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BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE: BOŽIDAR KNEŽEVIĆ AND HIS *THOUGHTS*

What secured Božidar Knežević, a Serbian philosopher from the end of the 19th century into the early years of the 20th century, a wider audience and a permanent place in the cultural memory of the nation, were not his extensive historiosophical studies, to which he dedicated most of his creative energy and ambition, but rather a later subsequent, from the standpoint of the author's intentions perhaps, even a subordinate book. Though he was indisputably a pioneer in the field of philosophy of history in our country, Knežević gained full recognition and reader response only with his *Misli* (Thoughts), which appeared in serial form in *The Serbian Literary Herald*, and later as a separate book (1902). It consists of textual fragments that border between philosophy and literature, whose genre or affiliation and predecessors are difficult to pinpoint. *Thoughts* cannot be compared to anything in earlier Serbian literature, and in the European context, these fragments are somewhat similar to the aphorisms of French moralists and Friedrich Nietzsche. According to the testimony of Knežević's daughter Milka,¹ the book was written at the incentive of philosopher Brana Petronijević, Knežević's fellow countryman (both are from Tamnava), to whom the latter once complained that his *Principles of History* was poorly received and read. "Petronijević replied that very few people in our country can understand these things, but to expand the circle of readers, he recommends that he take all his thoughts and observations from *Principles* and *Proportions* and publish them separately. This is how father's *Thoughts* came to be, which met with a wide response."²

¹ Milka Knežević, *Život mojih roditelja* (My Parents' Life) in: Božidar Knežević, *Beležnica* (The Notebook) (1986-1987), prepared by Aleksandra Vraneš, "Božidar Knežević" Public Library, Ub, 2002, pp. 77-94.

² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

According to this, *Thoughts* was written by extracting and reducing, probably also by additional formal editing of ideas from the author's already published philosophical works, as their so-to-speak distillate, the essence stripped of layers of more extensive argumentation and scientific apparatus. Regardless of whether it was as described in this testimony, or whether it was just another literary stylization of Knežević's complex life circumstances, *Thoughts* will remain his most important work. There was no time to write another, new work because at the beginning of 1905, at the age of 43, he died of pneumonia. In addition to *Thoughts* and the two-volume *Principles of History*, the works he published during his lifetime include several translations from the English language, a historical calendar for school use, and a Serbian-French dictionary.

The fact that Knežević achieved his greatest success with his least ambitious book is not the only oddity concerning the image we can acquire concerning this thinker, one of the few authentic speculative minds that our culture has produced—and it is not the only motif in his biography suitable for fictional processing and embellishment. That image, from a purely visual standpoint, is based on two or three short textual descriptions and one drawing. Božidar Knežević did not want to be photographed, so his *only* (or at least the only known) visual presentation was provided by Nikola Zega, a clerk from Čačak Grammar School, who found an opportune time to secretly draw Knežević's portrait. All of the subsequent portraits of Božidar Knežević are based on that hastily made sketch, and hence it can be said that we only know approximately what he looked like, which is almost incomprehensible for our era, overloaded with images.

Our knowledge about Knežević's life is just as unreliable. Biographical sketches about him are full of generalities, stereotypes, and unconfirmed or even incorrect claims—as recently shown by Boris Milosavljević in a well-substantiated text, correcting several erroneous data.³ We will arrive at a more or less reliable biography of Božidar Knežević only when we remove the veils of clichés and constructions that some interpreters had introduced and others uncritically adopted. This applies primarily to the story about Knežević's childhood and schooling, where we have stereotypes of an unjust stepfather and an orphan who supports himself by tutoring his schoolmates,⁴ but also to some very specific incorrect details—for example, that Knežević had so many difficulties with his superiors that he was even fired from his

³ Boris Milosavljević, "Božidar Knežević", in: Miloš Ković (prepared by), *Srbi 1903-1914: Istorija ideja*, CLIO, Belgrade, 2015, pp. 428-449.

⁴ For example, in the forward written by Ksenija Atanasijević in: Božidar Knežević, *Misli*, Srpska književna zadruga, Belgrade, 1931, p. VI.

job, or that, like Immanuel Kant, he never travelled (except, of course, moving for work). These false claims became so deep-rooted that it was even said on a television show that he had not travelled *even as far as Zemun*. And the actual truth? There was never a dismissal, and Knežević's estate contained notes from a trip to southeastern Serbia and the Kvarner Gulf (1897). Those notes were published in 2002. But even though his life story was not as gloomy as the attempts to weave a modern legend around Knežević's personality might suggest, it is nevertheless complex.

The stories that Božidar Knežević had a difficult childhood, that he was a neglected child and that he supported himself even during schooling, are not documented. The facts are that he lost his father at an early age, that his mother remarried, and that he grew up with his stepfather, but also that he was educated in the best (First Belgrade) gymnasium in Serbia at the time, which shows that his family cared about his education. It is also unlikely that he supported himself by tutoring the weaker students; at least not while studying at the Higher School. He enrolled in 1880, and after the first year of studies, he was accepted for a paying job as an intern, first at the State Printing Office, and soon after at the Ministry of Education.⁵ It is also a known fact that he often moved to the hinterlands switching gymnasiums (Užice, Niš, Čačak, Kragujevac, again Čačak, Šabac), but this happened more often at his request than at the behest of the school authorities. Even less reliable is the legend, which originates from Skerlić,⁶ that he learned foreign languages on his own; in fact, he studied German, French, and Latin at the Gymnasium and the Higher School, and only English on his own, by translating. Knežević was, by all accounts, a person about whom anecdotes were spun, one of those self-confident, lonely geniuses, who both despised their environment, made up of ordinary people, the masses, and yearned for it to recognize their greatness; a man of firm character and unwilling to conform to social conventions. After arriving in Užice at the end of 1884, he lived with a married woman (they did not marry until 1889) and had a child with her, which must have been scandalous for the citizens of Užice.

The days Knežević spends in the provincial towns are not unproductive. He reads a lot, translates (a translation of Buckle's *History of Civilization in England* appeared in four volumes between 1891–1893), and immerses himself in extensive historiosophical research (the first book of *Principles of History* entitled *Order in History*, was published in 1898, and the second, *Proportion in History*, in 1901). When he was

⁵ B. Milosavljević, "Božidar Knežević", p. 435.

⁶ Jovan Skerlić, *Istorija nove srpske književnosti*, Rad, Beograd, 1953, p. 419.

finally given a position at the King Aleksandar I (Obrenović) Gymnasium in Belgrade in 1902, Knežević was already well-known in the capital's cultural circles, partially for his *Principles of History*, but much more for his *Thoughts*, which was serialized in the *Serbian Literary Herald* in 1901 and accompanied by Skerlić's reviews. Almost overnight that work moved Božidar Knežević high up the ladder of Serbian literature and has kept him there until today.

Thoughts was published as a separate book in 1902.⁷ Its reception, and especially Skerlić's very positive review, reinforced the idea that Božidar Knežević was a creator who was neglected in the province for too long and unfairly and was not given the right opportunity to demonstrate and realize his outstanding skills. Skerlić repeated his views in a concise form less than three years later in an emotionally written obituary, adding a few more bitter notes to the evaluation of Knežević's overall activity in Serbian culture: "Knežević was a man who possessed considerable spiritual skills. He spent almost twenty years in the bleakness of the deprived hinterlands, fighting like the devil with debts, drafts, suspensions, injunctions, and lone sharks, unusually unadaptable to a life to which he remained a complete stranger, yet managed to work and create works of lasting value."⁸ Skerlić's overall opinion of *Thoughts* is important, and still acceptable today: "When *Thoughts* came out, the literary name of its writer was created. With this book, Knežević presented the best work of its kind in Serbian literature. In his *Thoughts*, one should not look for easily fabricated aphorisms, written according to a recipe or mold, witty paradoxes, skillfully arranged antitheses, and colorful definitions. Nor does it offer advice about practical moral philosophy, and a breviary for life, such as the old moralists gave. In addition to certain metaphysical speculations, in addition to traces of dry and abstract scientific terminology, he introduced a lot of his own, personal, autobiographical, almost lyrical. And the best and most powerful part of *Thoughts*, the thing that makes it so impressive, is its deeply intimate tone."⁹

Let us turn our attention to the questions that Skerlić hinted at, which touch on the most important things one could say about Knežević and his *Thoughts*: what specific type of work is *Thoughts*; what is the relationship between the *scientific* and the *personal*, the *abstract* and the *lyrical*; and can we conclude something based on this book about

⁷ The first edition of *Thoughts* (1902) was prepared by the author himself and it includes 491 fragments. The third edition (1925) includes 145 fragments from his manuscript legacy. In addition to the original 491, another 385 fragments from his legacy were published in the fourth edition (1931) (most of which overlap with the selection made in 1925).

⁸ Jovan Skerlić, *Boža Knežević*, *Sprski književni glasnik*, 14/5, 1905, p. 399.

⁹ *Ibid.*

the author's *metaphysical* views? The last question requires the most extensive answer, and that is why we will start with it.

If the book really originated or initially started, as a kind of distillate of the ideas extensively developed in the *Principles of History*, then it should be possible to reconstruct the basic structure of those ideas based on *Thoughts*. But, on the other hand, since it does not have the character of a complete text that would allow for a unique and consistent systematic exposition, since it is a variant of views in fragments, it is exposed to the risk of repetition and varying motifs, as well as the danger that views on certain subjects will differ in certain fragments, or even be irreconcilable. Thoughts given in fragments can endure the kind of inconsistency that makes systematic exposition fail. In *Thoughts* we will indeed find, in literary form, the core of Knežević's philosophy, but not his philosophy as a whole; we will find clearly illuminated details, but the whole will remain partly in the darkness. This in turn makes both the whole and the details more challenging and enigmatic.

In the most general sense, the philosophical position of Božidar Knežević is a form of evolutionism, a theoretical orientation, and a way of thinking widespread in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, except that his variant of evolutionism differs from the typical evolutionist theory, inspired and based on the measurable results of the empirical approach of natural science, because he deals primarily with the issues of human history and its development, trying to establish the general *principles of history* (as his two-volume¹⁰ historiosophical work is entitled). For Knežević, social history is an extension of biological development and is inherent exclusively in man.

Knežević presents a series of inspired, brilliantly written, unverifiable observations about human history, civilization, and morality. However, according to his primary system of thought, he was a metaphysician, not a positivist.¹¹ His trust in science is limited because although science arrives at the truth, it is not the highest form of activity of the human spirit, but "only one transitional phase in the history of the human mind, just as law and harmony are only one transitory phase in the process of the universe" (II, 47);¹² higher forms than

¹⁰ The first book of *The Principles*, under the title *Red u istoriji* (Order in History) was published in 1898, and the second, *Proportion in History* (*Proporcija u istoriji*) in 1901.

¹¹ Dragan M. Jeremić thinks differently. He states that Knežević's philosophy "represents the highest pinnacle of Serbian positivism", D. M. Jeremić, "Božidar Knežević", in: Božidar Knežević, *Čovek i istorija* (*Man and History*), Srpska književnost u 100 knjiga, knj. 42, Matica srpska and Srpska književna zadruga, Novi Sad / Belgrade, 1972, p. 38.

¹² The citations are marked according to the new edition of *Thoughts* in: *Božidar Knežević*, (prepared by S. Radojčić), Novi Sad: IC Matice srpske, 2018.

science are, in different ways, philosophy (I, 373) and religion (I, 232). Just as he ranks forms of spiritual activity, Knežević also ranks the truth, not considering it to be necessarily separate from fallacy: every fallacy is “just one phase of the truth; every fallacy is truth for its time and fallacy for other times; every truth is proportional to its place and its time, and it is only true if it is proportional to its place and its time” (I, 421); fallacy is understood as “truth of a lower order” (I, 487). This relativism in understanding the relationship between fallacy and truth is more consistent with the evolutionist postulate than a position that would strictly separate truth from fallacy and assert that absolute truth is possible. On the other hand, in *Thoughts* one can find fragments that seem to speak precisely in favor of this possibility: “Truth is only one, like the cosmos, and there can only be one truth, the highest, just as a circle has only one center” (I, 287). The idea of only one truth’s existence contradicts the idea of truth’s relativity. Such dilemmas are resolved in two ways—either by further analysis of the concept in question (the concept of truth) or by abandoning the requirement for strict consistency, which in this case is the better option. Contradictions and inconsistencies that we observe in *Thoughts* are most likely side effects of its text’s fragmentary and concise structure, and it is not necessary to remove them at all costs during interpretation. On the contrary, the inconsistency and discrepancy between individual fragments preserve the flavor of the living thought, which is always a kind of internal dialogue of different ideas and always transcends itself.

Although, in essence, Knežević follows in the footsteps of Spencer and Darwin, there are fragments in *Thoughts* that are close to different orientations in philosophy. In terms of style and, more importantly, the basis for their reasoning, Knežević’s cosmological fragments are more like the metaphorical way of speaking of the Greek Pre-Socratics than that of modern physics: “The universe is one big ball of the same yarn, which branches into more and more threads as it gets closer to the end. The closer it is to the beginning, the more it is one” (I, 3); or “Just as the number of times the earth circles the sun is set, so are set the number and measure of everything on and in it” (I, 306).

The following fragment is recognizably Kantian in tone: “True morality is only in the actions a person does independent of external nature, external influences and incentives, without fear of external averseness, punishment and misfortune, regardless of the benefit to them or their interests. Morality is freedom from all those external considerations and forces; morality is freedom from the must and can, morality is in the *should*” (I, 79). These words could be used to explain Kant’s categorical imperative! That the emphasis on the morally decisive, imperative *should* is not an idea restricted to *Thoughts*, is shown

by somewhat more widely developed examinations of the reasons why people are honest (I, 274). According to Knežević, the majority is comprised of those who *must* be, in fear of punishment from God or the laws of man. The second most numerous are those who are honest out of *self-interest*, expecting that right conduct will gain them honor or some other benefit. The least numerous are those who are truly moral: “everything they do or don’t do, they do and don’t do because they are convinced that this is what they *should* or *shouldn’t* do; they do good because they want to and don’t do evil because they don’t want to, even though they can, regardless of the external pressure that is driving them to do it.” This same idea is formulated in other places, for example: “A man with character is only he who does everything that must make him what and the way he is convinced that he should be, basing everything he does and how he does it on the *should* principle. Raising *must* to *should*, the character reconciles both—*it should be; therefore it must be*. All other moments and motives—fear, self-interest, vanity, hatred, love, anger, envy, pity, mercy, kindness, hunger, trouble, worry—are excluded by character, it has nothing to do with them. Therefore, true character is just as rare and momentary as everything else noble in man” (I, 480; see also II, 351 and II, 352). Therefore, the source of morality is autonomous, and moral requirements are rigorous.

Along with the already mentioned fragment about the relationship between truth and fallacy (I, 421), the following statement also resembles the (Hegelian) dialectic: “The final stage of development of particularity: is for it to disappear into something more general than itself” (I, 13).

The following sentences found in a fragment from the legacy are interesting concerning Knežević’s relatedness to the history of European thought: “The universe is one great thought written by a sublime mind. Just as a person writes a complete thought in his head word by word, so do certain moments in the creation of the universe represent certain words with which the thought of the universe is written. That thought is not yet complete,” (II, 11). It is a variant of the metaphor of the world as a book written by the finger of God, which, as far we know, was first recorded in the twelfth century by the scholastic theologian Hugh of St. Victor, and repeated by a whole series of thinkers and writers, from Allen of Lille and St. Bonaventure to Borges and Umberto Eco.

The similarity with Nietzsche, although apparent at first glance when it comes to the “lower” and “higher” man, is only external, and terminological. Knežević’s “higher” man does not aspire to *revalue all the values*, which are the basis of human coexistence; instead, he is a moral example according to which social values have yet to be established. While Nietzsche’s “Overman” embodies the affirmation of life and unfettered life forces, despite all rational limitations, Knežević’s

“higher” man uses reason to rise above life: “the highest form of the general process, thinking, can develop only at the expense of life. The more life and the more exuberant it is, the less thinking and consciousness” (I, 15). With Knežević, the concept of life is formed from a characteristic evolutionary and historical perspective; thus, he sees the progress of civilization as a growing rationalization of life potentials, as their sublimation, and only superficially and impermanently: “civilization is only the thin polish of a thin outer, cooled crust of the soul; beneath that polish, in the depths of every man’s soul, there is a seething liquid mass of animal desires and feelings, passions and affects, which at the slightest tremor break through that outer, polished crust, which happens in revolutions and wars and social upheavals” (I, 236; very similar, with the same metaphors: II, 148). The human community is constantly in danger of returning to the wild, animal state, in which only the “lower” man can live, while the nobler and “higher” man perishes.

Whether and to what extent Knežević’s position is in some aspects close to Protestantism¹³ is a matter of discussion. Based on his critical observations about cults and ceremonies, he did not request that they be rejected, because cults and ceremonies are needed by the unenlightened masses: “Ceremonies are diapers in which the childish greatness and childish sanctity of man are wrapped. Man’s mature greatness and his mature sanctity need a different garment,” (I, 277). Knežević is a theist who believes that Christianity is historically the best, but not the perfect expression of man’s religiousness. Hence, it is rash to tie it to any specific confessional framework.

There is something both original and naïve in Knežević’s understanding of religiousness. His statements about religion as the basic form of human spirituality, from which the derived forms of art, philosophy, and science arose and to which they will one day return, are intertwined with witty, but purely formal arguments from the repertoire of rational proofs of the existence of God that have been rejected long ago by European philosophy, for example: “Precisely because the world is a mechanism proves that there is some deep primordial spirit in the world that arranges and determines everything,” (II, 6); “There is only one God, everything else is, more or less, numerous. And since everything

¹³ Skerlić compares Knežević’s attitude towards religion to Protestantism (Jovan Skerlić, *Misli od Bože Kneževića*”, *Srpski književni glasnik* 6/5, 1902, pp. 1016-1027). In the text, fragment I, 174 points to such a connection: “Honest work is also a prayer to God and a sufficient prayer at that. An increasingly mature mind throws out all empty words and ceremonies from religion and reduces all worship of God to honest work.” But the question remains: Does this consecration of work originate in Protestantism, the Enlightenment, or Knežević’s rigorous ethics?

else, of a kind, can vary in quantity, it doesn't have to be. Therefore, only God must be; everything else can both be and not be," (I, 229). In the first argument, the hidden subtext consists of Aristotle's *prime mover* and Leibniz's *divine clockmaker*, the only difference being that once they set the world in motion, they withdraw from it devoid of any further concern (because the world functions perfectly), while Knežević's *primordial spirit* remains in the world and constantly regulates it (because the mechanism of the world seems to be subject to breakdowns). The second argument is simply a mistake in logic because the assumption of the uniqueness of something does not imply the necessity of its existence.

Much more valuable than those "proofs" are Knežević's observations about God and religion, which he acquired by observing the human soul, observations most often formulated in gnomic language and with the use of stylistic devices that belong more to *belles lettres* than to the usual tools of philosophy. He considers the idea of God essential to man: "The more sublime the spirit, the more it needs God, a more and more sublime God, and more and more only one God," (I, 248)—the origin of that idea is not reason, but rather it originated "from the depths of the human soul," (I, 262). Therefore, the idea of God is not only essential but also very close to man. This is exactly why, for Knežević, religious rituals and ceremonies are less valuable than the immediate relationship that a person can establish with transcendence. "The best, deepest and most sincere way of believing in God is in silence," our thinker will say at one point (II, 29). Here, Knežević is nearing the viewpoint of so-called apophatic or negative theology and, no doubt, he will be speaking from this viewpoint when, in describing man's search for a name for the basic principle of the world, he says it would best to call that "primordial spirit—something that can never be expressed in human language—God," (II, 53). Only man can come to the idea of God, and that is why he is the only one who has religion, although animals also possess some form of faith (I, 359) because faith is the result of sensory experiences, inheritances of the soul.

Therefore, Knežević distinguishes between soul and spirit; animals also possess a soul, but only humans have the spirit and only some of them at that. The soul is natural, and the spirit a cultural (historical) category: "the soul is passed on from parent to child; the spirit is carried over and inherited only through history; the soul is the legacy of the entire human race and is inherited by the entire race, all people; the spirit and the mind are the legacy of only some glorious individuals," (I, 442). Those prominent individuals create history. In addition to emphasizing the importance of the individual or genius in forming world history, Knežević sometimes talks about humanity as the true actor

of that history. States, nations, and tribes are only seemingly the bearers of historical events, but in fact, it is *man* at different historical stages (I, 487). A history that can be covered by principles and laws, is “the life of mankind,” (II, 159).

In this way, Knežević shifts the focus of his considerations from the history of political events to the history of society, which was a very modern idea that had not met with an active response from Serbian historiography—which should not be surprising since this idea appeared too early, when historians still considered their task to be critical research of the material, and when establishing the facts was more important to them than delving into theories like Knežević’s, which adheres to the height of general principles. On the other hand, by not descending to the supposedly solid ground of data, it was easier for Knežević to combine into a whole the theory of “lower” and “higher” man and his moralistic views and ideas about humanity with the ideas of humanity as a historical subject and society as a stage. Thus, he sees the formation and progress of society as primarily moral problems, and “higher” people as agents of moral, and thus socially correct behavior (I, 402).

It is interesting that Knežević generally did not include his more direct political thoughts in the edition he prepared during his lifetime, and that his more concrete statements about the constitutional order and the government are found mostly in fragments within his legacy. He most likely wanted to avoid possible politically motivated discussions, which would distract the audience from more important topics. That is why the interestingly addressed issues regarding the false state of affairs in society (II, 233), the demand for aristocracy as a form of state organization (II, 207), as well as the problems of the ruler’s personal morality, were left for another time, which Knežević did not live to see (II, 260: “The more the crown shines, the greater the darkness around the people. For the people to be illuminated, it is enough for the crown to be unsoiled”).

One might be surprised that a reserved thinker, who is regarded as peculiar, should show such a lively interest in matters of society and morality. Nevertheless, Knežević approached these issues not only based on his contemplations but, above all, based on his experiences. Many of his fragments on moralistic themes emit a note of bitterness, mostly because they include something individual, something personal. It is difficult not to assume that, when he writes about the unfortunate fate of the “higher” man in the world as it is today, Knežević is not also thinking of his own fate. The fact that Knežević’s *Thoughts* draws the interest of the reader, both hundreds of years ago as well as today, lies precisely in the interweaving of personal experience with theoretical speculation. On a theoretical level, Knežević can be criticized for relying

on an unproved assumption concerning the necessary morality of the “higher” man, as well as for not talking about how that morality would be installed as a real social value and, in this sense, his ethics is utopian. He clearly shows us what *should* be, but not how it *can be* in a real, historically existing human society. But in the matter of introducing a personal note to theorizing, all remarks are superfluous, because then it is no longer a scientific or methodological issue, but a matter of an individual creative profile.

This points to one of the sources of the personal and lyrical in *Thoughts*. Another source is in their stylistic treatment. In many cases, Knežević’s fragments clearly belong to fine literature, rather than varieties of scientific or philosophical speech. Such, for example, are the statements: “The enormous book that time is writing is the biography of God” (I, 20), “Man is something that every so often even makes God happy, and frequently even makes the devil feel shame” (I, 164), “They say that everyone is a blacksmith of their own happiness. It’s just that fate gives some both a hammer and almost red-hot iron, while others have to forge it without any heat, and often with a bare fist” (I, 204), or “A cradle is the dawn of a grave night,” (II, 160). Such literary forms are very densely distributed throughout *Thoughts*, to such a degree that reviews stating that these fragments *also* fall under fine literature are not only undisputable but also impose the assessment that they *predominantly* belong to it.

It is true that among Knežević’s fragments there are many defining statements, but they are not definitions, but a kind of extended metaphor: “Duty is like wormwood, whose bitterness chases away the staleness of boredom, and soothes the bitterness of despair with its honey,” (I, 186), or “A dogma is an embalmed thought, dead but in one piece, alive but disabled, soulless but full of strength,” (II, 33). Knežević sometimes achieves excellent effects by playing with his pseudo-definitions—“height is distance” (I, 44), “distance is height” (I, 488). Statements of this type, which are essentially figurative, have the composition of apodictic judgments. This is a technique often used by poets as well, in texts that we unhesitatingly classify as lyric poetry. However, we should not go too far with this line of thinking, because it is quite certain that in *Thoughts* Knežević’s primary intention was not to achieve aesthetic effects, but rather to communicate his knowledge. But even then, he must have been aware of his use of figurative language.

This was a decision of profound significance for the fate of his work. Today, Knežević’s philosophy, both in *Principles of History* and in *Thoughts*, is at best a subject of historical interest, and despite its ground-breaking qualities, it will hardly serve as a starting point for some new philosophical reflections on the phenomenon of history or

its principles. The literary aspect of *Thoughts*, however, has not lost its value; on the contrary, Knežević's witty, well-formed fragments are still part of the Serbian literary canon today, and attract each new generation of readers. It is very like that each succeeding generation reads and sees something different in this work than the previous one; the value of *Thoughts* also lies in the fact that it provides a textual base for various reading experiences. Today, when we talk so much about non-linear writing and reading, about the experience of reading that freely dives into the text, the existence of pioneers such as Knežević's fragments, which must be read discontinuously and by forming countless associative connections within the text and outside it, reminds us that in our daring theoretical constructions we are not as innovative as we would like and that everything we want can be done much more naturally. For, Božidar Knežević's *Thoughts* is essentially exactly what its title suggests—the opinion of an individual with high speculative powers, free of the constraints of professional conventions and methodological obligations, only thoughts and their flow, unsystematic, unrestrained. Just think: nothing more and nothing less.

Translated from Serbian by
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