Orthodox theological thought is sometimes equated with Sophia – the Wisdom of God (Florenski, 2009, pp. 282–310). While the reproductions of the icon of Jesus mentioned here are associated with an inherently impermanent material such as fabric (although the first one is supposed to be imperishable) (Lubańska, 2019, pp. 270–271), in the novel the place where the presence of the Virgin/Sophia is visualised becomes a stone – a being that is 'immutable, eternal and unharmed'[22] (Bielik-Robson & Stroiński, 2009). Thus, the novel's

[21] I quote after: Lubańska (2019, pp. 53–54).

[22] As Agata Bielik-Robson says in the interview: "In the metaphysics of the Greeks, being is eternal and aspires to nothing: it finds fulfilment in a closed circle of reproduction of what is. The order of this metaphysics is well reflected by the metaphor of 'stone': the ontophany of stone underlies the entire Greek *logos*. I say this in polemical reference to Derrida, who in "White Mythology", obviously referring to Plato, argues that the sun is the leading metaphor of *logos*. Well, maybe the sun, but next to it and still before it – stone. This is the debt of the philosophical *logos* to mythic experience, brilliantly described by Eliade, according to whom stone is the perfect appearance of an immutable, eternal and unharmed being, that is one that cannot be belittled. At the same time, it turns out to be a very compliant element of the metaphysical order: of all entities, stone 'is the most', and this is why the unmoved mover is, by Aristotle, a stone being. Not a solar one." ("W metafizyce Greków byt jest odwieczny i ku niczemu nie dąży: spełnia się w zamkniętym kręgu powielania tego, co jest. Porządek tej metafizyki dobrze oddaje metafora "kamienna": ontofania kamienia stoi u podstaw całego greckiego *logosu*. Mówię to w polemicznym nawiązaniu do Derridy, który w "Białej mitologii", oczywiście nawiązując do Platona, dowodzi, że wiodącą metaforą *logosu* jest słońce. No, może i słońce, ale obok

narrative closes with the aporia-based suggestion of the sophiological ontophany of stone, through which the mystical unity of being manifests itself, which cannot be expressed and falls outside any rational cognition but is free from the dualism that deprives human thought of its freedom.

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niego i jeszcze przed nim – kamień. Na tym właśnie polega zadłużenie filozoficznego *logosu* w doświadczeniu mitycznym, świetnie opisanym przez Eliadego, wedle którego kamień to doskonały pojaw bytu niezmiennego, odwiecznego i nieposzkodowanego, tj. takiego, którego nie sposób umniejszyć. Okazuje się przy tym bardzo spolegliwym elementem ładu metafizycznego: spośród wszystkich bytów kamień "jest najbardziej" i właśnie dlatego nieruchomy poruszyciel to u Arystotelesa byt kamienny. Nie słoneczny") (Bielik-Robson & Stroiński, 2009).

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Topos wmurowanej kobiety i nieudane próby emancypacji. Przypadek powieści Emilii Dvoryanovej *Земните градини на Богородица*

Artykuł poświęcony jest refleksji na temat powieści współczesnej bułgarskiej pisarki Emilii Dvoryanovej *Земните градини на Богородица* (2006), której autorka podejmuje próbę feministycznego rozrachunku z obowiązującą na Górze Athos – świętym miejscu prawosławia – zasadą *avatonu*, a ślad za tym z androcentryczną teologią chrześcijańską. Interpretacja stosowanych przez pisarkę strategii dialogu z Tradycją religijną oraz folklorem (reprezentowanym przez topos wmurowanej kobiety) pozostaje w korelacji z myślą filozoficzną Rossi Braidotti, która potwierdza wpisane w semantykę powieści przesłanie, iż kobieca emancypacja skazana jest na porażkę, gdy wiązana jest z nadzieją na naprawę „męskiego" świata.

Słowa kluczowe: literatura bułgarska; Emiliya Dvoryanova; feminizm chrześcijański; Athos; wmurowana kobieta

The topos of an immured woman and failed attempts at emancipation: The case of Emiliya Dvoryanova's novel *Земните градини на Богородица* [The Virgin Mary's Earthly Gardens]

This article is devoted to reflection on the novel *Земните градини на Богородица* (2006) by the contemporary Bulgarian writer Emiliya Dvoryanova, who attempts a feminist reckoning with the *avaton* principle that applies on Mount Athos – a holy place of the Orthodox Church – and, in the wake of that, with androcentric Christian theology. The interpretation of the writer's strategies of dialogue with the Religious Tradition and folklore (represented by the topos of the walled-up woman) is in correlation with Rosi Braidotti's philosophical thought, which confirms the message inherent in the semantics of the novel that women's emancipation is doomed to failure when it is linked with the hope of repairing the 'man's' world.

Keywords: Bulgarian literature; Emiliya Dvoryanova; Christian feminism; Athos; walled-up woman

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