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Post-Totalitarian Tendencies in Bulgarian Literature

SOCIALISM AND AFTER

November 10, 1989 marked the beginning of a new, radically different course of development for Bulgaria after 45 years of totalitarian government. Within a very short period, drastic changes in the socio-political structures of the state were introduced. For the first time in decades a real working Parliament was elected. A new Constitution which guaranteed basic human rights was ratified in 1991. The nation voted for the election of a president by direct vote after years of a formally representational electoral system. The process of (re)building a new Bulgaria had begun.

This radical change in the socio-economic and political life of the country had immediate implications for the cultural process, or rather, the more encompassing notion of "cultural life" as it had been known traditionally. The distinction is justified, since one of the consequences from the changing of the system was the drastic repositioning of the creative personality, whose role in the past had often been equivalent to that of a Messiah. The Socialist state took care of its artistic personalities, providing them with material benefits which ensured their faithful serving of the ideological cause. Under the new conditions of an emerging market economy, the system of values proclaiming the superiority of the spiritual over the material, which had for so long at least outwardly governed society, was inverted to such a degree that the significance of anything which cannot be priced was practically obliterated. In this new paradigm the artist was allotted a marginalized position. In an article on the current cultural situation in the former Soviet Union, Caryl Emerson poses a valid question which by analogy refers to the state of affairs in any of the former Eastern block countries: "Russian culture is now ex-Soviet and 'post-Communist.' But do these terms have any positive content?" (353). The answer is far from unequivocal but one thing is certain: the fall of the totalitarian regime and the subsequent socio-political changes triggered

serious shifts in all spheres of culture and these are everywhere reshaping the previously "untouchable" Socialist canon.¹

One of the most difficult theoretical problems after the fall of Soviet-type Socialism is to find an appropriate label for the post-Socialist epoch. A ready to hand solution is the use of coinages with the prefix "post" or the application of already existing concepts which are given a new content according to the new circumstances: this is the "etymological" basis of terms such as *Post-Communism*, *Post-totalitarianism*, or *Post-colonialism*. The question of semantics becomes relevant, however, when we trace the ideological implications of each of these linguistic constructions. These implications are two-fold: external and internal. By external, I mean the content value of the terms for observers, i.e., the non-participants in the former Socialist society for whom, therefore, current processes have no influence on their immediate life and environment. Conversely, the internal implications can be explicated only if taken within the context of the former Socialist milieu.

Post-Communism is a favourite coinage for foreign observers analyzing the current changes in the former Soviet Union and the Eastern European block. Given the fact that the former ruling parties in these countries all bore the name of Communist Parties and had as their primary long-term ideological objective the establishment of a Communist order as defined by Marx and Lenin, it seems to be a suitable formulation. However, with the failure of Communism to be achieved in the 1980s, as Nikita Khrushchev had promised, the term completed the slow but gradual process of its desamantization. While one cannot entirely deny the early revolutionary romanticism of those who truly believed in building a classless society according to the principles of justice, brotherhood, and equality, after the realization of the validity of the Orwellian maxim that "Some are more equal than others," their disillusionment with the idea was bitter and irreversible. After the stages of romanticism and disappointment, the third natural step was ironic indifference and sardonic resignation.

This psychological state was particularly true of the Bulgarians. Considered by many historians and political scientists as the most obedient Soviet satellite, a sixteenth republic, a nation with an inherently slavish psychology, Bulgaria did not have its "Budapest 1956," or "Prague 1968," or the Polish "Solidarnost," or a Czech "Velvet Revolution." But it did not have a Soviet occupational army deployed on its territory, either. The change in 1989 came not as some kind of popular victory after political and social pressure, but (at least formally) as a voluntary act on the part of Todor Zhivkov, the longest ruling leader of the entire Socialist block. In this way, the Socialist regime in Bulgaria did not fail, it gave up power on its own.

1 On the new developments in Bulgarian mass culture and the media, see Deltcheva, forthcoming.

For the external observers from the West, the situation was different. Ever since the "witch hunts" of the 1950s the Communist countries, and by extension their people, were symbols of evil. The juxtaposition between the two worlds was simplistically two-dimensional: black versus white, bad versus good. Naturally, this context of political confrontation generated a metaphoric image — the Iron Curtain — which for many Westerners was perceived literally to be hanging from the sky and dividing the planet. On the other hand, for many intellectuals at Western and North American universities Communism was a utopian ideal to be pursued through revolutionary discourse, not through revolutionary deeds.²

Another term used to define the present situation in East Central Europe is *Post-colonialism*. It is not a new concept; rather an established term has had its semantic boundaries expanded to encompass the ex-Soviet satellites in Europe. Taking into consideration the recent history of the East European countries and their dependence on the Soviet Union as a kind of "colonizer," such a label does seem to be appropriate at first glance, especially for the external observer. Yet, it should be immediately pointed out that the term is largely rejected within the East European community.

Formally, as a geo-political term it denotes the stage in the development of former colonies, following the period of forced social, political, cultural recreation of a Eurocentric model. This analogy, I submit, is not applicable to East Central Europe. First, until the end of World War II the East Central European countries were developing within the socio-economic framework of capitalism. The socio-political changes after the war were at least on the surface instigated by popular movements from within and only "aided" by the Soviet regime. Secondly, all East Central European states had existed for a long time, albeit with interruptions and limitations of their independence, and have their autonomous political, social, economic, and cultural history. From this perspective, the Soviet "colonizer" did not introduce a radically different model which entirely obliterated their national and cultural identity. Thirdly, not all countries of the Eastern block were externally "colonized" to the same degree. One should qualitatively distinguish between Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany, on the one hand, since they were physically occupied by Soviet troops throughout their Socialist stage of development, and Yugoslavia, Romania, and Bulgaria, on the other, which were not in a state of Soviet occupation.

2 Cf. leading Bakhtinian Gary Saul Morson's description of political tendencies in North American universities in a letter to Russian professor of philosophy Vitalii Makhlis: "At present at home [the United States], for one's career the best, that is the most useful [position one can hold] is to be a Marxist, and the worst and least useful — to be an anti-Marxist" (38).

In so far as the term *Post-colonial* is applicable to East Central Europe, it actualizes its geo-political connotations. With regard to culture, it is adamantly rejected by East Central European intellectual circles. Two kinds of attitude to the term are manifested by Bulgarian scholars and writers. It is either taken as an entirely metaphorical comparison: this more tolerant attitude is manifested by the younger generation, e.g., poet Boiko Lambovski or political scientist Vasil Penev. Representatives of the older generation, however, show total intolerance to it. My encounter with poet Georgi Konstantinov, editor-in-chief of *Plamuk* (*Flame*), magazine for literature and literary criticism, prompted an outraged article as to what the "ignorant" Westerners and the North Americans think about Bulgaria, disregarding "the fact that we have had script and books for a thousand years" (Konstantinov 4).³ In an article, sarcastically entitled "Koloniálni razmisli na edna mlada dama" ("Colonial Thoughts of a Young Dame"), Konstantinov proceeds in the following way:

It is clear that in the one-dimensional understanding of some academic celebrities overseas (and not only there) we are still climbing the tree of knowledge. The most we can hope for is to be commended on the fact that we are finally leaving the wilderness and heading towards world civilization — where we can expect our own [Bulgarian] homemade best-sellers, action movies, and "sing-song writers' poetry." (4)

The poet proceeds with nationalistic pathos to enumerate "what the Bulgarians have given to the world" which culminates in the statement that after all "in the course of our dramatic history, no foreigner has succeeded in colonizing us [the Bulgarians] spiritually. Furthermore, there were times when we have played the role of a kind of cultural colonizers" (4). It is not my purpose here to discuss or evaluate the validity of Konstantinov's argument.⁴ Yet, his stand is indicative of the general mood of left-wing intellectual circles in Bulgaria at present. The example appropriately illustrates the negative connotations of the term *Post-colonialism* for most East Central Europeans.

Since a consensus between the views of the external observers and the inside participants in the processes of democratization in East Central Europe is

3 Translations from the Bulgarian are mine throughout.

4 Despite the authoritarian discourse and his seemingly intentional substitution of my topic from Post-colonialism into colonialism (which immediately politicizes what was supposed to be an objective and politically neutral academic dialogue), I think that Konstantinov does have justification to be indignant. There have been far too many negative attitudes in Bulgaria over the past four years, which, again driven by political purposes, have tried to deny any development whatsoever in Bulgarian history of the past 45 years until 1989. The nationalistic pathos in the framework of culture seems to be the most widely-spread approach to counter these views. Konstantinov illustrates the older romantic understanding of the Messianic artistic personality, whose most important function is to inspire pride in the nation.

desirable, I will employ *Post-totalitarian* as a notion which has gained a fair degree of acceptance, and at the same time expresses accurately the essence of both the past and present stages in the development of East Central Europe. Semantically, it most accurately describes the essence of the former Socialist regimes — the lack of democracy in government. The term is also useful because it does not carry the idealistic connotations of "Communism"; nor does it mechanistically transpose the post-colonialist jargon, which is in vogue in the American context, but is still foreign territory for East Central European literary scholarship.

THE LITERARY PROCESS

Similarly to all other social spheres, the literary process in Bulgaria has entered a qualitatively new stage of reevaluating the past. Often, the recent past is completely denied, while Western trends are being transplanted indiscriminately. These new changes and the reshuffling of the existing cultural layers will eventually combine to create a new specific configuration, bearing all the traits of a *national literature*. For more than forty years Socialist Realism was the canonical requirement for the production of literature. Subject matter and style had to be subordinated to the principles of the method. Yet, in spite of the fact that Socialist Realism as developed and established in the Soviet Union was the inflexible doctrine underlying the literary production and art in general, its actual manifestations display specific features and do not overlap entirely with the Soviet model. As Katerina Clark points out, Socialist Realism

is not, first of all, a single doctrine. We now recognize that old bogey, "monolithic Communism," does not exist — that there are, instead, many different Communisms. In much the same way, there are many different Socialist Realisms. Different countries, different political parties, and critics with different *partis pris* have each evolved different definitions of it. (3)

Bulgarian Socialist Realism differed from the Soviet archetype primarily in that it was more moderate in its utopian nature. A better definition for it would be the schematic rather than the utopian representation of life in literature. The material taken from actual life was represented in didactic schemes which were reminiscent of realism but for some "distortions" and "corrections" dispersed throughout the otherwise realistic text. These corrections were related to several well-defined groups: thematic taboos which included the impossibility to write about and expose Socialist-style concentration camps or the abuse of power by the higher party echelons; aesthetic taboos forbidding the parodying of the militia forces, the showing of disrespect towards the Mother-Party, or the idolization of the bourgeoisie as a social class; prescriptive requirements towards the positive hero in terms of his/her origins, world view, profession, etc.; formulaic requirements concerning the organization of the plotline, especially with regard to the optimistic denouement; populist requirements for accessibility of the text to all

social layers expressed in the maxim of bringing literature closer to the ordinary people. Any attempt at breaking away from strictly mimetic representation or any kind of experimentation with either content or form were not looked upon positively and were denounced as "antipopular" by the critics.

Despite these prescriptive restrictions, however, the actual literary production had certain achievements which cannot be denied. In this context, one should not underestimate the changing character of Bulgarian Socialist Realism over the decades. Thus, while in the 1950s this model was still applied seriously, in the 1970s it was merely a useful *façade* of disguise, and in the 1980s it was hardly anything more than empty propaganda. The component of Socialist Realism which perhaps was most difficult to overcome was the notion of the positive hero. At the same time, one should give due credit to those Bulgarian writers who truly opposed (as much as possible) the schematic postulates of the doctrine of Socialist Realism and tried to modify it with every stage of "thawing" in Socialist society. Many writers succeeded in expressing their dissent with reality by various artistic means. Moreover, the public had been trained well enough to receive these signals, which were however faint and coded, yet effective.

A typical case is Ivailo Petrov's controversial novel *Khaika za vulsi* (*Wolf Hunt*). Written and published in the early 1980s, before *perestroika* and Gorbachev, the novel refutes Socialist myths and traces the painful and violent process of forced collectivization in the Bulgarian countryside after 1944.⁵ In terms of method, it is written "more in the tradition of social criticism than socialist realism" (Iovine 253). Despite the official disapproval from the Party apparatus, the novel gained immense popularity among the reading public and it was awarded the Writers' Union prize for fiction in 1986. During that same period Blaga Dimitrova published her novel *Litse* (*Face*) exposing the true state of Socialist society. The book was severely attacked by Bulgarian critics, and later removed from the book-stores, but it had been published and eventually was available to anyone who cared to search for it more stubbornly. Iordan Radichkov's prose and drama, written much in the tradition of allegory and magic realism, always carried political overtones and ambiguous suggestions. The undercurrent allusions of his instant best-seller drama "Obraz i podobie" ("Image and Reflection") about Zhivkov's corrupt and incompetent government were not missed. In general, there was a silent agreement among publishers and censors, that along with the mediocre Socialist Realist mass production, significant literary products would be allowed from time to time. The agreement was kept on both sides.

As I suggested, the changes after Zhivkov's ousting in November 1989 have inevitably influenced the literary process in Bulgaria. Despite a somewhat biased overall assessment of what she describes as "the revolution of 1989 in Eastern Europe," Iovine gives a precise description of the Bulgarian situation when she

claims that it "has largely introduced chaos into Bulgarian literary life and brought contemporary Bulgarian literature to the brink of an identity crisis of almost existential proportions" (255). It seemed that once the totalitarian censorship was done away with, there would be ample ground for free creativity and innovation. Reality, however, has proven different. Although a dramatic shift in the different layers of the Bulgarian literary canon is taking place, the fundamental question which remains to be answered is whether this shift is a result of a reassessment of works and authors based on their artistic merit, or whether this is a new politically-motivated reshuffling of names according to the new conditions in the country and the new influences from abroad. In the almost automatic drive to reject all authors and works related to the past, it is quite possible that the disappearance of the "old" paradigm may eliminate names and titles which have a right to remain in the canon by virtue of their literary importance. Here, I have in mind the radical claims made by some critics who deny that anything of value was produced during the period 1944-89. Compare also Iovine's statement:

As Bulgarian literature begins to put its house into order, to reevaluate its literary past, and to reassess its present, the names (and works) of Dimitur Korudzhiev, Rudenko Yordanov, Georgi Mishev, Viktor Paskhov, Alexander Tomov, Georgi Belev, Boris Khristov, Mariana [sic] Basheva, Vladimir Levchev, Ani Ilkov, Stefan Tsanev, Mikhail Nedelchev, Edvin Sugarev, Nikola Georgiev, and Svetlozar Igov, among others, will begin to replace those of Lyubomir Levchev, Andrey Gulyashki, Bogomil Rainov, Kamen Kalchev, Kostadin Kyulyumov, Dimitur Metodiev, Evtim Evtimov, Liliyana Stefanova, and Panteley Zarev ... in serious discussions of contemporary Bulgarian literature. (254)

The claim that all the authors of the first group were unrecognized previously is highly questionable: most of them were not only members of the BWU (Miriana Basheva, Mishev, Tsanev, etc.) but were published and enjoyed popularity among the reading public. At the same time, numerous scholarly studies and translations abroad have shown that both Lyubomir Levchev and Liliyana Stefanova deserve to be acknowledged as poets on artistic, not only political merit. The case of Rainov demands separate consideration. It is important to make a distinction between Rainov, the Party ideologist and "archcensor," and Rainov, the writer. While in his first role, he was an unrelenting defender of Socialist Realism, with his books he introduced the Bulgarian public to the genre of the Western spy thriller. Situating his protagonists in an alien (non-Bulgarian, non-Socialist) environment, he practically subverted his own ideological position. As Saparev points out in his extensive analysis of Rainov's spy fiction, "The specific literary value of these novels is their ironic first-person narration, which always reminds us that things should not be taken too seriously" (32).

Regardless of the fact that the new socio-economic situation has created serious problems in the cultural sphere, Bulgarian prose, poetry, and drama

5 The totalitarian regime in Bulgaria spans the period September 1944 to November 1989.

thrives. Of the three, poetry is by far the most well-represented. Being a short literary form, it can survive more easily under the new conditions of market economy and the lack of state subventions in publishing. Even a brief overview of the lyrical production over the last three or four years confirms the continuity with the past and the parallel emergence of new tendencies. On the one hand, the older generation of poets such as Pavel Matev, Georgi Konstantinov, Damian Damianov continue to be published, and their poetry has a well-established readership. On the other hand, poets of the younger generation are gaining popularity with their original innovative style. A common phenomenon for both young and old writers is their definitive shift to new subject-matter and new perceptions. If one is to define the most typical feature of the post-totalitarian poetry in Bulgaria, it is its consistent interiorization. The world is present only in so far as it triggers an impulse to turn to the subjective inner world of the lyrical personae with subsequent attempts at philosophical and existentialist generalizations. A brief survey of the production of the younger generation confirms the tendency: Malina Tomova's best-selling *Stigmati* (*Stigmata*), Ekaterina Iosifova's *Podozrenia* (*Suspensions*), Svetla Damianovska's *Etiudi za samota* (*Etudes on Loneliness*), Ivan Teofilov's *Da* (*Yes*), etc. According to Miglena Nikolichina, the new Bulgarian post-totalitarian poetry is defined by the following recurrent characteristics: parody and fundamentalism, recycling, mysticism and narrativity, eroticism and religiosity, lapidarity and fragmentariness (7). It is a poetry which defies the old norms of unity between form and content, in favour of the total annihilation of meaning, negation of the chronological segmentation of time into past and present, and refusal at either formulating or adopting any prescriptive formulas with regard to the state of affairs in the world.

Another prominent line in lyrical poetry traces the painful subjective re-evaluation of the past, the gradual demythologization of old truths and beliefs, and the ultimate recognition that there was much suffering in the past, but that it was as much a result of the old regime's dehumanized politics as of personal irresponsibility, passive resignation, and refusal to counteract. The validity of this existential but at the same time socio-politically determined poetry is also manifested in the specific choice of non-Bulgarian scholars to promote Bulgarian poets and their works. After 1989, at least three anthologies of Bulgarian poetry were published in English (*The Devil's Dozen*, *Young Poets of a New Bulgaria*, *Clay and Star*), in addition to another one, published in 1988 (*Poets of Bulgaria*), in which poets such as Boiko Lambovski, Vladimir Levchev, and Ani Ilkov refuse to give in to resignation and fruitless philosophizing. Rather, they constantly seek answers to concrete problematics, anchored in current reality. The general mood of pessimism is graphically expressed in the miniature poem by Boiko Lambovski, "Liberty":

The King shouted to his vassals: Hey, listen:

The absurdity
of my absurdity
is not my absurdity!
We are all human...
i.e. mammals.
Therefore I order:
Live according
to the laws of Nature!

But the Fool laughed
disguised as a bat
and flew away from the tower. (Tonchev 59; trans. Belin Tonchev)

The impossibility to come to terms with the past terror and conformism is poetically expressed by Levchev's equally concise and exposing poem entitled "Stalin (Saturn-Satan)":

He said:
Believe in me! I am time!

And when they believed in him
he ate his own children. (79; trans. Vladimir Levchev)

There is still much subject matter to be explored and artistically interpreted by the new generation of Bulgarian poets. What is significant is that they do not despair either because of the dire economic situation or the political chaos of the transitional period. Despite the fact that the Poet is no longer the Messiah, the very fact that Bulgarian poetry is not only alive but is experimenting both in form and content suggests that there is still promise which will endure.

Development is also visible in Bulgarian prose although economic factors exert their curbing influence. Having a long tradition both in the genre of the short story and the novel, Bulgarian prose is successfully surviving in spite of the steep competition from imported fiction. 1990 was the year when Svetlozar Igov's long awaited survey of Bulgarian literature was finally published. Completed over a decade ago, *Istoriia na bulgarskata literatura 1878-1944* (*History of Bulgarian Literature 1878-1944*) was left unpublished for a long time owing to its politically incorrect, deideologized approach to the classics. It presents a balanced treatment of authors from the pre-totalitarian stage, including names which had been blacklisted by the Socialist critics because of the "unsuitable" problematics or the "inappropriate" style of their works. Employing aesthetic rather than ideological criteria in his analysis of the literary processes until 1944, Igov establishes a continuity within the overall framework of Bulgarian literature which allows for a more accurate contextualization of the newly emerging prose. Igov's monumental work allows for a lucid assessment

of the current situation and rejects some extreme views (e.g., Encho Mutafov, Jordan Vasilev) that the past should be forgotten and that the current stage is a new moment of explosion (to borrow Lotman's description), qualitatively new, different, and better, in which Bulgarian culture should be created anew.

A natural follow-up of Igov's history is the Bulgarian short-story anthology *Nepobedimata armada* (*The Invincible Armada*), published in 1993. The anthology traces the entire development of the genre. As its three pillars it takes the classic short stories of Ivan Vazov, Elin Pelin, and Jordan Lovkov. Each of these authors marks a specific stage in the development of the genre: the ethnocentric model in Vazov, replaced by the anthropocentric model in Elin Pelin, which Lovkov in turn expands by means of aesthetic and artistic sophistication. The compositional structure of the short story is then further enriched by the folkloric exoticism of Nikolai Khaitov, and the magic realism and political allegory of Jordan Radichkov. The cycle is completed by the youngest generation of prose writers such as Viktor Paskov, Ivailo Dichev, Krasimir Krumov, Zlatomir Zlatanov, etc., with their bold exploits of the post-modernist poetics and world apprehension.

There are two major trends in the subject matter exploited by contemporary Bulgarian prose fiction. On the one hand, there is the return to the totalitarian past and its reevaluation; on the other hand, similarly to poetry, there is a definitive turn to existentialist, universal themes treated from an ostensibly apolitical humanist perspective. Perhaps the best illustration of the first approach in Bulgarian prose is Viktor Paskov's award-winning autobiographical best-seller *Germaniia* — *mrusna prikazka* (*Germany: A Dire Tale*).⁶ The book traces the Socialist existence of a whole generation of young intellectuals who lived through the 1968 Prague intervention, and then immersed in the environment of East Germany — the Socialist *façade* — would eventually see through the whole "diabolical experiment of Socialism" (Karastoyanov 5). Paskov conveys his experiences through the discourse of stylized vulgar lingo and slang, as well as a fragmentary narrative technique which matches his generation's disillusionment with the political reality and the social conditions which deprive the individual of dignity, emotion, and ultimately sanity.

The demythologization of Socialism and of the positive hero is the subject matter of Emil Tonev's *Granitsa* (*The Border*). The author recollects the two years of compulsory military service in a frontier unit guarding the Southern Bulgarian border. Through Tonev's experiences in the barracks one is confronted with a string of violence, abuse, and ignorance rendered by the author's stark narrative technique and purposefully prosaic language. As the reviewer of the book concludes, "[I]t is the total defeat of totalitarian Romanticism" (Shekerova

46). Pantelei Zaprianov's novel *Odranoto kuche* (*The Skinned Dog*)⁷ — the Bulgarian version of *The Lord of the Flies* — depicts the past from the perspective of the Bulgarian working abroad for the purpose of making money. The sequence of events takes place in the closed environment of the lumber-cutting region of Komi, a remote republic within the boundaries of the former Soviet Union. The narrator, himself a member of the community, describes the absurd reality of the workers' greed which gradually results in their complete dehumanization. Socialist realities are also reflected in Georgi Ingilizov's collection of long short stories *Uiski s tsivat na noshi* (*Whisky with the Hues of Night*). Once again the focus of attention is the life of the little people, without Socialist romanticism and pathos. The author traces the experiences of the sailors of the Bulgarian fleet in a deheroicized human vein. The optimistic approach so typical of earlier fiction is substituted for a philosophically subdued treatment of the sailor's life without the stereotypical glory and fame. The mastery of the author is his subtle ability to render simultaneously a "period piece" of the near past which also transcends this temporary status and conveys some eternal problems, independent of nationalistic, political, or social factors.

A further trend in prose is represented by purely apolitical and atemporal works which focus on an existentialist, usually optimistic approach to life. Such is Pavel Pavlov's artistic and ideological position in his novel *Tsigansko liato* (*Indian Summer*). The novel traces several fateful months in the lives of a man and a woman. Without ending on a happy note, it conveys an atmosphere of warmth and idyllic peacefulness — perhaps a necessary glimmer of hope at this moment of disillusionment and lack of ideals in Bulgarian society. Similar universal themes are treated in Emil Stoev's collection of short stories *Zatrupani razkazi* (*Buried Stories*). The problems and quests of the characters are placed in the 1950s but they have not lost their universal status. Stoev's heroes live for their quests and their stories are "as much Bulgarian as they are universal" (Georgieva 6). A pessimistic view of the human predicament is the position of Georgi Chatalbashev's best-seller *Slepiat plukh* (*The Blind Rat*). Through his surrealistic approach in which fantasy and reality intermingle, the author presents a complex treatment of the idea of moral compromise and survival. Despite the psychologically motivated overall pessimism, the author's inherent belief in human goodness and friendship allows him to find light in the tunnel.

7 It is worth mentioning that Zaprianov's novel was published in Germany in 1994, and was viewed by German critics as a significant literary achievement. Zaprianov himself says the following about his memoir novel: "This is a novel reflecting the problems of the East European and in particular the Bulgarian; but on a more global level it deals with the problems of Man" (qtd. in Tokin 11).

6 Paskov's novel received the literary prize "Hermes," awarded from among the 230 books by Bulgarian authors published in 1993.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In his last book, with the symbolic name of *Kul'tura i vzryv* (*Culture and Explosion*), Yuri Lotman completes the methodological transition of the study of culture, developed in the conditions of totalitarianism, by allotting it a qualitatively new position within the process of democratization in Russia and East Central Europe. The principal shift in Lotman's perception of cultural paradigm consists in the rejection of the explosive and often destructive nature of the past and present revolutions in the East in favour of gradual evolution and integration between culture, politics, and history, based on Western tolerance, jurisdiction, and compromise. His vision of future European unity is summarized in the closing statements of his last and final work:

The radical changes in the relations between East and West Europe, which occur before our very eyes, possibly allow us to accept a common all-European ternary system, and to renounce the ideal of destroying "the old order to its very foundations and then" building up a new one on its ruins. Missing this chance would be a historical calamity. (270; my translation)

My brief survey of Bulgarian literature, while hardly exhausting all current processes and emerging trends, is suggestive of one important proposition: in spite of economic stagnation and political chaos, cultural vitality has not been eliminated. Moreover, there is a consistent attempt to place culture as a mediator between the current reality and the recent past. In this context, Lotman's "recipe" for integration, gradualness, and tolerance and the eventual overcoming of the boundaries for the establishment of a truly "united Europe" seems to be not only Bulgaria's best alternative, but perhaps its only possible path to a better future, thus befitting itself and Europe as a whole.

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