

"I ams." Environmental Motifs in the Works of Georgi Gospodinov

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The Bulgarian writer Georgi Gospodinov has long transcended his status as one of the most acclaimed and remarkable voices in Bulgarian literature; he is now a truly European and global author. In 2023, he was awarded the International Booker Prize, and his work has been translated into 40 languages. This paper explores an intriguing paradox: environmental motifs are, in my view, omnipresent throughout Gospodinov's oeuvre, spanning his poetry, prose, and graphic novels alike. However, Gospodinov's work is predominantly examined through the lens of postmodern "faceted" narrative, dense intertextual references, and the motif of nostalgia.

This paper aims to shed light on the environmental dimensions of his writing and analyse the specific strategies he employs across his creative output, with a particular focus on the novels *The Physics of Sorrow* (2012) and *Death and the Gardener* (2024). *The Physics of Sorrow* tells the story of a man suffering from a fictional "obsessive somatic-empathic syndrome," or "pathological empathy." This empathy manifests as the narrator's ability to inhabit the minds of others and travel through their memories. Critically, this capacity is not limited to humans; it is deeply intertwined with the ability to enter the realm of animals and plants, whose narratives are treated with the same gravity as those of human characters. Human life itself is perceived as a complex, multifaceted identity—an existence of "I ams"—encompassing the fates of ancestors, unborn children, and non-human entities alike. The second novel, *Death and the Gardener*, represents an attempt to come to terms with the passing of the author's father. Here, mourning and the preservation of memory are intimately bound to the father's garden, raising profound questions about the profound interconnectedness of human lives and the natural world. By weaving together empathy, non-human perspectives, and the inseparability of human narratives from those of nature, Gospodinov establishes himself as a vital literary voice of the Anthropocene.

