

## Tzvetan Stoyanov: an Untamed Creative Spirit

In his note to the French edition of “The Genius and His Mentor,” the French thinker Tzvetan Todorov defines his Bulgarian namesake Tzvetan Stoyanov (1930–1971) as “a literary critic and historian, author of numerous studies” and concludes that his unfinished masterpiece “The Genius and His Mentor” is “a unique event in Bulgarian critical literature after World War II” (Todorov 2000). An assessment fully shared by the French translator Marie Vrinat, who in her afterword to the book tries to outline the profile of this “profound humanist, erudite, who assimilated to an exceptionally high degree (especially for Bulgaria in the 1960s and 1970s) different cultures – not only Bulgarian and Russian, but also French, English and German, with which Tzvetan Stoyanov had a lasting influence on an entire generation of intellectuals, captivated by direct contact with this ardent and sociable man... Thanks to his tolerant spirit, his taste for conversation, for fruitful polemics with intellectual challenges, he opened up new spiritual horizons for the Bulgarian intelligentsia, which lived in strict isolation imposed on them by the regime and censorship” (Vrinat 2000).

These assessments show how fruitful Tzvetan-Stoyan’s cosmopolitan attitude can be in today’s cultural context, once again marked by the debate between local and global, as well as to what extent key concepts from his work – such as alienation, the analysis of power through Dostoevsky, the bilateral East-West dialogue or the theme of dialogue (“of good conversations”) – are important today, if they are read precisely from the Bulgarian “periphery” and in depth.

It is no coincidence that the issue begins with Toni Nikolov’s introductory article “The Unfinished Enlightenment Project of Tzvetan Stoyanov and his ‘Chinese Chronicle’”, dedicated precisely to the large-scale “spirit of systematicity” of his work, to the core of this “modernization project” and the author’s unwritten but “dizzying critical trilogy”, likened to the Cologne Cathedral. Because, according to its design, it started from the beginning of the eighteenth century – Defoe, Swift, Sterne, Fielding, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Herder,

Goethe, Schiller, Gozzi, it went through the depths of romanticism and classical philosophy – Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe, Shelley, Joseph de Maistre, Chateaubriand, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Marx, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, to reach Gogol, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, as well as authors of Russian religious philosophy such as Solovyov, Fyodorov, Leontiev, Rozanov.

The topic is continued in Kamelia Spasova's article "Tzvetan Stoyanov and the Utopia of World Literature", which analyzes a fundamental division for the Bulgarian intellectual debate in the 1960s – the difference between "vale literature" and "world literature". This makes it clear why Tzvetan Stoyanov, who did not emigrate to the West, like Tzvetan Todorov, Julia Krasteva or the writer Georgi Markov, argues for the idea that Bulgarian culture should not be closed in its "everyday peculiarity", which would be some kind of "pseudo-folklorism". In a series of articles he opposes the "isolationist tendency" of his opponents (Toncho Zhechev, Krastyo Kuyumdzhiev), refusing to think of Shakespeare through the "green hills of the English countryside", and turns his gaze to Goethe's ideal of "world literature as a dialogue of cultures". Otherwise, as Kamelia Spasova writes, there was a danger that not only Bulgarian, but also world literature would begin to be understood as a "folklore panopticon" into which Bulgarians must enter with their "Balkan -Bulgarian embroidery."

Which once again raises the question "is it easy to write about Bulgarian literature?", as Maya Gorcheva's article is titled. Tzvetan Stoyanov himself writes with ease about Bulgarian as well as non-Bulgarian literature, but in this case the profound question is about the connections and oppositions between the "Bulgarian" and the "non-Bulgarian", as well as about his readings. The Bulgarian tradition provides Stoyanov with "material" to develop his aesthetic principles and in it – especially in philosophical prose – the native is often "utopian", "mythological", even purely fictional.

Something that is fully evident in the two previously unpublished texts by Tzvetan Stoyanov, which appear for the first time in this issue – "The Water of Aquarius" (a reflection on alienation, madness and old age) and "The End of Myths" (a fantastic story about the fate of "foreigners" under "people's power").

In his article, Stiliyan Yotov makes an attempt through the optics about the pain and pleasure of alienation in Tzvetan Stoyanov to analyze his studies such as "Ideas and Motives of Alienation in

Western Literature” and “The Threads That Break”. And he comes to the conclusion that his author’s reading (beyond literature) is not even directed so much towards religion or psychology as towards a “mythology” with which culture argues in a given era. Because existentialists were not (good) sociologists. And Tzvetan Stoyanov realized that this is a problem worth intellectual efforts.

Maya Angelova’s attention is focused on Tzvetan Stoyanov’s essay “Outsiders and Runaways” (first published in the magazine “Savremennik” in 1971), since it models the field of his analysis, placing “people overboard” at the center (which is mainly centered on John Updike’s novel *Rabbit, Run*). A topic that was innovative for its time, since the fundamental study “The Outsider” by the British philosopher Colin Wilson was published only in 1956, defining *the outsider* as a symptom of modern alienation. In this sense, if we follow Tzvetan Stoyanov’s logic, the outsider is not so much an age diagnosis as a mode of existence and condition, the result of a clash between man and the self-reproducing social order.

In Tzvetan Stoyanov’s work, translation and research often go hand in hand. This is also proven by the article by Joanna Patula-Krasteva, dedicated to Tzvetan Stoyanov and the Bulgarian reception of Walt Whitman: translation and reception series. The theoretical framework The analysis is based on Marta Skwara’s concepts of “translation series” or “textualization”, which allow us to see Tzvetan-Stoyan’s translations of Walt Whitman’s “Blades of Grass” in a new light – as “cultural-historical gestures” or “cultural play” in a rather ideologized era.

And again on the topic of the “eternal game” in Dostoevsky, Mitko Novkov tries to recontextualize the dilemma of “The Genius and His Mentor” in Tzvetan Stoyanov with one assumption: “three in the game, the fourth forgotten”. What would have happened if instead of Fyodor Dostoevsky or Konstantin Leontiev, the chief prosecutor of the Holy Synod Konstantin Pobedonostsev had redirected his attention to another great Russian writer – Nikolai Leskov? Moreover, Dostoevsky and Leskov read each other. In one of his essays, Walter Benjamin defines Leskov as the “great exception” in the modern novel. In this sense, the article is also a “game attempt” to “reread” some of Tzvetan Stoyanov’s theses through Benjamin’s lens.

**References**

Stoyanov, Tzvetan. 2000. *Le génie et son maître*. Translated by Mari Vrinat-Nikolov, foreword by Tzvetan Todorov. Paris: L'Esprit des péninsules.