

Todor Hristov

## The Gift of Literature

The paper will describe a particular literature dealing with the question “what have Bulgarians given to the world”. That traumatic question haunted the Bulgarian culture for more than a century, and it was asked with particular intensity in periods of crisis – after the Balkan Wars and after 1989. It was further complicated by the Bulgarian EU accession. The authors usually claimed that what Bulgarians had given to the world was literature, and what made this literature of any value, was the identity it represented. The goal of the paper however will be to describe the economic language pervading those claims. Studying that language will show that Bulgarian literature was constituted as a gift responding to the gift of the world literature, yet ever unable to repay the debt incurred by its initial gift, and trying to alleviate its indebtedness by means of a specific language of exchange. I believe that studying the literature on the value of Bulgarian literature will demonstrate that the notions of identity, recognition, value, translation, national and world literature have been inscribed in a scriptural economy blending gift and exchange in a peculiar way. I hope I will be able to show that this economy emerged as a modification of the scriptural economy the notion of world literature had been embedded in, and that it had been globalised into a universal literary economy.

### 1. “*Entropa*”

In 2009, on the occasion of Czech presidency of the EU Council, the artist David Czer-ny presented an installation called *Entropa*. The installation was intended as visual metaphors of stereotypes about European nations. The visual metaphor of France identified it with strike; Belgium was presented as a half-eaten chocolate box, Greece as burned forests, and so on. Bulgaria however was presented as a set of pre-modern looking toilets, generally known in Central Europe as Turkish toilets, superimposed on the national map. Before it was eventually covered with plastic, the exhibit produced three types of responses in Bulgaria:

1. this is unacceptable;
2. this is true;
3. this is art.

The last two responses in effect worked together despite their incoherence, because if saying or showing something is art, it cannot be unacceptable. As art does not claim reality, its claims cannot be unacceptable on account of reality. And since the claims that the exhibit is unacceptable on account of reality are unacceptable, then the visual metaphor of the exhibit is not really untrue.

Yet how can a representation of a national territory as a set of toilets be acceptable, not untrue to reality or even true? Why is it not hate speech, defamation or racism, why is it not an offence to political correctness we have heard so much complaints about?

This paper will try to offer a tentative explanation to that. I will claim that a statement is true if one cannot state the opposite in a defensible manner, and that one cannot state the opposite to a violent artistic representation, first, because it is art, second, because the claims that it is unacceptable are readable as evidence of the deeper and uneasy truth it reveals, of its revealing a secret which one would not want to reveal precisely for its truth, and third, because of the subject position it is presented from. In order to do that, I will start from a somewhat different yet historically recorded statement: Bulgarians are incapable of literature.

## 2. *Bulgarians and Literature*

How Can the Statement that Bulgarians Are Incapable of Literature Be True?

I have stipulated that it is true to the extent that it is undeniable. Yet it has been obviously deniable even at the dawn of modern Bulgarian literature, as for example the well-known poem by Stefan Izvorski with an acrostic “Is it not possible to write poetry in Bulgarian? Stefan Izvorski proves it is possible”.

Therefore statements like this are undeniable as far as one chooses not to deny them. What is more, they are undeniable as far as a Bulgarian chooses not to deny them, for their endorsement by a non-Bulgarian would multiply the derogation, but if they are endorsed by a Bulgarian, this endorsement would be readable as a recognition of their truth value, or possibly even as a confession<sup>1</sup>.

Yet how can one choose not to deny a derogatory statement about oneself?

I will claim that one chooses to recognise a derogatory statement about oneself because one owes that recognition, because one is already indebted to the other who makes the derogatory statement, and that this debt is explainable by a particular scriptural economy<sup>2</sup>. I will try to describe the literary version of this economy on the basis of a book by a relatively marginal 20<sup>th</sup> century Bulgarian writer, Stilijan Čilingirov, *Kakvo e dal bălgarinăt na drugite narodi* [*What the Bulgarians Have Given to the Other Nations*]<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Foucault 2009: 161-256.

<sup>2</sup> Certaeu 2000: 155-156.

<sup>3</sup> Čilingirov 1940.

### 3. *Čilingirov and the Bulgarian Nation*

Čilingirov's book has the ambition to prove the value of the Bulgarian nation.

In order to do that, Čilingirov offers a collection of facts ranging from the invention of the Cyrillic alphabet to remarks on Bulgarian anthropology and a list of renowned Bulgarian doctors practicing abroad.

Since the facts are intended as evidence of value, their description is recurrently interrupted by an economic language. Of course, this economic language has not been invented by Čilingirov, its instances are widely scattered through poetry, prose, essays, articles or even historical narratives after the 1870s, both in Bulgarian and other languages.

The principal merit of Čilingirov's book lies in the distillation of this economic language. As the title of the book suggests, it is articulated as a language geared at describing what Bulgarians have given to the world, and therefore as a language of gift.

Yet a gift can be inscribed in different economies<sup>4</sup>. In order to explain the defining features of the economy exemplified by Čilingirov's book, I will contrast his account of the invention of Cyrillic alphabet with an earlier one.

In a founding text of the Bulgarian national revival, *Slavonic-Bulgarian History*, St. Paisij also described the invention of Cyrillic alphabet as a gift:

1. St. Cyril was God-given;
2. he gave his alphabet to the Slavs;
3. the Bulgarians were the first to accept St. Cyril's gift;
4. Russians and Austrian Serbs claim that they were the first to accept it on account of the Bulgarians being illiterate;
5. yet Bulgarians were illiterate because of living under the double oppression of the Ottoman empire and the Phanariot church authorities;
6. Russians and Austrian Serbs should be thankful that God did not give them the oppression He gave to Bulgarians;
7. Russians and Austrian Serbs should thank the Bulgarians they did not give up their religion despite the oppression they were given by God<sup>5</sup>.

Čilingirov described the invention of Cyrillic alphabet along the following lines:

1. There are only two imperial alphabets which have succeeded in conquering other continents, Cyrillic and Latin.
2. There are only two alphabets of genius used in literary works of universal value, Cyrillic and Latin.

<sup>4</sup> Derrida 1994: 6-7, 15-16, 24, 28-30.

<sup>5</sup> Paisij 1963: 83-84.

3. Civilisation has been born in Europe and each of the alphabets, Latin and Cyrillic, covers almost half of Europe.
4. Progress is forged in Europe, and Europe is split between Latin and Cyrillic.
5. As half of Europe uses Cyrillic and as progress and civilisation are products of Europe in general, one cannot say which half of Europe is more important to progress and civilisation, therefore one cannot say if Latin is more important than Cyrillic.
6. St. Cyril was a Bulgarian Slav, and the language on which he based his alphabet was given to him by his Bulgarian parents.
7. St. Cyril gave to the world the alphabet of half Europe, the alphabet which has made possible the production of progress, civilisation and literature in half Europe.
8. Since St. Cyril was Bulgarian, he was given to the world by Bulgarians, so Cyrillic alphabet was given to the world by the Bulgarian nation.
9. Cyrillic alphabet allowed the establishment of a Bulgarian national church, it made Bulgarian a church language and a language of religious literature; since this was the first national church in Europe, the first vernacular church language and the first vernacular literary language, Bulgarians gave to the world a precedent of modernity.
10. Russian literature is of universal importance and as it is written in Cyrillic, Cyrillic alphabet is a condition of its possibility; therefore by giving the Cyrillic alphabet to the world Bulgarians made Russian literature possible, and therefore made possible one of its universal literatures.
11. In the nineteenth century Russians returned the gifts they had received from Bulgaria by importing literature in Bulgaria, and by supporting the Bulgarian enlightenment and liberation movements.
12. Foreign academics and writers also recognise the language of St. Cyril as Bulgarian, as well as St. Cyril himself as Bulgarian.
13. Other foreign academics and writers recognise the origin of St. Cyril as Greek, yet this misrecognition is an effect of misinformation or hidden political agenda.
14. Some Bulgarians endorse the claim that St. Cyril was of Greek origin because they abide by the authority of foreign academics rather than by the truth.
15. Bulgarian modernisation has consisted in adopting from the already modern European nations anything they can give. This in turn depreciated anything Bulgarian because Bulgarians consider themselves unable to respond to the gifts they have received from modern nations. Yet Bulgarians have already given enough to the world not to be considered worthless<sup>6</sup>.

Now, if one compares the accounts of the invention of Cyrillic alphabet offered by St. Paisij and Čilingirov, one will be able to detect at least the following differences:

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<sup>6</sup> Čilingirov 1940: 16-29.

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| <p>1.1. Cyrillic alphabet is given by St. Cyril who is God-given.</p> <p>2.1. Cyrillic alphabet is given to the people that use it, Bulgarians, Russians, Serbs, etc.</p> <p>3.1. A gift is not reducible to a given. It can consist in what God does not give, or in not giving up, or in being true to a past gift.</p> <p>4.1. A gift is given to the extent it is offered, even if the other fails to take it, as in the case of Moravian Slavs.</p> <p>5.1. The gift of Cyrillic alphabet is an event which can be ultimately reciprocated only by gratitude.</p> | <p>1.2. Cyrillic alphabet is given by St. Cyril and was given to the world by the Bulgarian nation.</p> <p>2.2. Cyrillic alphabet is given to the Slavs but ultimately to the world, and it belongs to the world as inheritance even if the world would not use it.</p> <p>3.2. A gift consists in something given as the alphabet, or as the precedent of vernacular literary language, or in general, as anything that can be inherited.</p> <p>4.2. A gift is given to the extent it is accepted, and it is accepted if it is incorporated in the inheritance of other nations, therefore if it is exchanged between nations.</p> <p>5.2. If a nation is unable to reciprocate the gifts it has received from other nations, it is becoming depreciated and possibly worthless. A worthless nation is doomed.</p> |
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If we sum up the differences between the two accounts then, Čilingirov, in contrast with Paisij, represents the invention of Cyrillic alphabet as a gift by the Bulgarian nation to the world, accepted by other nations, enabling other gifts to the world by other nations, and eventually returned to the Bulgarian nation as a progress or literature. Furthermore, his account of the invention of Cyrillic alphabet is framed by considerations of value, related for example to the questions or the questioning of the value of Bulgarian nation. Čilingirov represents the invention of Cyrillic alphabet not merely as a gift, but as a gift of value, a value given to and circulating among the nations of the world, therefore as a political economy.

In the following paragraphs I will try to outline the double articulation of literature as a gift and value, its imbrications with the emergence of modern literature, and the hegemonic articulations it is geared to produce.

#### 4. *Literature Is More Than Books*

Books come at a price. Let us assume that the price of a book depends on its value, which in the final analysis depends on the amount of socially necessary labour needed to produce the book.

Imagine that a piece of literature is published as a book. If it is indeed literature, it should be of more value than the book because it would need more labour than the production of the book, let us say, the labour of being written.

Now, publishing was probably the first fully capitalized industry<sup>7</sup>. And the advent of print capitalism made the labour of writing, the work of literature productive, because it allowed a print capitalist to produce his or her commodities.

As a consequence, the work of literature also came to be able to bring a price, for example by being paid in the form of copyright, and not given as a gift to a patron in exchange for other gifts, for example wealth, support or protection<sup>8</sup>.

Yet the value of literature does not depend on the amount of socially necessary labour needed to produce a poem, because socially necessary labour reflects the average labour-time needed to produce a commodity in a given period of time, and literary work is singular, irreproducible and therefore unaccountable in terms of average labour-time.

However, there are other kinds of value as well which are irreproducible and only indirectly productive, for example patents, brands, copyright, recognisability, corporate organisation, culture of innovation, customer confidence or locality. Since the 1970s such forms of value have been customarily subsumed under the concept of intangible assets<sup>9</sup>.

As in 2008 intangible assets amounted to 70% of the value of world economy, making reliable estimates of their value came to be an important task of contemporary political economy<sup>10</sup>. Currently, there are basically three overlapping methods to account for the value of an intangible asset<sup>11</sup>:

1. The value of an asset is the price it can be sold for.
2. Since intangible assets are only indirectly productive, one can identify their value with the share value that cannot be explained by directly productive assets, for example by subtracting from the selling price of a brand the value of directly productive factors as labour or raw materials.
3. An asset is valuable to the extent it can be exchanged for other assets, for example given to a customer for money. Intangible assets however have the peculiar feature that if they are given to a customer, this does not take them from the seller. For example if I sell my text, you can take a copy with you, but you will not be entitled to take the book from me and you cannot claim that the text is already yours. Yet why would you pay for an asset you would be unable to take with you? You would, of course, pay to share it. But if this is the case, then an intangible asset is more valuable if more customers would pay to share it. Now let us call assets that more people would like to share more liquid<sup>12</sup>. An asset is more liquid if it is shareable by clients with as diverse backgrounds, interests, incomes as possible, in as diverse situations or circumstances as possible. But

<sup>7</sup> Rose 1991: 47-48.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew 2006: 35-58; Eliot, Rose 2007: 234-235, 253-255.

<sup>9</sup> Cohen 2005: 32-33.

<sup>10</sup> Adams *et al.* 2010: 96.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen 2005: 92-112; Adams *et al.* 2010: 98-105.

<sup>12</sup> Cohen 2005: 32-33.

then an asset is more liquid if it is more fluid, that is if it can be shared by as divergent agents as possible, if it can circulate in as diverse situations as possible. Therefore, in the final analysis, an intangible asset is all the more valuable all the more it is fluid.

Calculating a market price or a share value that is unexplainable by directly productive assets is not readily applicable to literature. However, many works of literature are intangible assets that many want to share, and many works of literature are liquid enough to be readable in circumstances centuries detached from the circumstances they were produced in.

This fluidity is essential to literary value. If my work is unable to circulate beyond my social network for example, it would not be generally considered a work of value. Alternatively, a work circulating into foreign languages would be generally considered of greater value than a work that has never been translated.

The fluidity of a literary work, its readability beyond its point of origin, its ability to circulate in foreign circumstances, communities, classes, races, genders, contexts, times, languages and cultures shapes even the most staunchly humanist, conservative and anti-economic definitions of literary value.

But if the value of a literary work depends on its ability to circulate in foreign contexts, times, languages and cultures, then literary value ultimately depends on translatability. In *Grundrisse* Marx, who opposed any economic theory failing to distinguish material from spiritual production, used translatability as an allegory of value in capitalist societies:

To compare money with language is not less erroneous. Language does not transform ideas, so that the peculiarity of ideas is dissolved and their social character runs alongside them as a separate entity, like prices alongside commodities. Ideas do not exist separately from language. Ideas which have first to be translated out of their mother tongue into a foreign language in order to circulate, in order to become exchangeable, offer a somewhat better analogy; but the analogy then lies not in language, but in the foreignness of language<sup>13</sup>.

If we rearticulate this allegory into a definition of literary value, then in order to have value, to be able to circulate and ultimately to be exchanged and shared, or to be more precise, shared in exchange for money, a literary work should be translatable into a foreign language.

Yet what makes a work of literature translatable?

To begin with, in order to be translatable, the work should be foreign. A Bulgarian text is untranslatable to Bulgarian. Any translation to the same language would be superfluous, or for that matter any translation into the same context, situation, etc.

Second, in order to be translatable, a work of literature should be worth translating it. Then what makes a work valuable enough to be translated?

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<sup>13</sup> Marx 1973: 163. Cited after Spivak 1987: 165.

Let me propose a formal yet reliable answer to that question: a work of literature is valuable enough to be translated if it is worth knowing, and not necessarily because it reveals a profound knowledge, a singular experience, an inspiring perspective, but merely because the text written in it is worth knowing.

Third, a literary work is more translatable if it remains foreign after being translated, or otherwise the translation would strip it from its foreignness and it would be unable to offer anything worth knowing. So the foreignness should exceed the foreign language, and the value of its translation would depend on this excess of foreignness over language.

Now, if we sum up the features of translatability outlined above, a work of literature is translatable and therefore it is a work of value, if it provides foreign knowledge that is worth to be known, or to put it in other words, if it provides knowledge valuable to foreigners.

## 5. *Influence*

The concept of influence is crucial to the political economy of Čilingirov's book.

1. Influence is a gift because it consists in taking something from the source of influence, for example an idea, a technology, a genre.
2. Influence is a gift without giving because its source does not lose what it gives, for example an influential technology is not taken from its inventor by the fact that it has been given to others.
3. Influence is hierarchical because what is subjected to influence is secondary to its source, hence it produces the obligation to recognise the preeminence or the superiority of the source.
4. Influence produces the obligation to return. In order to understand the nature of that obligation, we need to take into account the political relevance of influence which Čilingirov suggested in speaking of dominance or hegemony without offering an explicit account. It can be tentatively outlined as follows:
  - 4.1. Enlightenment proclaimed the sovereign right of the enlightened nations to govern themselves. But at the same time it challenged other nations or peoples to either prove that they are enlightened as well, or to recognize that they are unenlightened and therefore incapable to govern themselves, and therefore they should be governed by the enlightened nations (as children should be governed by adults until they are delivered from their immaturity).
  - 4.2. Of course, the domination of North Atlantic states was achieved by excessive violence or threats of excessive violence unmatched by any of their opponents. Yet their domination was founded as well on obligations produced by credit or by claims to right to dominance.
  - 4.3. To disprove the claim that it is incapable of governing themselves, a nation had to prove its enlightenment. But since enlightenment was defined and indeed embodied

by the enlightened nations, one had to prove one's enlightenment in their terms. In order to prove oneself in terms of others however, one should take their terms and hence succumb to their influence. Therefore proving oneself enlightened referred to the influence of the enlightened nations and as this influence was articulated as a gift, proving oneself enlightened was articulated as a response to that gift, as a return gift.

In his book Čilingirov iterated the claim of historians of literature that modern Bulgarian literature emerged under the influence of other European literatures. Therefore he claimed that the Bulgarian nation received literature as a gift.

The gift of literature however produced an obligation to return it. As modern literature was considered a gift of value, it produced the obligation to return a gift of equal value. Being unable to produce a gift of equal value in return would prove a nation unequal to the enlightened ones, unable to be equal to them, undeserving to be equal, and therefore deserving to be dominated by them.

In order to return the gift of literature with literature of equal value however, a nation should itself produce literary works of value. Yet literary works are valuable to the extent they are translatable, and they are translatable to the extent they give valuable knowledge to foreigners. And as the gift of literature should be returned to the source of influence, and this source of influence is the enlightened nations that dominate the world, literature is of value to the extent it gives valuable knowledge to the enlightened nations, the masters of the world.

But what makes knowledge valuable to a foreigner?

One cannot claim that knowledge is valuable if the foreigners do not value it. And as the foreigners are in dominant position, one cannot make them value knowledge they do not want to value. Therefore knowledge is valuable to foreigners if they decide to value it, and consequently a literary work is of value to the extent a foreigner decides that it offers him or her knowledge worth knowing, knowledge he or she values.

But if this is the case, then returning the gift of literature, producing literary works of value produces a subject position entitling one to decide on value, to recognise the value of a work or to reject it as a worthless gift proving not the value of the nation that offers it but its inability to offer anything of value, its inequality, and potentially that it does not deserve to be equal but rather deserves to be dominated by others.

Of course, this subject position cannot be occupied by any subject. In order to be entitled to decide on value, one should be foreign to the nation to which the work in question belongs. Furthermore, one should be enlightened enough to be able to know the value of a literary work, so the weight of one's decision would depend on the weight of one's knowledge, or more precisely, on the weight of one's entitlement to know (the judgment of a professor would be of more weight than the judgment of a connoisseur, and the judgment of a connoisseur – of more weight than the judgment of an ordinary reader).

If one fulfils those conditions, if one is a foreign subject supposed to know, then one can claim that he is in a position to decide on the value of a literary work, and if the claim

turns out to be successful, then one is entitled to decide not only on literature but, through his decisions on literature, to decide as well on the value of other nations, on their equality, and ultimately on their right to freedom.

Indeed, in his book Čilingirov tried to oppose that entitlement. Yet in order to make his opposition more forceful, and in order to avoid his vulnerability to objections that he was partial because of not being a foreigner, or that he was not in a position to know better than subjects that are supposed to know more, he opposed the entitlement of foreigners to know the value of Bulgarian literature better than the Bulgarians by referring to other foreigners, and therefore by reproducing the entitlement he tried to subvert.

## 6. *Knowledge*

Knowledge is often controversial.

Imagine that I have written a piece of literature which, as far as I know, is worth reading. Then a critic reads it and says that it has no value. The knowledge about my work will become controversial because the knowledge of the critic would conflict with my knowledge.

Of course, this conflict of knowledge is resolvable if one type of knowledge becomes stronger. The critic can say for example that he knows from literature, and if I am unable to oppose his claim, then my knowledge will become indefensible.

But indefensible knowledge does not simply disappear. I might well lose the argument with the critic, but still believe that I have produced a work of value, a work ahead of my time which future generations will appreciate. Of course, being indefensible, my knowledge would seem private, partial, idiosyncratic or lacking truth to anyone who chooses to side with the stronger knowledge.

Let us call hegemony any knowledge which is so powerful that it makes knowing the opposite indefensible, following rearticulation of the concept developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe<sup>14</sup>. Then the double articulation of literature as gift and value produces hegemony. Because if in returning the gift of literature I am entitling the “foreigner supposed to know” to decide on the value of my work and potentially on my freedom, then I am entitling him or her to know my value better than myself, which makes knowing what has been deemed unworthy of knowledge by the “foreigner” an indefensible, partial, private, publicly unacceptable knowledge.

In order to explain the hegemonic effect of this double articulation of literature, I will sum up the story of an obscure 19<sup>th</sup> century Bulgarian poet, Georgi Pešakov, who made an attempt to return the gift of poetry via returning a gift by poetry.

In 1824 Jurij Venelin published a book entitled *Ancient and Contemporary Bulgarians in their Political, National, Historical and Religious Relation to Russians*. The book was probably the first study focusing exclusively on Bulgarians. What was more, Venelin

<sup>14</sup> Thomas 2009: 37-39.

rejected the popular theory that Bulgarians were of Tatar origin and proposed the theory of their Slavic origin, and that was fraught with consequences, because if Bulgarians were of Tatar origin, they were related to Ottomans, and no foreign nation could claim the right to intervene in the affairs of the Ottoman empire in order to protect them from violations of their rights. In effect, the Bulgarian public responded to Venelin's book with enthusiasm. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Venelin's authority became so matchless that after he suggested that important features of modern Bulgarian language, as its analytic nature or the definitive article, are erroneous and explainable only by the unenlightened life Bulgarians were living under the Ottoman oppression, several Bulgarian linguists excluded those features from their descriptions of Bulgarian language.

In 1837 Georgi Pešakov wrote an ode to Venelin, which circulated widely in manuscript copies. The ode was composed as an expression of eternal gratitude to Venelin by the Bulgarians and their mother Bulgaria. As the bulk of the Bulgarian poems at the time however, the ode was composed as an exemplification that the Bulgarians had received the gift of literature, and that literature now is their gift, both in the sense of being literary gifted and of offering their literary gifts to the enlightened world.

Venelin often complained about the inability of the Bulgarians to appreciate what he did for them, and to respond by giving to him information of value to his research. So in 1838 his principal Bulgarian correspondent, Vasil Aprilov, sent him a copy of the ode Pešakov had dedicated to him. Then Venelin wrote to Aprilov:

Заедно с това приятно писмо аз получих наистина и благодарствена ода [...] Понеже г. Пешаков е писал не на чужди езици, а на своя роден език, то той има право да заеме едно място в историята на своята отечествена просвета. [...] Приятно ми е да знам, че има поне един българин, който най-сетне е пожелал да оцени моето слабо адвокатство в полза за съотечествениците му; но щеше да ми е още по-приятно, ако ми беше изпратил народна песен<sup>15</sup>.

[Along with this pleasant letter I have received indeed an ode of gratitude [...] As Mr. Pešakov has written it in his own language rather than in foreign languages, he is entitled to a place in the literary history of his homeland. [...] I am delighted to know that there is at least one Bulgarian who finally decided to appreciate my weak advocacy in favour of his countrymen, yet I would be even more delighted if he had sent me a folksong.]

In the context of this paper the response of Venelin can be rephrased as follows:

1. the ode is a historical event;
2. it is however a local event, an event in the Bulgarian history;
3. it is only a local event, because its value consists in being written in Bulgarian;
4. yet the ode is not a global event, as it has no value to enlightened foreign readers.

<sup>15</sup> Cited after Penev 1978: 704. Hereafter translations are mine [T.H.].

The response of Venelin was quite ambiguous as he both recognised the value of the ode to Bulgarians and denied recognition of its value, both accepted the gift and refused it the value of literature, thus putting Pešakov in the situation of being unable to provide a gift of value and at the same time being appreciated for his honest intentions.

Pešakov had probably believed in the value of his work. But now he could not claim that his work was of literary value because this would mean to claim that he knew of literature better than Venelin, and, what was more, that he knew better which literature was of universal value and therefore of value to foreigners.

Yet even if his claim of literary value was now indefensible, Pešakov probably read the ambiguous response by Venelin as recognition that his work was of local value, of value to the Bulgarian literature, because after Venelin died in 1839, he wrote an elegy called *Ridanie na smert' Jurija Venelina* (*Lamentation on the Death of Jurij Venelin*).

In 1841 Vasil Aprilov published a book intended to inform the Russian public on Bulgarian enlightenment. The book was intended as a proof that Bulgarians were walking the path to enlightenment, so they deserved the support of an enlightened nation as Russia. In order to avoid the risk of his book being misread as evidence that if Bulgarians were enlightening themselves, they were not yet an enlightened nation, Aprilov dedicated the first section of his book to the history of Bulgarians, to the gifts Russians received from them, most notably the Cyrillic alphabet and the Slavic Orthodox Church language, and to their tragic fall under the Ottoman oppression which made it impossible for them to be enlightened earlier. Then Aprilov offered evidence on the Bulgarian enlightenment, a list of seven books published in Bulgarian and two more waiting to be published as well as short descriptions of the most prominent Bulgarian schools. As literature was the primary mark of any enlightenment, in order to exemplify the emerging Bulgarian literature, at the end of his book Aprilov published Pešakov's *Lamentation* on the death of Venelin. Moreover, Aprilov published the poem without translation, hoping to demonstrate at the same stroke the gratitude of the Bulgarians for the gifts they received from Russia as well as the closeness of the Bulgarian language to Russian, and hence of the Bulgarians to Russians<sup>16</sup>.

Then a famous Russian critic, Vissarion Belinskij, responded to Pešakov's poem with the following comment:

Ако те са внушени от чувство на благодарност, признателност – длъжни сме да похвалим автора за това чувство – обаче стиховете са твърде лоши. [...] Съвсем не ни се харесва това Ридание на смърт Ю.И. Венелина. Впрочем може би и това трябва да се каже: Може би тия стихове да са хубави за хора, които познават българския език и българския вкус на поезия – не оспорваме. Учете се, учете се, добри, почтени българи<sup>17</sup>!

<sup>16</sup> Aprilov published as well Pešakov's ode to Venelin in a prose translation, which was still vulnerable to the misreading that this exemplification of Bulgarian poetry was not worth translating into poetry, as poetry, and so lacked poetic value.

<sup>17</sup> Cited after Penev 1978: 706.

[If the poem is animated by feelings of gratitude and recognition – we are obliged to admire the author for that feeling – yet the poem is very bad. [...] We totally dislike this lament on the death of Ju.I. Venelin. Probably one should also say this: Maybe this poem is good for those who know Bulgarian language and Bulgarian taste for poetry, you cannot argue with that. Learn, learn, good, honest Bulgarians!]

In the context of this paper Belinskij's comment is reducible to the following set of statements:

1. This is an example of Bulgarian literature;
2. It has no literary value;
3. It might have local value yet its local value is irrelevant;
4. Notwithstanding its foreign language, the poem does not need translation, for as it is merely of local value, a foreigner would not want to know what is written in it;
5. The intention to offer gratitude to an enlightened author, or to offer evidence that Bulgarians are trying to educate themselves should be appreciated;
6. However, as the poem has no value, it is unacceptable notwithstanding the good intentions;
7. Therefore the poem proves that Bulgarians are quite unenlightened, as they are unable to recognize literary value, or in other words, as they misrecognise as gift of literature what is actually nothing more than a gift of literacy;
8. Despite their good intentions, Bulgarians are as yet quite unequal to the enlightened nations, because they are displaying themselves as unable to offer anything more than literacy in return to literature enlightened nations have given to them.

As Pešakov's *Lamentation* was conceived as a funeral gift to Venelin in response to what he had given to Bulgarians, Belinskij's comment amounted to rejecting that gift as a worthless offering, while at the same time fulfilling the obligation to accept the gift by recognising its good intentions. So Belinskij's response is ultimately reducible to the following formula: "I know that you wanted to return my gifts, and I appreciate that, but you are unable to return my gifts because what you offer in return is worthless".

What was more, rejecting Pešakov's poem as worthless offering allowed Belinskij to extend his comment from the value of Bulgarian literature to the value of Bulgarians:

Учете се, учете се, добри, почтени българи! [...] Да, просвещавайте се! Дори пишете стихове, щом не можете да минете без тях<sup>18</sup>!

[Learn, learn, good, honest Bulgarians! [...] Yes, enlighten yourselves! Even write poems, if you cannot do without it!]

<sup>18</sup> Cited after Penev 1978: 706.

Let us once again reduce this comment to a set of statements relevant to the conceptual framework of this paper:

1. Bulgarians are not enlightened;
2. They are incapable of literature;
3. However, they write literature;
4. They probably need their literature;
5. Yet their literature is of need to nobody else but themselves;
6. Still the enlightened world is merciful and compassionate to let them produce their needless literature;
7. The representatives of enlightened nations are merciful enough to hint at rather than openly disclose the inability of Bulgarians to do literature;
8. Being merciful as they are, the representatives of enlightened nations display themselves as both morally and intellectually superior;
9. Even if Bulgarians strive to be equal to the enlightened nations, their claim to equality provokes but irony.

How could Pešakov defend his knowledge that his work was a work of literature or that Bulgarians are capable of literature or that Bulgarians are equal to the enlightened nations, if he faced this enlightened irony?

He could not possibly claim the literary value of his work, and as his work was the only work of literature Belinskij laid his eyes on, he could not plausibly claim that Bulgarian literature is of value. So he could only hope that in the future Bulgarian literature would produce works of value, translatable works.

However, even this hope would turn out to be superfluous. Because almost a century later, when Bulgarian writers have produced masterpieces, knowing the opposite of what Belinskij claimed was still indefensible.

In the late 1920s in his influential lectures on the history of Bulgarian literature, Bojan Penev dedicated a couple of pages to Pešakov. Yet lectures were intended to give knowledge and what was more, to give valuable rather than worthless knowledge. Opposing Belinskij would not produce any knowledge of value, it would rather produce knowledge of questionable value and ultimately undermine the value of Bojan Penev's knowledge. So Bojan Penev would never think of opposing Belinskij. Instead, he extended Belinskij's verdict to the poetry of the whole period:

Тия стихотворни опити нямат нищо общо дори с най-обикновените и елементарни поетични форми. Тук липсва не само размер – нито едно от тия стихотворения не е плод на поетически талант – досадно е не само да се четат, но дори и да се говори за тях<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Penev 1978: 708.

[Those poetic attempts have nothing to do with even the most common and basic poetic forms. They lack not only meter – none of those poems is a fruit of a literary gift – they are wearisome not only to read but also to talk about.]

Moreover, the emergence of Bulgarian literary history made even more indefensible the claim that the work of Pešakov was of value, as it lost its value as an event in the history of Bulgarian literature, and therefore its local value. The only value Pešakov's poems could be claimed to retain was the one of evidence. In 1903 Pešakov's poem was republished in a paper of a prominent scholar of Bulgarian history, Vasil Zlatarski, as an evidence of Venelin's influence on Bulgarians, which in effect reduced the value of Pešakov's gift of poetry to recognition of the cultural gifts the Bulgarian nation had received from Russia<sup>20</sup>. In 2010, Pešakov's poems were quoted at length in a study which ascribed to them the value of evidence that some Bulgarians considered Venelin the true originator of the untranslatable Bulgarian movement called Resurrection, and hence as evidence that Bulgarians are still not enlightened enough to know that the work of St. Paisij, to which they ascribe the value of a beginning of the Resurrection, is of questionable value from a non-national, global or foreign perspective<sup>21</sup>.

#### 7. *Multiculturalism and Discrimination*

Multiculturalism has promised to end discrimination of non-dominant cultures.

In 1988 the American writer Saul Bellow, in an interview to the *New Yorker*, asked: "Who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus? The Proust of the Papuans? I would be glad to read him". The question implied that the Zulus had not a Tolstoy, that one was entitled not to read their writings, or more importantly, that one was entitled not to want to know about their culture.

The question asked by Saul Bellow was considered a provocation to multiculturalism as the older imperial policies reverberated in it. It was considered a provocation because multiculturalism promised to amend the imperial violence on dominated cultures or communities justified by claims of their unequal value. Yet multiculturalism proposed to amend imperial violence by recognising their value. "Zulus would have their Tolstoy, and we would be glad to read it", multiculturalist policies claimed<sup>22</sup>.

But offering recognition to other cultures still involves domination, because in order to be recognised, in order not to entitle the other to refuse recognition, one should present his or her culture as a culture of value, as a translatable culture, understandable to foreigners, giving the foreigner what they would want to know, and therefore to subject himself or herself to their judgment. In order to have the value of their culture recognised, Zulus

<sup>20</sup> Zlatarski 1903.

<sup>21</sup> Hranova 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Tejlăr 1999: 57-58.

would still need to have a Tolstoy, to present their writers as local versions of Tolstoy, or in other words, as local versions of literature, to make their writers knowable to those who would be supposed to know of literature, to recognise the supremacy of the original Tolstoy and, in general, to the cultures whose influence could be read in Zulu literature.

Today, it is commonly claimed that multiculturalism is dead. Yet multiculturalism is not dead because the ethnic minorities refused the recognition so generously offered by the dominant nation or, for that matter, because they refused the integration they were offered. Multiculturalism is dead because the minorities that make the European economy work by providing cheap labour and by enduring their exclusion from the social, political and civil rights enjoyed by the dominant nation have refused to subject themselves to the judgments of dominant nations' representatives on their value.

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### *Abstract*

Todor Hristov  
*The Gift of Literature*

The traumatic question “what has Bulgarian literature given to the world” acquired particular intensity in periods of crisis such as the Balkan Wars, and after 1989 and the subsequent Bulgarian EU accession. It is generally accepted that the value that Bulgarian literature transmits to the world lies in the identity it represented. The goal of the paper is to show that Bulgarian literature was constituted as a gift responding to the gift of world literature, yet ever unable to repay the debt incurred by its initial gift, and trying to alleviate its indebtedness by means of a specific language of exchange. Hristov believes that studying the literature on the value of Bulgarian literature will demonstrate that the notions of identity, recognition, value, translation, national and world literature have been inscribed in a scriptural economy blending gift and exchange in a peculiar way. He hopes that this economy emerged as a modification of the scriptural economy in which the notion of world literature had been embedded, and that it has been globalised into a universal literary economy.

### *Keywords*

World Literature; Bulgarian Literature; Literary Interchange.