

A Glimpse into an Interrupted Conversation: An Unpublished Letter from Tzvetan Todorov to Nikola Georgiev

Abstract

The text aims to provide a broader context for understanding a letter from Tzvetan Todorov to Nikola Georgiev, as well as to shed some light on the dialogue between them: initially direct, later – indirect and in absentia.

Keywords

Tzvetan Todorov (1939–2017), Nikola Georgiev (1937–2019), dialogue, de-Stalinization, cybernetics, structuralism, literary studies

The Archive

Tzvetan Todorov's letter dated February 4, 1964 is part of the Archive of Prof. Nikola Georgiev, donated by the latter the New Bulgarian University on February 25, 2019. The archive contains biographical documents, materials from his teaching, academic and research activities, and illustrative materials.¹ The letter occupies a special place in this archive, as it was specially preserved by Nikola Georgiev's wife, Vesela Grueva, and handed over as a particularly important part of the archive. The only preserved letter. Were there others before and after it? Are the replies of Nikola Georgiev preserved in the archive of Tzvetan Todorov in Paris, handed over after his death to the National Center for Scientific Research by his daughter Lea? For now, there is no answer. And from Tzvetan Todorov's letter, we can judge that Nikola Georgiev was no less detailed in his correspondence with Tzvetan Todorov.

¹ University Archives of the New Bulgarian University (UA–NBU), f. 22 (personal collection “Prof. Nikola Georgiev” – unprocessed). See the website of this collection at <https://uniarchive.nbu.bg/bg/lichni-fondove/prof-nikola-georgiev>

The Time

We decided to publish this letter because we find it an unexpectedly good testimony to a period of time in which nothing significant happened – the end of 1963 and the beginning of 1964. There are no events, there are signs of life normalising. The thaw in the Eastern Bloc has already happened, the April Plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (1956) has already taken place, the Soviet tanks have already entered Budapest, but the Prague Spring and the May events in Paris are yet to come.

We highlight the April Plenum and the processes of de-Stalinization as a time when Tzvetan Todorov and Nikola Georgiev were fellow students at Sofia University (1956–1961); the Prague Spring, insofar as Nikola Georgiev headed a Bulgarian language lectorate at Charles University, but left after the winter semester of 1967, just when the liberalization process began there, which brought the Warsaw Pact troops; Todorov witnessed the Parisian May events, but did not participate in them and did not approve of them.

The end of 1963 and the beginning of 1964 were a kind of interlude in their personal development: in April 1963, Todorov left for Paris, financially supported for a year by his aunt who was living in Canada, attracted more by the cultural aspect of the city than by its scientific achievements. He struggled at first, with his poor French and inadequate contacts, until he encountered Gérard Genette², who took him to Roland Barthes' seminar on fashion at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS). Only at the end of 1964 and the beginning of 1965 would Todorov feel somewhat accepted: Philippe Sollers would publish a selection of texts by Russian formalists under the title *Théorie de la littérature* and he would receive his first contract with *Éditions du Seuil*³. Even then he would not feel completely

² Gérard Genette (1930–2018) was a French literary theorist, associated in particular with the structuralist movement, known for his work in narratology, particularly his analysis of narrative structure and the relationship between texts. He is recognized for his key contributions to structuralism and his detailed exploration of concepts like "paratexts", "hypotexts", and "palimpsests". See Prince (2020).

³ In 1965, Philippe Sollers, a central figure in the *Tel Quel* movement, was developing his theory of literature, which emphasized the practice of writing as a process of transgression and experimentation. This period saw Sollers's work, particularly his novel *Event (Drame)* and his writings in *Tel Quel*, explore the limits of language and challenge traditional literary conventions. The core of Sollers's theory involved a move away from literature's perceived ideological constraints towards a more scientific approach to textual analysis and production. See Champagne (1996), Dumont (2020).

at home – he would ask some of his beautiful colleagues to edit his texts; and in Barthes’ mini-seminar he would stiffen up, so as not to embarrass himself. The letter still discusses the possibility of a return, but in practice this goes no further: the return did not happen until 1981. Todorov would find his place as an internationally recognized French intellectual and weaken his ties with the circle of Miroslav Yanakiev, Tsanko Mladenov, Nikola Georgiev and Radosvet Kolarov.

While Todorov was looking for the right environment, topics and grand theory, Nikola Georgiev was supposed to go on assignment as a teacher in the village of Musomishte, where, however, he did not go. Administrative problems ensued, about which Nikola Georgiev did not like to talk much. Regarding this, his wife today claims that he always behaved anarchistically – “I have impractical political views” (important books in his library are Kropotkin’s *Ethics*, books by Bakunin and Proudhon). These problems seemed to end when he was elected assistant professor in literary studies in 1962 – a competitive selection as an assistant or graduate student would cancel administrative assignment duties at the time. Thus, Nikola Georgiev remained in his totalitarian world, in his academic environment, in the midst of which he was still searching for the grand theory, the true literary science. It seems that the long letter that Tzvetan Todorov is talking about, and which we have not yet found, was seeking such authorities, authors, titles, ideas that would compensate for the scarcity in Bulgarian libraries and the principled closedness of Bulgarian scientific and public life.

The Topics

We have a single letter, but one with such important topics. Starting with the observation that structuralism was not yet popular in 1964 France, and that the semiotician Roland Barthes “killed it with philosophizing and talk.” For Tzvetan Todorov, as well as for Nikola Georgiev, the most important task at this moment was to move away from literary essayism and to seek grounds for a true literary science that has nothing to do with idiosyncratic intuitions.

The letter is important not only as evidence of the most significant conflict in Bulgarian and European humanities in the 1960s, but also as a self-portrait of the two most significant Bulgarian literary scholars

of the era. Nikola Georgiev, the addressee of the letter, was then 27, and the addressee Tzvetan Todorov was 25. Two colossuses in the time of great rapture.

In his letter, Tzvetan Todorov referred to Donald McKay⁴, Claude Shannon⁵ and the very current “information theory” in the early 1960s. This was the time of the scientific war between the camps of the so-called “physicists” and the so-called “lyricists” in the humanities of the Soviet Union and the entire socialist camp. Claude Shannon’s “information theory”, launched with his 1948 article “A Mathematical Theory of Communication” (Shannon 1948), is not at all related to literary theory, but literary critics who are part of the so-called structuralism are inspired by it and cite it as one of the manifesto texts of their movement. One of the proponents of Shannon’s theory is Roman Jakobson, whose 1960s concept of the functions of language⁶, although developing ideas mainly from Karl Bühler, starts precisely from Shannon’s focus on the effective transmission of information, who talks about the peculiarities of the channel – about the noise in the channel and its place in literary texts (Innis 2013). And because for Shannon the transmission of information is the reduction of uncertainty, genre and narrative structures in literary prose, for example, can be well explained via mathematical analysis. Style, too, can be linked to “information theory”. Incompleteness in the narrative, allusions, any of the rhetorical figures that “obscure” meaning can be linked to what Shannon defines as “information noise”. The concept of noise can also be applied to how readers interpret ambiguous passages or how the cultural context acts as “noise” that affects understanding.

Tzvetan Todorov recommended to his colleague who had remained in Bulgaria Donald Mackay’s article “The informational analysis of questions and commands” (MacKay 1961). However, Todorov confused

⁴ Donald MacKay (1922–1987) was a British physicist who made important contributions to cybernetics and the question of “meaning” in information theory. See MacKay (1953, 1962, 1969).

⁵ Claude Elwood Shannon (1916–2001) was an American mathematician, electrical engineer, computer scientist, cryptographer and inventor. His *information theory* is a mathematical theory focused on quantifying and managing information, particularly in the context of communication. It provides a framework for understanding how to encode, transmit, and decode information efficiently, especially over noisy channels. Shannon’s work laid the foundation for modern digital communication and computer science. See Chambert-Loir (2023).

⁶ In 1960, Roman Jakobson presented his influential essay, *Linguistics and Poetics*, which explored the relationship between linguistics and the study of literature, particularly poetry. He argued that poetics is a branch of linguistics, and that the poetic function of language is what distinguishes poetry from other uses of language. This function, according to Jakobson, involves the projection of the principle of equivalence from the selection of linguistic units into the combination of those units, creating patterns and structures that draw attention to the language itself (Jakobson and Sebeok 1960).

the year of publication of the collection with the article – it was not 1962, but 1961; the symposium itself was held in 1960. This is evident from MacKay’s complete bibliography, prepared by Marvin McDonald (McDonald 1994). And here it is worth recalling that Roman Jakobson participated in the eighth Macy conference on cybernetics in 1951⁷ and in several symposia in London, and he again encouraged Mackay to publish a collection of his essays on the topic “Information and Meaning”, published between 1950 and 1960. The eighth Mackay conference also focused on the concept of language. MacKay’s views on information differ from Shannon’s, as they attempt to include “meaning” (a debate was taking place at the conference about whether meaning is an integral part of “information,” as the term was used at the time). But MacKay was also the one who devotes important pages to the problem of time perception and linguistic expression (MacKay 1969).

But how important are the reflections that Todorov shared about the necessity of the concept of “style,” even though it is “indefensible from a literary point of view,” and how are statistical methods applicable “only in the history of literature, but not in the analysis of the individual work,” even though the possibility of analyzing literature with precise methods was precisely their common dream. They were part of the social circle formed around Miroslav Yanakiev and had already read his monograph “Bulgarian Versification” and deemed it a significant achievement in the quest of truly learned literary scholars (Yanakiev 1960). “I still hold on to the name ‘stylistics’ for ‘strategic’ reasons,” Todorov wrote. And he informed his colleague that he had analyzed a poem by Debelyanov and had already sent his article to the journal “Language and Literature.” “Perhaps you will find it interesting, although you will not discover anything new, and I am a little ashamed of the superficiality I am showing there.” The article was published without delay in the second edition of the magazine for 1964 under the title “Stylist Analysis of ‘Orphan Song’ by Dimcho Debelyanov” and is signed, like all of Tzvetan Todorov’s texts from this

⁷ The *Macy conferences* were a set of meetings of scholars from various academic disciplines held in New York under the direction of Frank Fremont-Smith at the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation starting in 1941 and ending in 1960. The explicit aim of the conferences was to promote meaningful communication across scientific disciplines, and restore unity to science. There were different sets of conferences designed to cover specific topics, for a total of 160 conferences over the 19 years this program was active; the phrase “Macy conference” does not apply only to those on cybernetics, although it is sometimes used that way informally by those familiar only with that set of events: Eighth Cybernetics Conference, 15–16 March 1951.

period: Tzvetan Borov. This was his last publication before his final emigration to France.

In the letter, Tzvetan Todorov mentioned Nikola Georgiev's firm conviction that "a sharp distinction between linguistic and "literary" information cannot be made". How significant is even just this! Because both of them, but Nikola Georgiev more so, are convinced that there is no exceptional and specific "artistic" language, but only techniques, ways of use and social situations of the use of the common language. Years later, in interviews, Nikola Georgiev defines himself precisely as a "linguist".

The reference to Eduard Sievers clearly shows us that the two of them – Todorov and Georgiev – reason mainly in the categories set by OPOYAZ – the Society for the Study of Poetic Language. As early as 1917, Vladimir Shklovsky and Osip Brik discussed the theses of the young grammarian Sievers, related to the ideas of the so-called Ohrenphilologie, that is, the philological study of poetry, based on the idea that the poem has its main variant in its oral performance. Shklovsky wrote: "Sievers' experiments in voicing this or that poetic text led to the establishment of an average type of melody of a given poem during its mass repeated reproduction" (Shklovsky 1917, 93). Tzvetan Todorov and Nikola Georgiev were then inclined to accept the idea of the priority of its oral performance, but they were concerned about the problem that the author of a text certainly does not perform it in the way the average static reader would perform it. And yet, the use of experiment and statistics to study oral performance seems to them to be an acceptable scientific method.

And here enter René Wellek and Thomas Sebeok. Wellek, whose name remains inviolable for Nikola Georgiev until the end of his days and whose textbook *Introduction to Literary Theory*, written together with Austin Warren (1949), was the first of the titles on the list of required reading for all his students at Sofia University. And then Sebeok, the great guardian of the sacred fire of semiotics.

Tzvetan Todorov wrote as if addressing his closest friend. Another person would probably write about museums or palaces, gardens and statues, but he talked about articles and book he'd just read. Here, we learn that he had just become acquainted with the later famous analysis of Baudelaire's "Cats", published under the joint signature of Claude Levi-Strauss and Roman Jakobson. The original publication of the article "Charles Baudelaire's *Cats*" was carried out in the first edition (January-April) of the magazine *L'Homme* for 1962 (Jakobson and

Lévi-Strauss 1962), its Russian translation saw the light of day only in the collection *Structuralism: “for” and “against”* (1975). We learn that he had read *Structural Anthropology* by Lévi-Strauss (1958). We see how he mentioned *Studies on Human Time* by Georges Poulet (1949), about whom in Bulgarian humanities soon after only Nikola Georgiev would write. Today we would call this friendly advice. At the end of the letter there are short lists on the topics “theory of lyric poetry” and “verb tense”, which Tzvetan was ready to buy, but barely had the money to do so.

But the most important thing in the letter is the clarification that in February 1964 Tzvetan Todorov still intended to return and again stand alongside his colleague and friend, as well as Miroslav Yanakiev and Tsanko Mladenov, in the struggle for a new truly scientific literary study. Two years later, the collection of texts selected by him by the Russian formalists, *Théorie de la littérature, textes des formalistes russes* (1966), would be published – the book that would bring him the necessary prestige and forever open for him the doors of French academic circles. More than thirty years later, Nikola Georgiev would write in his article “A Respectful Manipulator of Heine in Bulgaria”:

“In 1965, Tzvetan Todorov, who was already living in Paris, published works of the Russian formalist school with his own preface and in his own translation – the first opportunity for the French to see in their own language a representative image of one of the most wonderful phenomena of literary studies in the 20th century”.

In the following years, Todorov and Julia Kristeva published works in France, an important theme in which was Russian literature, Russian literary studies and, above all, Mikhail Bakhtin. But he recalls these circumstances in the context of the bitter observation:

“For understandable, albeit not very pleasant reasons, Bulgarians around the world find it difficult to write about Bulgarian literature (and, let’s face it, they make little effort to overcome this difficulty). Look, if it’s about Russian literature, there is someone to publish and read them, especially since people around the world are interested in Russian literature from a non-Russian perspective” (Georgiev 2000, 102).

There were numerous covert dialogues between the two in the years after their separation, caused by Tzvetan Todorov's settling in Paris. One of them lies in the article that Nikola Georgiev submitted for the collection in honor of Todor Borov, Tzvetan Todorov's father. It comments on various problems of genreology and, most importantly, how fiction uses genres such as the letter and the diary. But an important part of it is occupied by an apology for the culture of letters and sadness for the times when treatises were written in the form of letters. The article begins like this: "In 1903, a poet began a letter to his beloved with the words: 'Although I will see you tomorrow evening, something tender compels me to send you a final greeting from the Balkan solitude.'" (Georgiev 1984, 100). In his book *Eros of the Impossible. History of Psychoanalysis in Russia*, Alexander Etkind offers his version of the concept of dialogism, which occupies such a central place in Mikhail Bakhtin's scientific work. According to him, throughout his life after the October Revolution, Mikhail Bakhtin conducted secret dialogues with his one-year-old brother Nikolai, who, after the defeat of the White Army, enlisted in the Foreign Legion, defended a dissertation in classical philology at Cambridge University, and established himself as a lecturer at Birmingham University. Ergo, Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, besides echoing Freudianism, was also an expression of his sadness over the conversations with his brother: "Probably, communication with his brother had that interrogative, provocative, and objectionable character that became for Mikhail Bakhtin a model of true dialogue" (Etkind 1993, 314). And when Tzvetan Todorov was invited to participate in a collection dedicated to Nikola Georgiev, he provided an article that focused on the unfulfilled meeting between Roman Jakobson and Mikhail Bakhtin (Todorov 1997).

We can reasonably assume that although the communication between Nikola Georgiev and Tzvetan Todorov was interrupted, they continued talking through the topics that excited the both of them, sometimes emerging in the reflections of each of them on possible and impossible meetings.

The Unclear Moments

As a whole, the letter seems relatively transparent to the modern specialized audience. The only unclear moment is related to the

following passage: “With deep (!) interest I also read what you write to me about the everyday side of literary problems in our country. The story with Markov is encouraging.” Here, there are at least two possible interpretations. The first is that it is about Georgi Markov, a literary critic and historian (1927–1987), who was an assistant professor in literary theory during the studies (as well as during the writing of the letter) of Tzvetan Todorov and Nikola Georgiev and who was one of the faces of literary studies against which they resisted. The second is that it could be the writer and later dissident Georgi Markov (1929–1978), murdered in London: a case better known as the “Bulgarian Umbrella” affair. In 1962, his novel *Men* was published – a work made according to the cliché of dogma, but with characters with human faces and speech, which brought him immediate recognition. In 1963, the novel got a second, supplemented edition, and its author was accepted as a member of the Union of Bulgarian Writers, skipping the mandatory position of candidate member. Research revealed that Nikola Georgiev did not maintain any ties with the writer Georgi Markov, but was forced to work with a critic of the same name. Officially, the Department of Literary Theory was headed by the nomenklatura Pantelei Zarev, who later became the scientific supervisor of Nikola Georgiev’s dissertation (whose defense he did not attend and tried to sabotage), but in reality it was operationally managed by the critic and literary historian Georgi Markov, to whom Nikola Georgiev was actually an assistant.

Moreover, throughout his entire career, Nikola Georgiev wrote about only three living contemporary Bulgarian authors, and the writer Georgi Markov was not among them. In addition, there is something very atypical: Nikola Georgiev always refrained from commenting on the “everyday life side” of literary life. As his wife claims, even in conversations between them he discouraged her from discussing life topics outside the text of the literary work: “what do you know about the life and personality of Marguerite Yourcenar”.

Another fragment for which we lack context is the following: “It is not clear to me whose ‘secret marriage’ among our friends you are hinting at.” We will have to accept that it remains unclear to both Todorov as well as us and our readers.

Finally, a semi-clear fragment from the end of Todorov’s letter: “I am waiting for your cousin Ginka on Monday at the Gare de Lyon – how it will go – I do not know.” This was certainly Ginka Asenova, Nikola Georgiev’s cousin, with whom he maintained regular relations,

and who subsequently married Alexander Fol, the future Minister of Public Education. Georgiev and Fol maintained ties of some sort (the family called him Sasho Fol) until the latter's appointment as First Deputy Minister of the Committee for Art and Culture, headed by the daughter of the dictator Todor Zhivkov.

Meanwhile

Finally, let's get back to the main point: the relationship between Tzvetan Todorov and Nikola Georgiev developed over time: from very close friends and university colleagues, through like-minded people separated by the Iron Curtain, but seeking the grand theory together, to being separated, both physically and theoretically. The indirect communication between them would continue through hidden dialogues that were not at all symmetrical. The distancing was largely because of Todorov, who clearly stated in the letter that of the entire academic environment in Sofia, "I actually want to establish the closest cooperation with you – I don't know if you approve of me ...". However, as his integration into the Parisian intellectual and scientific circles progressed, he never, on any occasion, quoted, commented, or referred to his Sofia friend and like-minded person. However, this would happen beyond the space of this letter and outside the period that interests us: from the entry of Soviet tanks into Budapest, to the Warsaw Pact troops in Czechoslovakia. Here we are still in a phase of wonderful closeness, brought out at the beginning of the text. "Your letter pleased me for two reasons: one, because it evokes in me memories of the past, which, purified by time and distance, seem delightful to me, and another – because you tell me about things that I think about all day long but very rarely talk about." Past conversations have left their imprints on the both of them, echoing, continuing, fading away. The new ones have not yet truly begun. A true life-long interlude.

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Appendix

Unpublished Letter from Tzvetan Todorov (Paris) to Nikola Georgiev (Sofia)

Paris, February 4, 1964

This letter was written by Todorov in reply to Nikola Georgiev's previous "long" letter that is yet to be found. It elaborates on Todorov's life in Paris, his linguistic endeavors and first impressions of the academic milieu in France. The letter's manuscript has been transcribed and digitized by Ivan Zvancharov. All footnotes here are written by Yordan Eftimov and Vasil Garnizov. The images of the letter's folia are published below, on pp. 48–51, courtesy of the University Archives of the New Bulgarian University.

Kolyo!

Your letter made me happy and I am sitting down to write to you right away but I don't know when I will send it because I have been penniless for a week, and if it weren't for a merciful (French) soul, I would probably lie under the duvet all day and curse Paris. But I believe that this is a temporary (in the sense of everyday experiences) phenomenon, and it shall pass.

Also, your letter made me happy for two reasons: first, because it evokes in me memories of the past, which, purified by time and distance, seem delightful to me, and second, because you are telling me about things that I think about all day long, but very rarely talk about. "Structuralism in literary research," as such activities are called here – I don't know if that's a good enough reason – is not popular in France. With difficulty I found an assistant professor of literature who had heard of the Russian formalists, but he immediately told me that he dared not tell me anything, that I was more knowledgeable, etc. The Soviet works are out of reach here and I know nothing about them; the American ones come with considerable delay, and so far they arouse more tongue-twisters or outright indignation than they inspire. The only one who is well-informed is Roland Barthes, whom I think I wrote to you about, a former literary critic who is now engaged in semiotics... But with the French, this always ends up as philosophizing and talk. Barthes suggested, by the way, that I write something on literature within the

framework of semiotics for a magazine called *Communication*, which does not play a very central role – but I have not yet decided what to do.

The linguists, of course, are more active. I take an active part (i.e. I attend) the increasingly popular course on *Linguistique quauls l'altre*, where in fact elementary mathematical truths are studied; but there is a seminar where scientists from various countries come to speak about their work on machine translation and linguistic statistics. In this regard, I recommend a collection called *Information theory*, ed. by C. Cherry, London, 1962, where MacKay¹ is of primary interest – he develops some aspects of the concept of information not touched upon by Shannon², which seem to me [?] suitable for literary analysis as well. In particular, he talks about its *dimensionnalité* – i.e. how many independent elements there are in a structure, regardless of whether they carry new information (this is called, as you probably know, LOGON).

I follow, it seems to me, carefully the ideas here on the application of exact methods in literary studies, and I do not see anything special. Statistical methods can be used, in my opinion, only in the history of literature, but not in the analysis of the individual work (which still seems to me to be the primary task). The concept of “style” is, as you have long said, indefensible from a literary point of view; but I still hold on to the name “stylistics” for “strategic” reasons.

Cassirer does not captivate me unconditionally, but it seems to me that he upholds a few sound principles. In fact, I have somewhat abandoned this side of the questions, which seems to me to be clearer and less important, and I am thinking more about the description of meaning in a literary work. You rightly observe that a sharp distinction between linguistic and “literary” information cannot be made, and for now I am content with a more empirical and less schematic description, which I hope will become clearer to me by the end of my stay (I will return in June – at the latest!). I try to circumvent the question of literary “pragmatics” and objective analysis with a distinction introduced by Jakobson in *Poetics and Linguistics* [*Linguistics and Poetics*, 1960] in connection with verse: he speaks of *modèle du verse* – *exemple du verse* – *modele d'execution* – *exemple d'execution* (in English design and instance). It seems to me that “objective” analysis should be limited to the

¹ Donald MacKay (1922–1987) was a British physicist who made important contributions to cybernetics and the question of “meaning” in information theory.

² Claude Elwood Shannon, American electrical engineer and mathematician, known as the “father of information theory”.

concrete execution, but should not deal with the concrete interpretation, which, undoubtedly, plays a huge role. In theory, all this remains rather vague (where does Sievers's *Autorenlese*³ leave it?), but in practice it seems feasible to me. That is actually all I can tell you on the subject of the existence of a work of art (this business is a bit epistemological for me). I actually have an idea about it only from the corresponding chapter in Wellek's *Theory of Literature*. It seems to me that an analogy can be found in the problem of the existence of the phoneme (where does it actually exist?). – However, this part of the analysis (“objective”) lends itself much more easily to systematicity, and if at least that much is done it is still good. I see examples of this in T. Sebeok, whose analyses I like very much, but in the end he suddenly simplifies things and deprives himself, in my opinion, of valuable results.

In the period since my previous letter, the works of Cl. Levi Strauss have made the strongest impression on me. His *Anthropologie Structurale* is a rarely fascinating book, captivating with the beauty of his thought. He tries to extract the structural method from linguistics and apply it to primitive societies. The results are, to say the least, very interesting. Particularly familiar to us are his analyses of myths, which he dissects into a series of oppositions and repetitions – of course, quite complex. One – joint with Jakobson – of his analyses of a Baudelaire poem can be found in the magazine *L'Homme* from 1962, but there is no theory there. I think his ideas about describing larger semantic units are extremely fruitful – a step ahead of the formalists. – He is very popular here, although attacked by the professors at the Sorbonne (conservatives) and, by the way, claims to be a Marxist!

Much is written about time here. In the philosophical sense, the most popular is the book by G. Poulet, *Études sur le temps humain* essays on French literature, where the first chapter is not a bad overview of the issue. In the grammatical sense, there are also many, but very specific works (monographs), not theory. I will try to add a bibliography at the end of my letter. The French have, as you know, a cult of “form” and many fragmentary thoughts of M. Proust, Thibaudet, R. Barthes, A. Robbe-Grillet (with whom I met), etc. come to mind. Moreover, in all their stylistics, which are very grammatical, there is a chapter on

³ Eduard Sievers, a German linguist and young grammarian who dealt with poetry studies – the so-called “sound analysis” (*Schallanalyse*). He also introduced the concept of “aural philology” (*Ohrenphilologie*), which argued that poetry should be analyzed as a text intended for oral pronunciation.

time. – On top of that, there are a whole bunch of theories on lyric poetry, but they are mainly written by poets. I can buy you, for example, *Les manifestes du surréalisme* by A. Breton if you want. By the way, Aragon has published a new book that is precisely an “epic” – a kind of novel in verse, *Le Fou d’Elsa*, and about which he wrote in an interview that it was born from his observations on the past tense forms in Arabic languages.

Reading what you wrote to me about the daily literary struggles back home was also profoundly interesting. The case with Markov is encouraging. I – by the way – tried to analyze a poem by Debelyanov, and sent the article to “Lang and Lit”; perhaps you will find it interesting, although you will not discover anything new, and I am a little ashamed of the superficiality I show there. In general, I hope the status quo will remain, because I am coming back bearing my rose-colored glasses and high hopes and a great desire to work. I have even come up with something for the two of us to do. It is not at all clear to me what kind of environment I will bump into (if there’s any bumping to be done), because I have no idea what is going on inside Miroslav and Tsanko’s heads, not to mention the others. In fact, I want to establish the closest cooperation with you – I don’t know if you approve of me... In any case, I will have to take an entrance exam, which will not be easy for me, unless it is stylistics, because everything else is vague to me. Have you heard anything “along those lines”?

It is not clear to me whose “secret marriage” among our friends you are hinting at. I think I detected some bitterness behind the laconicism in this part of your letter (stylistic (?) analysis), but I dare not interfere. I got this trait from the French, who never interfere in your work – not even a little bit. I will be waiting for your cousin Ginka on Monday at the Gare de Lyon – how it will go – I do not know.

I wish you all the best and hope to receive at the very least one more letter while I am here – and a long one too.

January 24, 1964

Tzvetan

On Lyric Theory: Philippe Van Tieghem, *Les grandes doctrines littéraires en France* (scholastic); Y[ves] Le Hir. *Esthétique et Structure du vers français d’après les théoriciens, du XVIIe siècle à nos jours*. P. 1956 (mediocre); *Die Deutsche Lyrik: Form und Geschichte*. Hrsg. v. B. V. Wiese (-1) Düsseldorf, 1957; R[obert] Petsch, *Die Lyrische Dichtkunst*.

Ihr Wesen und ihre Formen. Halle, 1939; Osk[ar] Walzel, Zeitform im lyrischen Gedicht. Leipzig, 1931; Joh[annes] Pfeiffer. Das lyrische Gedicht als ästhetisches Gebilde. Ein phänomenologischer Versuch. Halle, 1931; G[ottfried] Benn. Probleme der Lyrik. 1950.

On Verbal Tense: Thornton, Thornton, Harry and Agathe [in collaboration with A. A. Lind]. Time and style, a psycho-linguistic essay in classical literature. London, 1962; Will[iam] Em[erson] Bull. Time, Tense, and the Verb. A study in theoretical and applied linguistics [with particular attention to Spanish]. Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960; G[ustave] Guillaume. Temps Et Verbe, Théorie Des Aspects, Des Modes Et Des Temps. Paris 1929; H. Sørensen. Aspect et Temps en slave. Aarhus, 1949. – But, as you know, this is an insignificant part of the books on these topics, which (in terms of titles and authors) seem more interesting to me (I make no guarantees). If this still interests you, perhaps you should narrow your scope. There is no money yet.

January 30, 1964

February 4, [1964]

Finally, a little financial enlightenment.

Tzvetan

University Archives of the New Bulgarian University (UA-NBU), f. 22 (personal collection “Prof. Nikola Georgiev”, unprocessed). Original. Manuscript. Leaves 1, 2. In Bulgarian, French.

2
 дана (тукъ въпросъ ми е много естетическогоса), въ какъво
 мнѣнїе прерасива се въ самъ актъ съответнаго гласа отъ Theory
 of Hecate и тукъ. Служба ми се, че една аналитическа мисль да се отъ-
 ерне въ проблема за въпросъ гласности и формализма (како въпросъ
 съществуетъ ли?). - Но тукъ, какъ гласъ отъ анализа се израва мнѣ.
 въ всички на съответстваностъ а актъ мисль въ се израва - какъ
 едрѣ. Примери за това вънегатъ у Т. Девотъ, мисль ланганъ ми
 харесватъ много, но бѣтъ издрасъ дѣлванне съответна мисль и
 мисль, вънегатъ мнѣ, отъ гласъ речуванта.

Въ ~~проблемъ~~ ^{проблемъ} ми мисль гласъ мнѣ - какъ вънегатъ
 ми издрасива речуванта на С. Левъ. Какъ вънегатъ вънегатъ
 структура е речуванта гласъ, издрасива е гласности на мнѣ.
 гласъ ми. Мнѣ се отъ гласъ за вънегатъ гласности мисль отъ
 мисль гласности и за вънегатъ гласъ гласности гласности.
 Вънегатъ ми се, какъ мнѣ, мисль гласности. Особенъ гласъ за мнѣ се
 гласности ми се мисль, какъ мнѣ гласности на гласъ отъ глас-
 ности отъ гласности - речуванта се, гласъ гласности гласности,
 с гласъ гласности на гласъ гласности гласности гласности
 въ гласности L'Homme отъ 1961, но тукъ гласъ гласности, въ мисль
 гласности ми се гласности на мнѣ гласности гласности се гласъ.
 гласъ гласности гласности - гласъ гласности отъ гласности мнѣ. - Гласъ е гласности на
 гласъ гласъ, мисль и мисль отъ гласности въ гласности (гласъ-
 гласности) и, мисль гласности, гласъ гласности!

За гласности мнѣ а мисль мисль за гласности мнѣ мисль.
 гласъ е гласности на G. Pavlet, Etude sur le langage гласности гласности гласности
 французската гласности гласности гласности гласности гласности гласности гласности
 си. Вънегатъ гласности гласности гласности гласности гласности гласности гласности
 (мониторингъ), а не гласности. Вънегатъ гласности гласности гласности гласности
 гласъ на гласности си. Французската гласности гласности гласности гласности гласности
 "гласности" а ми гласности на гласности гласности гласности на М. Прант,
 Tylkanski, R. Barthes, R. Kellie, G. Llet (с гласности и гласности) и гласности гласности,
 въ гласности ми гласности гласности гласности гласности гласности гласности гласности
 гласъ се гласности. - Гласности на гласности гласности гласности гласности гласности, но
 въ се гласности гласности отъ гласности. Мисль гласности гласности гласности гласности гласности
 gansferes de гласности на R. Barthes. Гласности гласности, Гласности гласности гласности
 на гласности гласности, гласности с гласности "гласности" - гласности гласности гласности гласности,

