ART STUDIES AND CULTURAL STUDIES

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CONNECTIVIST APPROACH TO THE ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS IN SLOVAK POSTMODERN LITERATURE

*Abstract. **The Purpose of the Study** is the analysis of spiritual symbols in the works of Slovak postmodernists - D. Dušek, D. Mitana, P. Vilikovsky and M. Vadas, as well as the verification of the principles of connectivism within the framework of literary studies. **The Research Methodology** is based on hermeneutic and deconstruction methods, as well as on the connectivist approach, which allow the interpretation of deconstructed motifs at the level of connecting individual elements into a secondary semantic network. **The Scientific Novelty** of the research lies in the fact that for the first time in Slovak literary studies, connectivism was used for the study of postmodern literature. It is concluded that a complete denial or confirmation of religiosity as such can be achieved, for example, by combining religious meanings from different novels. **The Conclusions.** The analysis of religious symbols with the principles of connectivism shows how the authors reveal the strong desire of humanity to have a stable core, which is absent in modern society. Therefore, considering how much evil has been committed in the world, the writers choose a version that describes the reign of Lucifer himself. Slovak postmodern literature works*

hard to create its own models of reality, in which authors allow their stories to arbitrarily organize and create connections between the material and transcendental realms, thus providing a unique perspective on the complex system of reality.

Keywords: *connectivism, Slovak postmodern literature, religious symbols, Dušan Dušek, Dušan Mitana, Pavel Vilikovský, Marek Vadas*

The Problem Statement. Contemporary Slovak postmodern literature is an incredibly perspective and attractive object for research, because in simply tuned texts we find countless serious ideas, moreover, it reflects not only "dynamic transformations of the social system" (Čúzy – Hochel – Kákošová, 2007, p. 6) but also transformative psychological processes of the individual. Contemporary literature has gradually "taken the form of a poetically and value-diverse, pluralistic, significantly differentiated and open structure, governed by spontaneous literary processes" (Passia, Taranenková et al., 2014, p. 14), and precisely the present character makes it possible to explore the figurative world of Slovak (not only) postmodern literature using the instruments of various disciplines, owing to which it is possible to penetrate as far as the curtain of images of the irrational world. The given research focuses specifically on the analysis of religious symbols, also raising the issue of why the just-mentioned motifs are investigated in the field of postmodernity, which positions itself as an opponent of religiosity. However, the fact is that the emphasis on the important – religious part of culture is typical for Slovak postmodernism, as well as for the entire Slovak society.

"Slovak literature today represents a pluralistic system" in which "authors of different political orientations, worldview convictions and individual poetics coexist side by side", due to which "conditions are created for free, uncensored, creation unrestricted by non-literary circumstances" (Hochel, 2007, p. 22). It is for this reason that the works of the four most important representatives of Slovak postmodern art, peers and pioneers of Slovak postmodernism – Dušan Dušek, Dušan Mitana and Pavel Vilikovský, together with Marek Vadas, one of the most popular contemporary Slovak authors, were selected for research. M. Vadas's poetics should be referred to postmodern categories, postmodern practices upted though, therefore it is possible to analyze the connection of the motifs used by the selected writers. Their works stands out for the originality, additionally, the contents of the selected works allow us to study their coexistence in the literary space, as well as the explicit or implicit aspects and motifs which we consider topical because of their universality.

For the analysis of individual motifs, in this case, motifs related to spiritual themes, a connectivist approach was chosen because this contemporary theory makes it possible to attribute certain connections to apparently non-linear structures. Connectivism (also called connectionism or synergetics) is a newer,

still developing direction that describes the cognitive system as a network of interconnected elements.

Connectivism emerged at the end of the 20th century and is currently a very popular science. Its principles and concepts penetrated a wide spectrum of scientific fields – biology and physics, history and economics, literature and philosophy. Connectivism, based on elements of rhizomatic philosophy, uses the image of brain neurons not only for their ability to process or deal with complex processes or phenomena, but also for its disposition to self-transformation within the process of processing complex information systems (Jefimova, 2008, pp. 18−25).

The Analysis of Sources and Recent Researches. The starting point for the development of connectivism was primarily the rhizomatic character of postmodern philosophy. The poststructuralist G. Deleuze, together with the psychoanalyst F. Guattari, using the metaphor of a rhizome – a stolon, an underground stem, depicted the current state of reality as that having no core (Deleuze – Guattari, 2010, p. 6).

A new approach to poetics – connectivism – developed a little later from the above-described approach to the system or way of knowing. As South African philosopher Paul Cilliers explains, the complexity of postmodern theory revolves around "the process of self-organization and the rejection of traditional notions of representation. The language model, developed by poststructuralist and postmodern linguists and philosophers (F. Saussure, J. Derrida), is closely connected with distributed modeling techniques, an example of which is connectivism. This approach leads to models of complex systems that avoid the oversimplification that is often the result of rule-based thinking models" (Cilliers, 2022, pp. 35–37).

However, one of the most important philosophical conclusions of connectivism may appear doubtful, especially for an individual inclined to mystical thinking because under certain conditions, order is born from chaos. This conclusion can best be expressed by the supporters of the said theory themselves. "The essential thing is that from the connectivist point of view, the birth of a new order from chaos is not forced by some external (in relation to this reality) force, but has a spontaneous character. Therefore, connectivism is a theory of self-organization (and not organization)" says V.P. Branskij (Branskij, 2010).

Connectivism (otherwise called synergetics) is, according to I. Prigozhin, "a theory of chaotic processes in complex random dynamic processes" (cited according to Machlina 2001). But even a work of art can be perceived as a complex dynamic system with a very unstable order that can be generated by chaos.

Chaos in the postmodern understanding of the world does not deny logos, but refuses to establish any of the created worldview systems as "absolute" truth. Chaos is a confirmation of pluralism, from the point of view of postmodernists "it is not terrible, nor destructive, but self-organizing, constantly generating something new. Decentered postmodern text initially does not have uniform semantics, is fundamentally open-ended and represents a field of actualization of proliferating potential meanings" (Karpova, 2015, p. 70).

Connectivism may provide a more adequate description of how the human brain works as well as how language works. Linguistics is therefore often understood today as a mirror of neural networks and as a window into the functioning of the human brain. With the help of language, literary texts are created, which subsequently appear to be the representation of complex networks.So it can be argued that by examining literary texts, we are not only examining words on paper, but particularly trying to understand the complex systems hidden in the bowels of the gray mass of our consciousness.

Derrida explains language as an open system. There is no place outside language where meaning can be generated, because where there is meaning, language is automatically present. Language cannot be separated from the world it describes. "The outside connects with the inside a relationship that is, as usual, anything but simply the outside. The meaning of the outside was always present inside, at the same time imprisoned outside and vice versa" (Derrida, 1976, p. 35). "Only when the difference between inside and outside is broken, the system can open" (Cilliers, 2002, p. 43). If the system of language is as open as Derrida suggests, if relations are always playfully changing in unpredictable ways, then nothing permanent and concrete can be said about them that applies to language in general, which is also true of connectivism theory.

Even the thoughts of the French philosopher J. Lacan, describing the so-called "object a", which in our case is a word with which the subject releases the idealistic interior, speak of the fact that through language, i.e. the word itself, a human being can express what is hidden inside them because the purest and most symbolic function of language, including literature in general, is the confirmation of human existence itself (Lacan, 1995, pp. 39, 44, 46; see also Shteinbuk, 2008, p. 103).

Today, connectivism can be understood as interdisciplinary knowledge, a new picture of the world, the language of modern science, a scientific paradigm, as well as the connection of knowledge in the space of non-linear self-organization (Andrejev, 2008, p. 118). The distinguishing feature of connectivism is an open network in which elements cooperate with each other and with the environment through the exchange of energy, information, or matter, therefore it is possible to

connect apparently unconnected material images with transcendental phenomena, such as the essence of human being.

The Purpose of the Article. The goal of the research is to examine and interpret the spiritual theme in selected works using contemporary philosophy – connectivism, thus, provide a new approach to the analysis of Slovak postmodern literature. In addition to the analysis of individual symbols, the aim of this study is also to clarify and verify the principles and content of the connectivist approach in practice.

The Research Methods. As part of the research on the perception of religious symbols in postmodern texts, the hermeneutic method is first used, helping in the process of interpreting specific expressions of culture – literary texts through which an individual receives reality (Gadamer, 1988; see also Voskobojnikov, 2006, pp. 182–183). Furthermore, the research is guided by the method of deconstruction (Derrida, 1976; see also Skoropanova, 2001, p. 17; Rivkin, Ryan, 2004, p. 257), according to which the works are initially divided into individual motifs, so that they can then be interpreted on the basis of connectivist theory. For the analysis of literary works, in addition to hermeneutics and deconstruction, a connectivist approach is also significant, adding a new dimension to the mentioned pair – which allows to interpret the deconstructed motifs on a different level, one that connects specific elements into a secondary meaning network.

The Main Material Statement. In relation to the literary work author, the literary text shows "undoubted signs of an open system and is consequently subject to its characteristic features. While creating a literary work, there is a constant exchange of energy with the external environment – the depicted reality and the consciousness of the author. An artistic text is not a sum of its basic elements [images, tropes, storylines, compositional techniques, etc.], but it forms a new, qualitatively defined whole" (Stecenko, 2008, p. 212).

The text contains a balance of traditional literary practices and unique expressions of the writer's individuality, and also contains many potential ways of developing characters and events. "In this way, elements of self-organization appear which can lead to a closed [...] or open [...] finale" (Stecenko, 2008, p. 213; see also Evin, 2004, pp. 101–115), that simply means that the text functions as a set of non-linear possibilities of correlation, resulting in original creations and senses.

Just as it is true in the connectivist prototype of the world, in this case, one can also speak about a model type of reality perception based on the principle of the activity of brain neurons which function as a link between different nerve "nodes" (Jefimova, 2008, p. 19). In our understanding, the connectivist node is represented by an individual who is constituted by a material envelope and at the

same time a transcendent being. However, literature as an open system provides space for this kind of interaction, thus in the spirit of connectivist philosophy, in the process of creation there is an exchange of energy between the author's consciousness and subconscious perception, which subsequently is materially transformed in the form of a text.

The religious form of knowledge plays an significant role in human thinking. An individual's desire for an absolute beginning, for knowledge of their soul, can take different forms – mystical, religious, but a special role in this process belongs to art. According to M. Weber, art is currently constituted as a kind of independent microcosm, taking on "the function of salvation in the world, interpreted in different ways, from [...] the oppression of everyday life and above all from the growing oppression [...] of rationalism" (cited according to Careva, 2011, p. 118).

In the philosophy of postmodernism, art is presented as a space for the interaction of the empirical and the transcendent; it is able to penetrate beyond the visible shell of things to their innermost essence. J. Deleuze says that created being is overcome in the creative process through symbolization and a breakthrough into the transcendent occurs (Deleuze, 1999, p. 67). Therefore, literature (as a part of art) can be understood as a connectivist network, in which parallel worlds are created owing to infinite possibilities and boundless symbolism, which, due to imagination, reflect arbitrary images, acquiring particular forms and shapes in the process, thereby creating various new forms of transformed reality.

The absolute entity – God – cannot be contained in the material world because sacral and other spiritual beings are an exclusively idealistic phenomenon. It is a sphere of existence that is accessible to an individual exclusively through some internal relationship between the individual and the source of being – the divine spark hidden in the bowels of that Self. With the help of the creed, the individual tends to achieve an imaginary connection with the alleged primordial being.

The symbolism of the "other world" has a notable presence in the texts of the selected authors. In connection with the world of spiritual dimensions, Vilikovský states that "nebo je v našich predstavách čosi dokonalé, raj, ktorý sme si kedysi vlastnou vinou zašantročili" ("heaven is something perfect in our imaginations, it is a paradise that we once squandered by our own fault")[1] (Vilikovský, 2018, p. 256), but at the same time he writes about how the other world is "iba ustálený jazykový zvrat, eufemizmus, ktorý si ako náplasť prikladáme na [...] boľačku. Všetci pri tom majú na mysli nebo, o očistci či pekle nijaký dospelý človek vážne neuvažuje" ("only a regular twist of language, an euphemism that we apply as a band-aid to [...] the sore. Everyone has heaven in

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[1] Translation here and everywhere. – V. S. M.

mind, no adult seriously thinks about purgatory or hell") (Vilikovský, 2018, p. 252). The given contradictory statement can be understood both as an expression of disappointment in the decadence of the human race's approach to the gifts of nature (God's gifts), but at the same time the author argues that the entire described phenomenon is once again only one of man-made simulations, serving to deceive one's own senses, and it also underlines the naivety of human thinking through focusing primarily on the state and space of "bliss", not taking into account that every coin has two sides.

Dušan Dušek also mentions the alleged former paradise "ktorý sa navždy stratil v závejoch piesku a času" ("which was lost forever in the drifts of sand and time") (Dušek, 2013, p. 135). In the story *Volavka* (*Heron*) from the book *Kufor na sny* (*Suitcase for dreams*), the text focuses on the symbol of the sea, which "by mohlo byť liekom [...] na beznádej z domu" ("could be a cure [...] for hopelessness from home") (Dušek, 2012, p. 126), and this space can be identified as an earthly form of the so-called "purgatory", where the hero's soul eliminates all its problems and vices.

The analysis of the short story *Sci-fi* (*Sci-fi*) from the author's identical book proves that the entire text can be enterpreted as an analogy of the biblical scene of the sacred paradise, as well as the first couple of the human race – Adam and Eve. Primarily, it is about the idea of "návratu vesmírnej lode na Zem" ("the return of the spaceship to Earth") (Dušek, 2012, p. 160). The problem could be as follows that "v celom vesmíre sa vraždilo a zabíjalo iba na Zemi" ("in the entire universe there was murder and killing only on Earth") (Dušek, 2012, p. 162), which can be seen as a symbol of hell, into which unconscious souls, led by the "commander" – the Demiurge, rush.

Nonetheless, the pair of protagonists, stimulated by an inner urge, would pluck up the courage to step out onto the untouched planet, and at that moment "začala rásť tráva [...] a vzápätí stromy" ("grass would begin to grow around them [...] and soon trees"), they would feel "ako pôda víta [ich] kroky, ako [im] prejavuje svoju náklonnosť" ("how the ground welcomes [their] steps, how it shows it's affection to [them]") (Dušek, 2012, p. 163), and they would be very careful that this time "ich odtiaľ už nijaký anjel s horiacim mečom nevyhnal" ("no angel with a flaming sword drives them out of there") (Dušek, 2012, p. 164). The form of the future tense used in the short story suggests that in these scenes there is a hidden subconscious wish of Dušek's characters yearning for the restoration of the fallen kingdom, in which the man realizes that coexistence with nature – *Gaia* – is the key to inner harmony.

Marek Vadas works with transgressive transitions between earthly and supernatural reality in an exemplary manner, and within the framework of religious archetypal images of that "other world" he writes that spiritual beings

reside "v palácoch, na oblakoch, v inej dimenzii" ("in palaces, on clouds, in another dimension") (Vadas, 2021, p. 26). In general, it can be stated that, portraying the former alleged paradise, the authors try to find a kind of core connecting the infinite number of layered elements of human existence, but at the same time they immediately draw attention to the dubious nature of the element itself.

In the short story *V hlbinách* (*In the depths*), the author depicts "jazero Nyos" ("Lake Nyos"), in its depths there is an "podvodný palác" ("underwater palace") which has a "veľkú záhradu plnú ovocných stromov" ("big garden full of fruit trees") (Vadas, 2018, p. 114), which in its turn can be interpreted as an image of a forgotten, lost divine eden. Looking below the surface, it seems to the protagonist "akoby kdesi hlboko zem krvácala" ("as if somewhere deep down the earth is bleeding"), and when he returns from his stay in the depths, he thinks "že si na všetko spomenul" ("that he remembers everything") (Vadas, 2018, p. 115), which subsequently made him nauseous. It is an image of a human being who has reached a state of enlightenment for a moment, while he is later overcome by unpleasant feelings, associated with disappointment and fear of where the earth's population has reached. Also, in connection with the symbol of water as a metaphor for death (the end), we can speak about a human being who for a certain time finds himself between worlds, and before he gets back to himself, he tastes what it is like on the "other shore".

A similar image can also be found in Vadas's short story *Hotel Beau Regard* (*Hotel Beau Regard*) from the book *Liečiteľ* (The *Healer*), where the hotel can be understood as a symbol of the earthly world, and "ľudí je tu niekoľkonásobne viac ako v časoch, keď [...] otec hotel založil" ("there are many times more people here than in the times when [...] the father founded the hotel"), where the image of the father can be depicted as the image of the Creator, but "z jeho biznisom to ide dolu vodou" ("his business is going downhill") (Vadas, 2007, p. 30), which means that humanity has become corrupt. Not only in the story, but also in reality, humanity destroys everything around it, following the exclusively selfish impulse of the desire for power, because the man's grandparents "neodolali, hoci žili v Božom svetle, [...] uverili Satanovej lži, uverili, že Boha nepotrebujú, že sú sami sebe bohmi, [...] uverili, že môžu [sami] postaviť vežu, ktorá prenikne až do neba" ("could not resist, although they lived in God's light, [...] they believed Satan's lie, they believed that they did not need God, that they were their own gods, [...] they believed that they could [by themselves] build a tower that would penetrate the sky") (Mitana, 2017, p. 105).

Regarding Mitana's work, it can be stated that it is saturated with religious images. To speak about the symbol of the "other world", in the book *Zjavenie* (*Revelation*) he writes how his hero, and people in general, lacks "odvaha k

pokore...Nechceme si priznať, že jestvuje niečo, čo nás presahuje, niečo, čo nikdy nepochopíme" ("the courage to be humble... We do not want to admit that there is something that goes beyond us, something that we will never understand"), because "sme sa vzbúrili a ideme vlastnou cestou" ("we have rebelled and are going our own way") (Mitana, 2017, pp. 142–143). The individual subconsciously suppresses the transcendental essence of existence with the fear of finding out what kind of disillusionment they are in, in addition, the hero claims that people "sú peklo, oni robia peklo svojím myslením" ("are hell, they make hell with their thinking") (Mitana, 2017, p. 150), which is filled with an egocentric desire to control and consume everything (nowadays not only) on this planet.

The basic theme of the book *Hľadanie strateného autora* (*Searching for the Lost Author*) is the wrongdoing of the first inhabitants of paradise, as well as the consequences for the expulsion from the divine eden for the entire humankind. In addition, the author writes that eden was only a reservation for mutated apes-humans (Mitana, 2017, p. 59). The book also says about undeniable proofs of the existence of the "other world", which supposedly cannot be refuted – unless, of course, someone wants to "tvrdiť, že neexistujú egyptské pyramídy" ("claims that there are no Egyptian pyramids") or "mezopotámske zikkuraty" ("Mesopotamian ziggurats"), "ani Brána Slnka" ("not even the Gate of the Sun") (Mitana, 2017, p. 63).

The phrase paradise on earth is shaken to its foundations in the given work, because the novel's protagonist discovers that "na zemi raj nikdy neexistoval" ("paradise on earth never existed") (Mitana, 2017, p. 67). He talks about several levels of the heaven spheres, and finally, in his reflections, he comes to the conclusion that even if we did not live directly "v pekle" ("in hell"), we would be guaranteed to "žijeme v očistci" ("live in purgatory") (Mitana, 2017, p. 116), thereby defending the imperfection of the functioning of life on Earth to himself.

Based on the words of Mitana – since "sa odohral v nebi palácový prevrat" ("a palace coup took place in heaven") (Mitana, 2017, p. 55), a god, whom human beings still recognize as the source of all being, took the imaginary throne. The writers of the examined texts work with the symbol of the highest instance in their reflections on the meaning of existence with the help of internal monologues of the characters, but some of them, through a transgressive turn, depict spiritual beings at some interspheric level, when these beings converse with the authors, although their physical presence is not evident. In the form of conversations with ethereal creatures, the authors blur the boundaries and thus create new – connectivist – links between the earthly world and the immaterial world, thereby weaving their own, alternative network of realities.

In his work, Vilikovský also avoids portraying images of a spiritual nature in P*ríbeh ozajského človeka* (*The Story of a real Man*), as it is primarily a matter

of pointing out the ability of the previous regime to erase the brains of weak personalities, but the hero nevertheless states that God "je všemohúci a keby chcel, raz dva urobí s hriešnikmi poriadok" ("is almighty and if he wanted to, he would do one or two things to sinners order") (Vilikovský, 2014, p. 93), which indicates that it was not adequately orthodox to believe in the cult of the personality of the "heroes" of the time.

His approach to dealing with spiritual topics changes in the book *Rajc je preč* (*Drive is gone*), where the protagonist, in addition to what has already been discussed above, thinks about the meaning of his stay in the world, and claims that he is perhaps "nevedomým kolieskom v plánoch Boha či Vesmíru" ("an unconscious cog in the plans of God or the Universe") (Vilikovský, 2018, p. 260), which, however, does not satisfy him, because he is aware of the limited human existence.

The text *Letmý sneh* (*Fleeting snow*) is much more open to ideas about the Divine presence, and apart from thinking about the purpose of the soul, the author criticizes the very first commandment of the Christian Ten Commandments – "nevezmeš meno Božie nadarmo" ("thou shalt not take the name of God in vain"), because "Boh nijaké meno nemá [...] je to iba označenie funkcie" ("God has no name [...] it is only a designation of a function") (Vilikovský, 2014, p. 27), the protagonist does not intend to limit the Creator with such a man-made category. He explains that it worked differently in ancient religions, and because of the polytheistic orientation of the religion, every god had to have his own name, but "náš Boh nepotrebuje meno, lebo je jeden a jedinečný" ("our God does not need a name, because he is one and unique") (Vilikovský, 2014, p. 28).

"Keď Boh videl, že skazenosť ľudí na zemi bola veľká a všetko zmýšľanie ich srdca bolo ustavične zlé, oľutoval, že stvoril človeka" ("When God saw that the depravity of people on earth was great and all the thoughts of their hearts were always evil, he regretted that he had created man") (Vilikovský, 2014, p. 40), writes the author, not hiding the self-critical undertone of the written lines. However, this claim could be justified by a statement from the book Šesť cudzincov (Six Strangers), where Vadas writes about God as a crazy director "ktorý nemá tušenie, ako má dobrý film vyzerať. Alebo [...] túžil iba po rozptýlení a bolo mu jedno, ako to celé dopadne [...] alebo chcel iba experimentovať, [...] možno je to umelec a v tom prípade by bolo jasné, že výsledku človek rozumieť nebude" ("who has no idea what a good film should look like. Or [...] he just wanted distraction and did not care how it all turned out [...] or he just wanted to experiment, [...] maybe he was an artist and in that case it would be clear that the result would not be understood") (Vadas, 2021, pp. 79−80). Among other things, Vadas's character in *Liečiteľ* (*The Healer*) debates why "sú v nebi len belosi a prečo je zlo čierne ako moja tvár" ("there are only white people in heaven and

why evil is as black as my face") (Vadas, 2007, p. 88), which outlines doubts of Baudrillard's theory that as everything else, even God and the heavens themselves, are just a tangle of layered simulacra (Baudrillard, 2015, p. 11).

Marek Vadas and Dušan Mitana present a significant deviation from superficial and dull images of the spiritual aspect of existence. Both of them work extensively with transgression, which can be defined using the interpretation of the French philosopher G. Bataille as "the exit of an individual beyond the boundaries of the daily routine or comfort zone. The binary of the profane and the sacred is lost precisely by this act" (Bataille, 2000, p. 74). This transgressive transition carries certain epistemological changes in the perception of reality, since looking behind the curtain of knowledge, the individual reevaluates the previous illusions about the acquired knowledge, which is another example of the use of Plato's well-known story about the cave.

One of the heroes of the book *Šesť cudzincov* (*Six Strangers*) talks how "pri ňom stojí anjel strážny" ("a guardian angel has been standing by him") since a certain time, it is not "dané vidieť ho, ale počuje ho zreteľne" ("given to see him, but he hears him clearly") (Vadas, 2021, p. 102), even one day "anjel povedal" ("the angel told him") , to take a notebook to the pub and he "bude diktovať" ("will dictate") to him what to write, which resulted in a "kniha o zmysle života" ("book about the meaning of life") (Vadas, 2021, p. 103), which can be understood as an analogy to the legend of the creation of the *Holy Bible*.

In the short story *Našepkávač* (*The Whisperer)*, Vadas writes about an evil spirit that enters people's "heads" (Vadas, 2007, p. 77) and forces them to do terrible things, and also in the short story *Tieň* (*The Shadow*), he describes a ghost that repeatedly appears to the hero, is guilty of several criminal offensive actions, but in the end he admits that he is responsible for everything, and that he is haunted by his own shadow (Vadas, 2007, pp. 82–85).

Finally, in the short story *Liečiteľ* (*The Healer*), the author uses supernatural images and portrays the figure of an "neviditeľného muža" ("invisible man") (Vadas, 2007, p. 154), who guided the hero's steps until he finally realized that "bol úplne v jeho moci" ("he was completely in his power") (Vadas, 2007, p. 155).

The protagonist of *Zlá štvrť* (*The Bad Neighborhood*) says that people around him often "rozprávali sami so sebou, [...] prosili Boha a vyjednávali s ním" ("talked to themselves, [...] begged God and negotiated with him"), but his insides did not give him any response, so he was "prekvapený, keď sa hlas [...] z ničoho nič vynoril" ("surprised when the voice [..." emerged from nowhere") (Vadas, 2018, p. 81). Gradually, however, he gets the impression that he is completely "otrokom cudzieho hlasu" ("a slave of a foreign voice") (Vadas, 2018, p. 83), that is, of some kind of immaterial entity that tries to manipulate him from the supernatural realm. He feels as if "bol niekoho prostredníkom, bábkou na nitkách,

ktorej končatiny niekto zhora poťahuje" ("he is someone's intermediary, a puppet on strings whose limbs are being pulled by someone from above") (Vadas, 2018, p. 83).

Such motifs regarding "conversations" with transcendental beings are also described in monograph written by M. Yampolsky, who explains the given scene through the phenomenon of doubling, when the personality is stripped of any individual core and begins to be understood only as a system of doublings and mutual reflections (Yampolsky, 1997, p. 33). Jampolsky calls such a divided being a demon (genius), and it is said that Socrates already believed that he was "accompanied by a certain demon (genius) who [...] gives him advice, stops him when he wants to commit a 'wrong' act and actively it encourages action" (Yampolsky, 1997, p. 39). But the demon of Socrates is not yet physically completely separated from the subject itself, it is a kind of internal "whisperer", just like the beings in Vadas's books.

Mitana puts God in the main role of most of the analyzed texts, he constantly speaks to him, but the answer from the highest also comes only indirectly – through the hero himself. He writes to himself on the computer, even the fact that God "neodpovedal vlastným hlasom, ale začal [...] komunikovať skrze počítač, svedčil o tom, že [jeho] domŕzanie Ho už začína otravovať" ("did not answer him with his own voice, but began [...] to communicate through the computer, testified that [his] teasing was already beginning to annoy Him") (Mitana, 2017, p. 86), but the opposite is true. This communication becomes an inseparable part of the hero's everyday life, as a result of which the character reevaluates the previously fixed ideas about reality. Enriched, he then looks at the world with new eyes, which he owes to a successful – transgressive – transition beyond the earthly sphere.

Even in the book *Zjavenie* (*Revelation*), the hero hears a voice, "taký zreteľný a jasný, akoby hovoriaci stál vedľa neho. Bol v ňom neopísateľný pokoj, láska, milosrdenstvo, odpustenie" ("so distinct and clear, as if the speaker were standing next to him. There was indescribable peace, love, mercy, forgiveness in it" and it seemed to him that "sa narodil len preto, aby počul tento hlas" ("he was born only to hear this voice") (Mitana, 2017, p. 121). However, Mitana takes this form of communication with the transcendental sphere to a new level and goes even further in the book *Hľadanie strateného autora* (*Searching for the Lost Author*). In the given text, the inner demon described by Yampolsky transforms from a symbolic interlocutor into a physical form and completely leaves the subject's body, while conducting a dialogue with the latter that defies any norms. This split being, which can be considered as a kind of side effect of the doubling (split) of the connectivist knot (a person who appears as a combination of a physical being and a spiritual being) is Lucifer himself, known as the ruler of

darkness. Using the doubling effect, Mitana creates his own connectivist reality in which fiction, the spiritual realm, and reality are connected at the same time.

The framework of the described book is *Rozhovory s Luciferom* (*Conversations with Lucifer*), who was willing to explain to the protagonist that "klasická interpretácia je falošná" ("the classical interpretation is false" (Mitana, 2017, p. 111), "pravý Boh" ("the true God") (Mitana, 2017, p. 55) is him, and he is also the creator of the human race, which means that "sme vlastne démoni" ("we are actually demons") (Mitana, 2017, p. 105), which only confirms why a man is such a hideous creature.

He says of God that he is a "hochštapler, manipulátor a hypnotizér" ("trickster, a manipulator and a hypnotist") and that he "najskôr [...] podviedol, potom zmanipuloval a nakoniec [...] zotročil" ("first [...] deceived, then manipulated and finally [...] enslaved" people to suggest to them that they were "hriešni a vinní – od počiatku až naveky" ("sinful and guilty – from the beginning to eternity") (Mitana, 2017, p. 108). He also says that the creation of man was only an "experiment Adam" ("experiment Adam") (Mitana, 2017, p. 211), which did not succeed when settling the new planet – Earth – with extraterrestrial sons of God, and therefore it is not surprising that with this kind of existence, everything is not with the church order. By constantly intertwining information and emerging new facts, the Devil leads the hero into a trap, and he begins to get lost in a vicious circle of endless interpretations.

Towards the end, the main character decides to go with Lucifer to the world "beyond the border", thus letting his material form disappear, which means that he allows himself to be absorbed by a fantastic substance in order to know the absolute truth.

Satan's claims are also confirmed by Mitana in the book *Zjavenie* (*Revelation*), where he writes that "Boh na Zemi nevládne, [...] na Zemi vládne Satan, lebo Adam človek sa rozhodol ísť vlastnou cestou, nezávisle od Boha, a tak odovzdal vládu [...] Satanovi" ("God does not rule on Earth, [...] Satan rules on Earth, because Adam the man decided to go his own way, independently of God, and thus handed over the rule [...]] to Satan") (Mitana, 2017, p. 157). He fears that the only option "ako sa vyhnúť utrpeniu a súženiu pre Krista" ("to avoid suffering and tribulation for Christ") (the materialized divine substance) is to "skloniť sa pre Antikristom a jeho pečaťou. Táto cesta však nevedie do Božieho kráľovstva, ale [...] rovno do pekla" ("bow down to the Antichrist and his seal. However, this path does not lead to the kingdom of God, but [...] straight to hell") (Mitana, 2017, p. 255), which, according to the statements of Lucifer in *Hľadanie strateného autora* (S*earching for the Lost Author*), is paradoxically the mentioned kingdom of God.

The Conclusions. Using the theory of connectivism to form its principes, the analysis of the texts of Slovak postmodernists shows that a literary work can be perceived as a space of interaction of various parts of the figurative world. A complex system of interconnected elements is generated in the process of creating a text, which forms itself and thus makes it possible to perceive not only the figurative reality but also the real one by means of different layers of its existence.

Human consciousness depicted in literary works is also a connectivist network created by God, with which Slovak postmodernists play. And one of the most important connectionist principles is to show how complex chains of meaning interactions work that further generate new meanings. For example, by combining religious meanings from different works, an overall denial or affirmation of religiosity as such can be achieved.

Connectivism proved to be a suitable method for analyzing artistic texts because, with the help of connectivist categories, it is possible to rationally accept, at least in part, simulations of reality provided by the authors, in the books of which, either metaphorically or by means of a transgressive transition, reality is transformed into the coexistence of various spheres of being.

Having used the principles of connectivist philosophy, the research into the perception of religious symbols in the inner world of characters in Slovak postmodern works showed how the authors represented the intense desire of man to return to the initial, "blissful" state of being, to a kind of stable core that is missing in today's world. Aware of these facts, the authors turn to the dark side of the supernatural, because they come from a Christian-oriented society, and considering the fact how much evil has been done in the world, it is difficult to believe that the good God could allow it, they resort to the version that speaks of the domination of the opposite being, namely Lucifer himself.

In addition, due to findings after analysing the texts, it can be concluded that Slovak postmodern literature works to a large extent with the designing of its own models of reality, in which the authors, in the process of creation, allow their story to freely organize and form interconnections between the material and transcendent spheres, thus providing readers with a unique view of the complex system of the world functioning. Finally, in the words of P. Vilikovský – "Boh je práve preto taký užitočný pojem, že si pod ním každý môže predstavovať, čo chce" ("God is such a useful concept that everyone can imagine what they want under it") (Vilikovský, 2014, p. 29).

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