

Is it Easy to Write about Bulgarian Literature?

[...] *It takes a lot of work, muscles, a hundred pairs of shoes to break in,
It never ceases to capture love and faith and optimism!*
Tzvetan Stoyanov, “The Brocéliande Forest”
(Stoyanov 1988a, 63)

Abstract

Is it easy to write about Bulgarian literature? The suggested essay ensues from the well-known debate in Bulgarian culture concerning the concepts of “the ours” and “the foreign”. It examines some examples from the critical and fictional texts of Tzvetan Stoyanov, which show both ruptures and linking “threads” between specifically native and non-Bulgarian culture and literature in the 1960s. Bulgarian culture, as a counterpoint to alienation, is characterized by the category of orality and preserves the harmonious relation between author and community. Therefore, the critic insists that it should be taken out of the “museum vitrine” and become a critical benchmark for the present. Secondly, we examine the manifold correlations between Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian in Tzvetan Stoyanov’s writings: the non-Bulgarian as a way of overcoming deficiencies; as mutual reflection and self-understanding; the interweaving of Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian images in an ever more uniform modern culture that standardizes cultural models despite ideological divisions. In conclude, the image of the threads is developed as a metaphor for the quest to preserve communion, and the asymmetry between authors labeled as “pro-Western” and their works on Bulgarian themes is displayed.

Keywords

communion, the opposition national specificity / foreign, Tzvetan Stoyanov’s fiction

Tzvetan Stoyanov writes with ease about both Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian literature, of course. The answer is easy, and the reason for the title was given by Svetlozar Igov's question in his review of "The Last Book of Tzvetan Stoyanov" from 1974: "[...] why is it easier for some talented art critics to appear in the field of non-Bulgarian artistic and art history material than in such undeveloped areas of the history and modernity of Bulgarian arts?" (Igov 1978, 262).

Obviously, behind the provocative opposition lies the intersection of ideas and theses in the context of the time, since a comparison with what was published by Tzvetan Stoyanov will refute it with the number of his reviews or essays that fall into the core of the "truly Bulgarian". It will also be refuted by a more in-depth reading of the connections and oppositions between Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian in his readings. Below we will examine some examples from Tzvetan Stoyanov's critical and fictional texts, in which precisely the Bulgarian is a critical measure and counterpoint to the analysis. Even when no specific Bulgarian reality is thematized or non-Bulgarian "material" is considered.

How Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian meet is illustrated by "The Brocéliande Forest": the ending – with the strongest rhetorical place of conclusion and resolution of the case – is the return to the place. After traversing the path of poetry from the ancient priestly blessing and unity of the tribe, hanging over the ruins of poetic inspiration in modern times, in counterpoint and ending the author reveals that he is writing in Koprivshitsa, the emblematic city for the Bulgarian Revival and the rebellion, but also the hometown of one of the most confessional Bulgarian poets – Debelyanov and hears Botev's verse sung (Stoyanov 1988a, 64).¹ In the rhetoric of the text, Bulgarian implicitly turns out to be the spiritual way out and intact whole. How, after this finale of the essay with a non-Bulgarian name from 1962, whose first publication was with introductory words, a reminiscence of a conversation after a literary reading in our country (Stoyanov 1988a, 624), should we deal the cards in the duel between the "conservatives" and the "progressives" in the square of Bulgarian criticism from the 1960s?²

¹ Toncho Zhechev's statement about a warm, friendly, but completely different place and environment is also well-known: "together in a house in Mindya they wrote – Vasil his "Roots", Tzvetan – his "Brocéliande Forest" (Stoyanov 1988a, 19).

² Here and below we rely on the groupings of Bulgarian intellectual camps drawn out by Boyko Penchev in his study of the same name, whose demarcation lines were outlined in a series of debates in the 1960s (cf. Penchev 2023).

In some publications by Tzvetan Stoyanov from the early 1960s, the Bulgarian, embodied in his canonical works, is an aesthetic norm that must be taken out from under the “museum showcase” and become a lesson for the present. The essay on Sophrony Vrachanski is titled “The Lesson of ‘Life’” (Stoyanov 1988, 197–200). Again, the title “Today’s Poetry and the Example of Vaptsarov” is didactic, since the same norm of the Bulgarian illustrates what the actuality of speech or themes is and how the original meaning of the epithet “modern” is realized (Stoyanov 1988a, 146–161, cf. 160). New expressive possibilities are revealed by the intellectual’s reading of the writings of Paisius, Hristo Botev, and the folk song, and this is the elevation of the oral word, which is poetry. The Bulgarian literary tradition of modern times is poetic – even Paisius, its first writer, was “above all a lyricist”, claims the critic and proves it with scientific enumeration and passionate experience in the essay “The Language of the Singer” (Stoyanov 1988a, 194–196). But the first refutation comes from the material itself. In “Weapons that are ignored” through “the lesson that our little folk song offers us”, an intellectual of modern times rediscovers expression that has regained its primary meanings – “the metric in the service of thought and mood, in the service of expression” (Stoyanov 1988a, 78). The folk song he writes about, he does not hear, but finds as a printed text in “some old collection of folk sayings”. The apology of the oral word bursts forth with “the desire to read them again and again” (Stoyanov 1988a, 72), and the printed word, like the long-standing work of recording and publishing folk songs, is the fruit of an enlightened, bookish and not at all oral modern scientific self-consciousness. It knows the “kinetic energy” of the folk song – the primordial tradition – through the modern alienating means of studying it, through the distance of the recording, which cannot convey the originality of oral speech, does not have the graphic signs to mark all the variations of dialectal oral speech. The man of modern times has the “material” only of oral poetry processed into written word, so to speak, literate.³ Turning the folk song into an absolute symbol of some ideal primal state of unity and communion, the critic emphasizes its

³ The folk song „Даваш ли гаваш, Балканџу Йово“ analyzed as an example of the rhythm is an author’s arrangement by Pencho Slaveykov, with a number of changes to the original entry No. 199 from the collection „Народне песме македонску бузгара“ (1860), collected by Stefan Verkovich. The work is included under No. 186 in the edition of the collection “Книга на песните. Български народно песни, отбрани от Pencho Slaveykov” in the latest edition of the manuscript, by Boris Delchev (cf. the latest reprint of „Книга на песните. Отечество“, 1995).

meaning as a “lesson” for modern writing – regardless of and despite the enlightened knowledge of the conventions of poetic creation in the folklore community. Or he sees in the compiler’s written tradition from Paisius’ work the inspiring message to modernity: “The passion of words is important, their aspiration is important” (Stoyanov 1988a, 195). Poetry does not “embroider embroidery”, but is expression, knowledge and communion. The artistic norm is determined by the principles of orality and impact: “If the language is expressive, it is also beautiful. The degree of its beauty is in the degree of expression. There is no other criterion” (Stoyanov 1988a, 100).

Is this not also the criterion for Tzvetan Stoyanov’s own writing? The native tradition gives him “material” to formulate aesthetic principles. The native is a eutopia – a kind of idealized space, but also self-expression and completeness of self-expression, simultaneously vital and active, empathetic and lyrical, friendly and playfully sarcastic, in which “everything is allowed”, because it is stamped with the ultimate experience of the intellect and spoken with the passion of polemics. In the eutopia, the return to the native testimonies of communion is also the re-creation of the ancient unity, when there were no dividing markers of one’s own or foreign names: it is as much Bulgarian as it is Brocéliande. This is the opposite of alienation, although can the return to the ancient (with which the division of Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian becomes meaningless) help the present of the “torn threads”? The critic seeks a “way out” of the spatial or temporal detachment between Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian, in order to unite them anew in the present as a unified experience and impulse of modern man. Or formulated as an observable problematic in the texts of Tzvetan Stoyanov, which we will examine below: how do Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian meet?

First, one notices the vulgar play with the exoticism of the folk, which is not at all ideologically neutral when it is in the hands of “the buffoons with scarlet belts, singing on the radio for the glory of Stalin,” as one of its expressive characteristics states (Stoyanov 1988a, 181). Even Botev’s sacred verse “He is alive, he is alive,” whose rhythm is also analyzed in “Weapons that are ignored” (Stoyanov 1988a, 80), will be nothing more than the screams of homeless emigrants in the Bulgarian pub in Vienna (Stoyanov 1969: 97), and Budi Budev’s triumphant journey back to his homeland, hidden in the menagerie of the “Native Balkans” circus, ends before the border precisely with

Botev's song (Stoyanov 1969, 223–224). The return to his native house follows the footsteps and images of Debelyanov's poetry (Stoyanov 1969: 226). However, in the community center, where his Bulgarian enlightenment began, he seeks out the poems of Edgar Allan Poe (Stoyanov 1969, 229).

By the way, at the end of the “tour guide's story” about the journey of Archie, the English writer, the hosts sing “He is alive, he is alive” throughout the homeland, as well as “You are beautiful, my forest”, and on “Hey, Balkan, you are our native” “even Archie joined us” (Stoyanov 1963, 106).

The non-Bulgarian participates in the Bulgarian, as Archie likes his journey, but how much can the completed harmonious image of native poetry withstand the gaze from the outside? Archie's readings of Yovkov's story “The Postolov Watermills” (“Postolovi vodenitsi”) surprisingly for his Bulgarian translator and companion reveal the destructive dark passions of gender, which corrode the harmonious picture of the native (Stoyanov 1961, 92). Incidentally, in Tzvetan Stoyanov we will find abundant readings of Western culture as disintegrating, left to the rampant selfishness and gender, and in general to “our” shared distrust. Probably at the time he was writing the story about Archie's vacation, he was also preparing the review “A Conscientious and Deep Analysis” (which remained unprinted) of Minko Nikolov's book “On the Crisis in the Modern Western Novel” from 1961 (Stoyanov 1988a, 244–245). Considering the subject – the modern Western novel – the critic formulates the situation of the analyst (which, by the way, can be applied with the same authority to the understanding of the folk song or native poetry), when the position of the responsible enlightening connoisseur must be chosen between the incorrect conclusions of biased assessments. Instead of “the two extremes – snobbish worship, on the one hand, and blatant denial, on the other”, this enlightened analyst, like Minko Nikolov's book, “comes to bring into all these conversations the first thing they need – awareness” (Stoyanov 1988a, 244).

Otherwise, he amuses himself with the endless cases of misunderstanding and discrepancy between Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian, reinforced especially in fictional stories. As we read in the story “We and Archie” (1961), the native attracts the attention of the non-Bulgarian, and that of the cultural center, precisely as a picturesque detail – like pillows with household embroidery. The hero – a well-established career writer from the West with the calmness of a

self-confident bearer of culture – is delighted with the slivovitz and the appetizer of sliced tripe (in “The Case of the Professor” they enjoy “tricolor cocktails”) and is “tired” of both getting acquainted with a unique cultural heritage such as the frescoes of the Boyana Church, and of industrialization. He is no more or less interested in meeting people⁴, but then in his travel notes he will treat with irony both the material prosperity achieved by these people and their ambitions to engage in the art of Elizabethan drama (even if he does not remember having read “Volpone”). The narrator enjoys the comic effect, placing the shocking pathos of the native poet Voivodov on the other side of Archie. Through Archie, it is from the outside that a conservative view of the passionate supporter of Disraeli comes, exposing our native Bulgarian stereotypes. Ultimately, the poet Voivodov, as well as the sister of the writer, an admirer of embroidered pillowcases, reach an untranslatable union (and they do not have a translator for their languages), when, under the pressure of the dark destructive element of gender, they isolate themselves in one of their native meadows.

Through comedy, the narrator Tzvetan Stoyanov touches on the stereotypes of Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian, puts them on an equal footing in their absurdity and laughs at them. But in addition, there is a reflection on their inevitable intersection in the modernity of the increasingly informed world and the increasingly standardized cultural models, despite the ideological division. It is this problem of meeting them that deserves a more detailed examination – because of the open questions, as well as because of the updating of layers of modern Bulgarian culture.

The critic spoke of the ancient tradition in terms of the modern world and called Sophrony an “aged, tortured fugitive” (Stoyanov 1988a, 199), so that the use of the term in a Bulgarian context predates the emblematic title “Outsiders and Fugitives” by more than a decade (Stoyanov 1988b, 7–29). The comparison of Bulgarian with universal knowledge and modern cultural phenomena remains an open task – today it is much more understandable and unproblematic to perceive

⁴ Similarly, as the observations in the essay “The Exotic Image of the Bulgarian Abroad” by Georgi Markov, cf.: “[...] Those Bulgarian propagandists are very wrong who think that the new shiny hotels or representative buildings take the minds of foreigners or the museum exhibits. All this is in the order of things and every country offers it to tourists. But the meeting with two old men from the region of Sredna gora and a donkey somewhere around Banya, Karlovo district, the glass of rakia with a little salad and the tongue of the fingers filled a pair of journalists crossing Bulgaria with tenderness.” (Markov 2015, 227).

Botev through the classifications listed in the essay “June 2nd” from 1961 (even with the pathos of the exclamation at the end): “Anarchist, cosmopolitan, unbalanced, captive of foreign doctrines!” (Stoyanov 1988a, 204). The listed characteristics place the figure of the national hero in the context of modern ideas and anthropology, confirm his historical value – and establish his distinction in the horizon of knowledge about the Bulgarian. In this interchangeability between the Bulgarian and the idea (or stereotype) of the Bulgarian, it is denied – and again reinvented, already at the level of pan-European models. As a refutation of the stereotypes of the ironic, adhering to the certain visible evidence national type, the poet with his self-sacrifice becomes the Bulgarian embodiment of flight and creative work – of the symbol of spiritual freedom and transforming self-destructive action, related in spirit to “that Orleans girl”, to “the Icarians and the Columbuses” (Stoyanov 1988a, 203). Of the national self-knowledge achieved at the moment of “becoming non-Bulgarian”, which the “Second Part of the Conversation” dares to admit (Stoyanov 1988b, 377, 380).

The reference or introduction of the non-Bulgarian leads to the rediscovery of the universal meaning and in the “valley” grown analogous achievements. Moreover, the comparison stimulates to refer the same analytical models in the understanding of topos or events and personal feats and to place them on the scale of absolute supranational values or mythical stories about the hero and the victim. The parallelism of Bulgarian with non-Bulgarian turns out to be an important strategy of the “progressive” for emancipation from the nationally closed existence and synchronization with the Western world.

The re-creation of the non-Bulgarian is an opportunity to prognostically speak and understand Bulgarian existence. And an alibi to point out “alarming current correspondences in Bulgarian reality here and now”, if we quote the later conclusion of Svetlozar Igov (Igov 2013). Such a double meaning of knowledge and criticism, penetrating the mechanisms of manipulation or degradation, without seeing any refreshing achievable endings, is found in both the observations on alienation as a social and psychological phenomenon, and on the relationship between creativity and power. The scale of trans-Bulgarian relevance in Tzvetan Stoyanov, as indeed in the essays of Assen Ignatov such as “Typology of Alienation” from 1967 (Ignatov 1968, 81–112) or “From the Analysis of Dogmatic Thinking” from 1963 (Ignatov 1968, 121–131), seems surprising for today’s standardized

pictures of the all-powerful totalitarian power as the assertion of personal responsibility and choices of the Bulgarian intellectual from the decades of the repressive regime. Although they remained incomplete, even destroyed⁵, the written works are invaluable evidence that exiting the “system” is possible only with the individually taken risk. They are self-sacrificing gestures, the perpetrators of which probably faced the same dilemmas that “The Second Part of the Conversation” poses with the prior knowledge of self-surrender, doomed to become the legitimation of yet another “deterioration.”

On the other hand, we observe asymmetry in the introduction of non-Bulgarian as a complement to what is missing in the native culture and as a catch-up. In addition to the tried and tested educational techniques of translation or commentary, Tzvetan Stoyanov does it through genre innovations in his own fictional works. “The Case of the Professor” (1966) not only perfectly complies with the prescriptions of crime fiction, which he speaks of in the literary-critical review “A Genre That Affirms Reason” (Stoyanov 1988a, 308–311). The inevitable secondary nature of assimilation also easily turns into an exaggeration and parody of genre clichés and self-parody (cf. Antov 2022, 141–147). In the obligatory action-packed chase on Bulgarian roads on the tracks of the Mercedes, a moped lambretta is involved. If we paraphrase a line from the final revelation and neutralization of the enemies in the story: “The parody of the criminal-intelligence plot was too Bulgarian, but everyone understood it.” And the dilemmas of “one’s own” and “foreign” are literally solved by the two names of the main character Ilarion – Larry, crowned with the national emblem in the surname Rozov.

We will find a whole conglomeration of genre models in “The Exceptional Biography of Budi Budev” (1969): a coming-of-age novel, a picaresque, philosophical novella (this view is substantiated by Miglena Nikolchina (2022, 86–87), an adventure novel, in which, like the poem “By the Blue Sea” by Valeri Petrov, all sorts of exotic places are listed, from the ice of Greenland to the desert and the savannah, with all the authenticity of the trials known from adventure readings, although sometimes what happens differs from what is read.

The third fictional text, “Peace Over Your Home,” however, drastically reverses the scheme of “catching up” and shows a complex tangle of correlations between Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian. Its title

⁵ Dimitar Bochev tells about the suicidally burned book by Asen Ignatov in the essay “A Hint of Happiness” (Bochev 2016, 114–117).

is a quote from a poem by Nikolay Liliev, whose poetry is the “thread” between the two characters.⁶ To reaffirm the unforgettable friendship, the first stanzas of three more poems by the poet are listed (Stoyanov 1967, 31). “They could [...] recite almost the entire Liliev in chorus,” Toncho Zhechev recalls of Tzvetan Stoyanov and Krastyo Kuyumdzhiev (Stoyanov 1988a, 6). The writer can easily parody poetry: let us recall that the criminal-intelligence intrigue in “The Case of the Professor” is entangled in the “Tranquility” hotel at the “Blue Bays” resort.

In the development of the story, sheltered under Liliev’s verse, however, the quotation of another title, already from non-Bulgarian literature, passes as a leitmotif: *Orpheus Descending* by Tennessee Williams (1961). Every day, the stranger in London anxiously expects something to happen and it seems that the event is that they finally manage to see a production of this play, although no comment is given, neither about the play nor about the audience’s assessments. Instead, within the London story, we find small signs of the play from the first meeting in the city. They are played out in different spaces – the cosmopolitan city and “a small town in the southern states”, but the subway takes the friends home far in the suburbs: “[...] finally we found ourselves in the open air again and walked along a quiet, almost deserted street. I was struck by the houses – perfectly identical, as if they had been manufactured in a factory” (Stoyanov 1967, 14). The season noted in the introductory remarks does not seem to be different. It is as if the welcome in London is also on “a rainy afternoon at the end of winter” (Williams 1967, 1). We will find more references: the pineapple ice cream for Jabe from the play has become the icy pineapple juice before bedtime in the story; the London Underground is like a daily descent into the mouth of hell. Tennessee Williams’s title is carried over into the title of an episode about a subway ride, followed by a nighttime adventure in the “Hundred Devils” bar. Isn’t it the devil who tears the ties between people, the question is asked in “The Brocéliande Forest” (Stoyanov 1988a, 51).

Tennessee Williams’ play is also cited in the article “Outsiders and Fugitives” (Stoyanov 1988b, 20), as well as in the study “The Threads That Break” (Stoyanov 1988b, 131) in connection with the type of the main character – a musician and a wanderer who is of the “breed of fugitives”. In the bibliography, Tzvetan Stoyanov also indicates his

⁶ If we quote the line of the emigrant Felix: “We are connected by threads that no one can tear!” (Stoyanov 1967, 13).

source: *Orpheus descending* (1963), although by that time the play had already been translated into Bulgarian and was staged at the Burgas Theater “Adriana Budevskva” in 1961.⁷ From the interest in the type of outsider in the play, we can also structure the story around the guest and narrator character in reverse order. In the narrative, he is charged not only with the role of the “generalized epistemological center”. He is both “his” Bulgarian point of view and the “foreign” and “outsider” in the non-Bulgarian cosmopolitan city. Although an observer, in the neutrality of his meticulous enumeration of objects and “luxuries” in the home, one can rather sense a dislike for the comforts of everyday life. It is this stranger character who enters into a series of dialogues, striving to establish a deep conversation – and the threads of friendship. He also plays out the “gender drama” in the ridiculous attempt to reconnect the threads in the midst of the most banal situation of hourly paid sex. But in its purest form, the type of foreigner is embodied by the friend, gifted with the name of happiness Felix, with the confession: “Everywhere is foreign to me, you see, I can’t reconcile myself” (Stoyanov 1967, 74).

We would call the story a chamber psychological drama, especially since in it the features of the dramatic genre are palpable with the arrangement of the characters and the outbreak of conflicts with fateful resolutions in a short period of time or with the dialogues – the extensive sharing with the friend or the quadrille of secular lines at the salon party. During their conversation, the artist Alfred also retells the drama “Behind Closed Doors” by Jean-Paul Sartre (Stoyanov 1967, 47), also commented on in “The Threads That Break” (Stoyanov 1988b, 124–125). In this drama, the outsider narrator becomes an intimate interlocutor with whom the two spouses share their estrangement or impulses. We can decipher the construction of the fictional text by the non-epic genres through which Tzvetan Stoyanov interprets the works of his friend Vasil Popov in his early review “Drama and Lyric” (1962). While drama is the ruptures, lyricism with Liliev’s verse embodies the force that is “the enemy of every conflict, the warmth that is released not from rupture, but from connection, the lyricism that is understanding and forgiveness and love, the merging of one with the other, the great spring feeling

⁷ The National Library Kiril i Metodii catalogue includes, but is not available for reading, a translation from 1961, by Bistra Vinarova, probably commissioned by the theatre troupe. A recording of this early play is kept in the BNR collection (cf. information at: <https://bnr.bg/hristobotev/post/101048886> (accessed 20.08.2025)).

of closeness” (Stoyanov 1988a, 236).⁸ The expected event, culmination and dramatic solution, perhaps, will be the news of the young wife’s pregnancy – in contrast to the murder of the future mother in “Orpheus Descends”, the story under the wing of verse promises that material prosperity will also become a home for the future.

The central place makes the hero-narrator a kind of analogue of the mythical Orpheus in the everyday life of the big city, in which nothing happens. In the story of the fading union in the “The Brocéliande Forest”, the cry of Orpheus, who has lost Eurydice forever, will walk the earth. Orpheus’s cry – “a cry for the former organic communion, a cry of loneliness!” – rediscovers poetry (Stoyanov 1988a, 38). The mythical poet, a victim of the Dionysian ritual, in Tzvetan Stoyanov’s reflection is a kind of doubling of the tearing of the body of the god, who led the Bacchanalian army to take revenge (cf. Petrov, Stoyanov 1968, 73–76). In the retelling of the myth by Tzvetan Stoyanov, there is also the meeting with Ariadne of Naxos – with the one who holds the “ball with the magic thread” (Petrov, Stoyanov 1968, 77).

The torn threads are a constant image – one of those Tzvetan Stoyanov sigil sentences, which Toncho Zhechev (1988a, 18) speaks of, in which Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian are intertwined again.⁹ The “scattering” of the bundle of threads and the urge to reconnect them is a universal plot model, subject to both his fictional texts and critical reflection. In “The Brocéliande Forest” the story starts from a utopian place of unity, a kind of “Golden Age” and gradually falls

⁸ However, the reference to the friend also exposes the parodic potential and the duality of the images – apart from the fact that in the intelligence novel “The Case of the Professor” published a year earlier, the plot develops in the “Tranquility” hotel, which is also the title of a story by Vasil Popov with a completely different theme.

⁹ The non-Bulgarian narrative intertwines with the images that emerged from Bulgarian poetry, as this disintegration also marks a poem by Konstantin Pavlov from the distant 1958:

Prelude – the spiders

The Pantheon hasn’t been ventilated recently.
In the nooks and crannies
cobwebs are stretched.
Spider webs resemble afterlife harps.
With thousands of heavenly strings.
The spiders nervously pull the threads –
They want to play something extremely mournful
and infinitely cheerful at the same time.
The threads are breaking. (Pavlov 2001, 28).

It is this poem that sounds in a night conversation on the streets of Sofia, which Toncho Zhechev tells about (Stoyanov 1988, 15).

apart with the emergence of differences: “The bundle of connecting threads scatters” (Stoyanov 1988a, 36). The warriors – victims of poetry, however, will regain the dying communion – sometimes they manage to “throw threads to that seemingly unattainable opposite [...]” (Stoyanov 1988, 40). The image is literalized, and thus ironized, in the criminal-intelligence investigation, which also follows the threads: “no, here probably a thread was interwoven...” (Stoyanov 1966, 50); “it was obvious that a serious thread was going to pop up here” (Stoyanov 1966, 56); sometimes, due to the suspicion that “more serious threads were hidden here,” the lieutenant colonel has to be called (Stoyanov 1966, 41). With the same enthusiasm – and contrary to the metaphysical criticism – “you yourself have to be inside the movement, have a feel for the movement, catch the threads” (Stoyanov 1988a, 173).

The story of this play and interconnection between spaces and cultures, but also between genres and registers, cannot reach its finale and denouement, because with the approach to each seemingly clearly defined determinant, it turns out to be bound by the threads of numerous relationships, and the clearly marked boundaries – erased by irony or quotation. The “easier” Tzvetan Stoyanov’s writing seems, the more deeply it has woven the insoluble contradictions into a harmonious whole or has projected the longed-for unity.

As well as a paradox in the construction of the narrative of “our own” and “foreign” in Bulgarian culture, which we will see quite accurately measured in the grouping of the opposition in the canonical narratives of Bulgarian literature. Authors catalogued as “Westerners” such as Pencho Slaveykov or Geo Milev wrote, if not more works with Bulgarian themes, then at least such penetrating summaries of the native as “Bloody Song” or “The Icons Are Sleeping”. Let us also add the long-standing “saving” in Slaveykov’s manuscripts of the anthology with poetically polished folk songs, from which came both the translated anthology “The Shade of the Balkans” (1904), so after his death the anthology of folk songs “Book of Songs” (1917, 1928, 1941, 1961, 1995). And we can reasonably characterize Vazov’s work as an assimilation of European models: of the popular romanticism of Victor Hugo with *La Légende des siècles* – in “The Epic of the Forgotten” or “The Wandering Jew” by Eugene Sue in “Under the Yoke”, which with reservations can be called the first Bulgarian novel, but is certainly the first Bulgarian novel in which “Crime and Punishment” is quoted.

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