

## FICTIONAL AND DOCUMENTARY IN BULGARIAN PROSE OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY. ANALOGIES WITH FOREIGN LITERATURE

Andriana Spasova, Nikolay Zhelev

Institute for Bulgarian Literature in BAS, Sofia, Bulgaria

### Abstract

*The goal of the project is to reevaluate the earliest texts of the Bulgarian national revival by researching the elements that are used to make the written text not just more realistic, but documental, to give the impression that the story that is told is not just realistic, but based on true events. For the rethinking of the authentic ideas of the Bulgarian literature of the 19th century, a particularly important factor was the reader's reception of the Revival audience. The project uses the ideas of the German scholar Hans Robert Jauss in order to analyze how the literary works combine fictional and documentary elements in order to convince the reader that the story they are reading is not only plausible, but really happened.*

**Keywords:** *Bulgarian revival, Literature and its writing, Fictional and documentary elements, Reception in reading*

Fundamental scientific project for young scientists with the topic “Fictional and documentary in the Bulgarian prose of the 19th century. Analogies with foreign literature”, with coordinator of the research team Chief Asst. Prof. Andriana Spasova, was approved by the National Science Fund at the end of 2022 and will continue until 2024. An established trend in Bulgarian and European interdisciplinary research is the presentation and scientific understanding of important artefacts such as cultural memory, national identity, history, language and education. For the rethinking of the authentic ideas of the Bulgarian literature of the 19th century, a particularly important factor was understanding the reader's reception of the Revival. Completely new and unfamiliar genre forms and images appear before it for the first time. The topic of genre modifications and the hard-to-distinguish boundaries of the fictional and documentary layer in Bulgarian publications is a scientific challenge that does not lose its relevance and expects to be thoroughly developed in a new light.

The team includes two important members - Chief Asst. Prof. Nikolay Zhelev and PhD student Slaveya Nedelcheva, respectively from the Institute for Literature and Institute of Balkan Studies with Center for Thracology ‘Prof. Alexander Fol’ at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Each of the three members of the team contributes in a different and authentic way to problematizing the theme of the intertwining of the two modalities - fictional and documentary - a topic with a broad research resonance in the European humanities. Zhelev’s scientific interests revolve around Slovak and Bulgarian literature of the 19th century. The dissertation topic is ‘The idea of Illyrianism. Appearance, development and reflections on Bulgarian culture from the 19th century. He participated in the projects ‘Literature and Nature’, ‘The Bulgarian Literary Pantheon and the Slavic World in the Scientific Heritage of Boris Yotsov’, ‘The Southern and Eastern Slavs: Diversity and Interaction of Written Cultures of the 11th-21st Century’. S. Nedelcheva has academic specializations at universities in Albania, Kosovo, Greece and Israel. Research interests are in the field of Balkan linguistics and literary studies; Albanian literature, history and culture; national movements and ideologies in the Balkans. She speaks Albanian, Greek, Turkish, English and Hebrew. Andriana Spasova is a literary critic of Bulgarian literature at the Institute for Literature, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. “Ancient Reminiscences in the Revival Literature“ (2020) is her first scientific book, defended as a doctoral thesis, which was awarded the Pythagoras Prize (2022) and Prof. Marin Drinov (2023). Her research interest is related to the tracing of the first receptions of classical antiquity and its paradigms in the cultural-historical situation of the Bulgarian 19th century, the problems of national identity and cultural memory, handwritten textbooks and letters of Nayden Gerov. A. Spasova teaches seminars on “Literature of the Bulgarian Revival” at the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (since 2022).

One of the main and important goals of scientific research is to understand and problematize some of the artistic ideas in Bulgarian fiction and to what extent they follow some general models for conveying authenticity and authorial persuasion for witnessing real events and real persons. These models are characteristic of European literature and the insight into Bulgarian analogies and Revival literature as a separate case is a particularly intriguing topic, the development of which through a complex and modern methodology will contribute to the expansion of the reading and critical interests of the general audience and the academic community. Through the prism set in this way, the Bulgarian literary prose and memoirs of the 19th century come to life in a new way, and the past and the culture of the revival era become a tool for understanding the present.

The aim of the project is to investigate how prose emerged and developed during the Bulgarian Renaissance and how documentary and fiction are combined in them. The relations of the new Bulgarian fiction with the other two divisions of the Bulgarian prose - the translated literature and the continuation of the classic old Bulgarian forms. The documentary is understood to what extent the chosen plot, motives or way of telling try to convince the Revival reader that the text reflects real events or thoughts about the state of Bulgarians, their past, and their future. The goals of the project go beyond and move away from some already narrow and outdated concepts to how much literature imitates the real world. Undergoing a critical re-evaluation and questioning of some long-repeated theses helps to bring new knowledge and correct inaccurate judgments through devising work and interpretation with a complex methodology.

The task of the current research project is to derive and problematize the relationship between fact and speculation, myth and history, documents and literature. The team members apply the reception theory of the German literary historian and literary scholar Hans Robert Jauss (1921–1997) in the developments and presentations to the scientific and general public. The monograph 'Historical Experience and Literary Hermeneutics' (1998) puts forward several hypotheses that are fundamental to European humanities: 1) the phenomena of literary history form current reader attitudes; 2) historical fact is interpreted as impact history; 3) differentiation of the various genre forms of a historical and fictional character and the genre dichotomy, the overflows and overlaps of the individual literary genres. Revival prose is a complex phenomenon that shows us some specific intertwining of the artistic and documentary beginnings. It is difficult and even inaccurate to consider the initial fictional attempts of Revival intellectuals as pure (fictional) literature. On the contrary, the new and modern critical reflexivity of the team is precisely to bring to the fore the hybrid character of the emerging genre forms in the Bulgarian XIX century. The methodology of receptive criticism allows in a convincing and innovative way the entry of verbal forms in the context of their origin and their change in different historical and social contexts.

The topic of the project opens up possibilities for various comparative and receptive studies regarding the transition from memoir literature to fiction, through which new conclusions can be reached regarding 1) the literary taste and socio-cultural attitudes of the Revival public; 2) the development of our literature and the invariable analogies with Western European and world literature and 3) the transforming processes in the Revival community and the innovations that occurred at that time - modernization and Europeanization, without losing the connection with the traditional value system.

This set and originality of the working models that we find in the revival memoir-artistic works is essential and continues to carry its current charge of direction. Today, this trend enriches us both cognitively and morally and helps us to understand ourselves, our belonging and to develop one of the main competences in democratic culture - the place of personality and tolerance towards others, to build and improve more mature interpersonal relationships.

The research objectives are fulfilled through the following types of activities: A) Study and research work; B) Organizational work; C) Educational and promotion activity (seminars, academic lectures, presentations, and a website, which will reflect the progress in the implementation of the project; workshops with students in the form of seminars, allowing them to freely express their own reasoning, relating them to history and the literature of the Bulgarian Revival, dissemination of the project in the media); D) Publishing activity (the publication of a scientific collection).

In the first place, regarding the scientific activities of the team members, we will highlight here only some of the prepared scientific studies.

In the period January - June 2023, Slaveya Nedelcheva focused on the preparation and participation in international scientific conferences with papers on different topics related to the scientific project. She is preparing for publication and has presented a paper on the topic "Role of Bektashism and Bektashi literature for the Albanian national revival (19-20th century)" in the interdisciplinary scientific conference "Fiction in the archives: selection of facts and documents in scientific research", conducted hybridly - at the University of Sofia "St. Kliment Ohridski" and online. The other two studies in preparation by Nikolay Zhelev and Andriana Spasova, as a result of the forum (23.03.2023), are "The Preface of Miserable Family as a Manifesto of the Coming New Literature" and "The Geography of Adventure (based on the autobiographical short story by Parthenius Pavlovich)". Spasova's study deals with the theme of the interweaving of documentary and fictional elements in the autobiographical work of Parthenius Pavlovich - a representative of Bulgarian and Serbian literature of the 18th century. "Autobiografia" (1757) is his most vivid work written in Church Slavonic. It remains in scholarly circulation as the first manifestation of the autobiographical genre in South Slavic literature. In the text, a scientifically comparative reading between P. Pavlovich's "Autobiography" and "Life and passions of sinful Sophronius" by S. Vrachanski. Until now, no such analysis has been known, and literary historians have only traced the roots of the autobiographical genre and its development to the first New Bulgarian literary work.

Nikolay Zhelev researches the first published Bulgarian novels. In modern society, the works of Bulgarian intellectuals Vasil Popovich, Vasil Drumev, Rayko Zhinzifov, Lyuben Karavelov remain in the shadow of more established and famous authors such as Hristo Botev, Petko Slaveykov and post-liberation authors such as Ivan Vazov, Aleko Konstantinov, Zahari Stoyanov, etc. The first Revival fiction works in the 19th century are an important part of the development of Bulgarian literature. Through them, we trace the evolution of Bulgarian prose in analogy with pan-Balkan and pan-European processes. Asking a number of questions allows us to think more deeply about how the literary taste arises and how the author's understanding of high literature changes and interacts with the reader's expectations and with the new modern stage of Bulgarian literature. It also provides us with a different and less affected perspective with which to follow in detail the transition from memoirs (Life and suffering of wrongful Sophronia by Sofroniy Vrachanski) to pure fiction (Ilia Blaskov's Lost Stanka). Bulgarian literary literature goes through a transition from presenting the personal lives of characters - prototypes from reality, through stories presenting and commenting on the lives of ordinary Bulgarians and their tribulations with the successes and failures in their endeavors, to reach the post-liberation era, where in the first years the revival theme is exhausted with a retrospective account of life during slavery and the struggle against the unjust empire ('Notes on the Bulgarian Uprisings', 'Under the Yoke'). The research project will allow a new picture of Revival literature and its specific mechanisms of interaction between memoir and prose to be proposed and refined.

In the process of forming the new Bulgarian literature in the XIX century the Bulgarian intellectuals are trying to find out an answer to the question what literature, what type of books are needed for the education of the common reader. In the middle of the debates in the 60s the first Bulgarian novels are being published. In them three traditions are meeting and try to complement each other – the Old Bulgarian literary tradition, the new type of west European style literature and the Bulgarian folklore. One of the formed criteria is "usefulness", but the meaning depends on the author. The first authors – Vasil Popovich, Vasil Drumev and Lyuben Karavelov work independently from one another, yet there are many similarities in the way that write their first novels. All of them write about the hardships that average Bulgarians at the time suffer at hands of the Turks. This literary motif is called 'miserable family' by the researchers Nikolay Aretov and Mila Krasteva. All of their narratives are based on true stories. The ways they try to imply that are quite different. The genre is marked as a novel by the authors but that doesn't mean that the texts are as large, as they are something between a short story and a novel.

Important sources of how the authors of the Bulgarian revival theorize and how and why they write literature are the introductions to their book. For example „Miserable Family“ (1860) by Vasil Drumev has an introduction that in which the author explains why and how he wrote the novel. The introductions

as parts of the text are typical for the period of the National revival of the Bulgarians. It adds a layer of how to read the following text, it prepares the expectations of the reader. According to Romyana Damianova “the introduction from the Revival period are massive number of texts that hold many questions and many answers. There can be separated three different main groups of problems that the introductions separate: about the point of view of the author’s introduction, about the functions that the introduction serves and comparing the introduction as a paratext with the literary generations during the Revival” [1]. Drumev presents to the Bulgarian readers not only why he wrote the novel but also what type of literary works he thought are most useful to the potential readers. He shares that the West European literature writes many novels based on small historical events and many of them are fictional and they are proud with, but the Bulgarians on the basis of their hardships can write even more and better novels, because they are based on real events. It could be argued that Drumev presents the way that the upcoming Realism writes novels, yet in his work there are many traces and influences from the sentimental literature that are researched by Boyan Penev, Docho Lekov and others. And yet in his work Drumev combines the literary traditions of the West-European literature, the Old Bulgarian literature and the Bulgarian folklore. As Nikolay Aretov writes “the literary works should not be too different from the reader’s view. Together with the new, that they carry in them they must also contain elements from the old, marks from the old system, so that they can be accepted” [2].

Realistic element in the novel is the way that Drumev “defolklorises” the nature in the form of a dwelling of the wood nymphs. The people believe that in the dwelling the wood nymphs will do terrible things to the person that decides to stay there. When the main characters Petar and Vladi learn that they are at the grounds of the dwelling, they are scared, but the brother of Petar, Ivan assures them that there are no such things and that the place is perfectly safe and became their hideout. This is the only place where Jamal bey cannot harm the main characters.

The novels of Drumev and Karavelov share a lot of similarities: the main motif or theme of suffering from the Turks, the decision to become a hajduk. What they differ the most is in the way of execution. In „Unfortunate family“ there are way more pictures of gruesome deaths than in the „Voivode“ and it is aimed way more to enrich the Bulgarian literature, to give a model how to write a good novel. Karavelov’s text was aimed at the Russian public, to present to them the suffering of their Slavic brothers, after several years later he will publish it in Bulgarian. Both texts show how the main protagonists find no other way, but to resist. Yet the resistance in the “Unfortunate family” ends with the end of the whole family, “Voivode” ends on a more positive note with Stoyan swearing that he will continue the fight giving the text a layer of propoganda.

Rayko Zhinzifov published only one novel – “Proshetba” and literary could be translated as a “walk” or “tour”. The main theme is vastly different than the other texts. It is hard to pinpoint an exact main motif as it is trying to cover several topics – the immoral way that the Greek orthodox priests are living, the lack of liturgical service in Bulgarian is a part of the topic of the Bulgarian past and it’s lost greatness that opposes the hard everyday living of the average Bulgar. The author also writes about the Bulgarian way of life and how it is threatened by the new European fashions. The only try in prose of Zhinzifov is not that much researched, even Boyan Penev in “History of the new Bulgarian literature” only briefly mentions it that it is published in the 3rd issue of the magazine “Bratski trud”. The low literary value of the text is the primary reason for the low interest. The text looks like way much as a work in progress, as some kind of work notes than a finished text. In this text the documentalistic part has a dominant role. Zhinzifov tries to show different parts of the life of the Bulgars, yet the different parts are barely kept together. The main character goes to the house of grandpa Stoyan, who explains how different it was in the past and how much better it was than the present they live in. After that the author is monologuing about the new West European fashions that influence his own people. In the time of the 19th century the image of West Europe undergoes a significant change in the cultural understanding of the Bulgars. From the schismatic West transforms to the cultural and developed utopia goal that Bulgarians try to achieve and compare to. In his text Zhinzifov has a negative view of West Europe. For him specifically the German and French cultural influences are like diseases. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate why the foreign influences are bad or what makes them to have negative or damaging effect. His negative view

is shared in a later comedy “The Phoney Civilization“ where the negative view of the West is shared by the character Hadzhi Kosta

On June 09, 2023 the young doctoral student Nedelcheva participated in an international scientific conference “Issues of language, literature and literary translation”, held hybridly - at the University of Gjakova, Kosovo and online. She presented a paper in Albanian language: “Heroizmi shqiptar dhe ballkanik në poemat “Serdari” dhe „Skenderbeu“ të autorit Grigor Përliçev” (Albanian and Balkan heroism in the poems "Serdarya" and "Skenderbeg" by the author Grigor Parlichev). Within the abovementioned period, Slaveya Nedelcheva prepared an abstract for participation in an international scientific seminar on Albanian studies at the University of Pristina, Kosovo, which will be held in August 2023. The report and the article is in Albanian on the topic: “Imazhi i Skenderbeut tek poemat e autorëve Naim Frashëri dhe Grigor Përlichev dhe roli i heroizmit për lëvizjen rilindase shqiptare dhe bullgare” (The image of Skenderbeg in the poems of the authors Naim Frasher and Grigor Përlichev, as well as the role of heroism for the Albanian and Bulgarian revival". In conjunction with this year's Academic Circle of Comparative Literature (ACCL) conference on “Women and Wars” scheduled for June 14, 2023, Andriana Spasova is currently preparing to submit a study for review. The study focuses on the topic of “War and Women's Education in the Autobiographical and Journalistic Portraits of Anastasia Tosheva.” The concept of promoting women's enlightenment in 19th-century Bulgaria finds further reinforcement in the later Revival works of A. Tosheva. Through her contributions to newspapers such as “Pravo” and the magazine “School” including pieces like “Encouragement of Bulgarian Women to Progress”, “Elhovo” and “Gabrovo” the significance of women's voices gain momentum. Anastasia Tosheva's post-liberation memoirs, examined in this context, add another layer of meaning. Notably, her 1911 memoir stands as the first published autobiography by a Bulgarian woman, preceding Raina Popgeorgieva's 1877 autobiography, which was written in Russian. In “Traits and Notes from the Life of Atanas Ivanov, Former Teacher in Stara Zagora” (1885), it is striking that Anastasia Tosheva's name is highly marginalized even in the cases in which she has a leading role at the expense of her own self-portrait. Such is the case with the active public role of the Renaissance woman in the development of the women's school and boarding house in Stara Zagora. It is interesting how the memoir laconic fragment in A. Ivanov with the spacious narrative in A. Tosheva.

Secondly, at this stage, our project implemented one of its most important organizational activities, namely - the organization of a national scientific conference with international participation. Members are currently working on the compilation of the scientific proceedings of the conference. With the cooperation of “The Bulgarian Society for Eighteen-Century Studies” was held an interdisciplinary scientific conference “Fiction in the Archives: the Selection of Facts and Documents in Scientific Research” on March 27, 2023. The title of the conference is inspired by the approaches of Natalie Zemon Davis in her book “Fiction in the Archives” (1997) and Giorgio Agamben’s one “Idea della prose” (1985), to seek for in-betweenness between „versus” et “process”, between fact and fiction in contemporary research. How prone is the scientific study to political movements and dominant ideologies while it also intersects with different areas of humanities and natural sciences? This topic concerns the level of credibility of the use of sources and materials containing facts in our research, which always contains a stage of interpretation of the primary material from the time of the European and Balkan Enlightenment. Often the echo of imprecise selection and utilization of facts reverberates later in the critical/historiographical analysis of the next generations of scholars who take the stored information as unequivocally valid. Thus, the mistakes made earlier deepen in the next period of research of a historical event or a personality stretching temporarily from 18th to 21st century. Therefore, we seek proposals which not only cover the initial problematic knot but also trace its historiographical echo up to today.

Prominent scientists and researchers from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Institute for Literature, Institute of Balkan Studies with Center for Thracology, Scientific Archive), Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” and Blagoevgrad University “Neofit Rilski” participated in the conference. Papers on fiction in the archives, the Renaissance literary and documentary heritage, the relationship between historical and artistic works, and the mixing of the fictional and the documentary were presented. The topics of the papers concerned both Bulgarian culture, such as “Geography of Adventure”, “History,

Narrative, Art: on Sofronius Vrachanski's self-contained additions to the manuscript of The Muhammad's system and religion", "Testimonies and metaphors: the figure of the savage in the Bulgarian Revival", "Poetry and truth. Vaz's Loves in Poems and Documents", "The Revival and the Enlightenment in the Diary of a Bulgarian Intellectual (20th century)" etc., and foreign literature and culture, such as "Four Moments in the Life of an Extraordinary Philosopher. Fragments from the autobiography of Valentin Jamre-Duval sent to Anastasia Sokolova", "Role of Bektashism and Bektashi literature for the Albanian national revival (19-20th century)", "Fiction in the archives of the Haitian Revolution (1790-1830)", etc.

Thirdly, of utmost importance for the implementation of our project is related to educational activities - Conducting an educational seminar in the form of a presentation and discussion with students. Until now, one scientific-educational seminar has been held for students of Bulgarian Philology at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (2022). The topic of the presentation was "The Preface of "Miserable Family" as a Manifesto of the Forming Bulgarian Fiction" with lecturer Nikolay Zhelev and co-lecturer Andriana Spasova. The fourth mentionable activity and guideline is promotional activity: the promotion of the project in social networks and in online scientific-educational and popular scientific publications and media (Bulgarian National Radio, "Hristo Botev" program, Bulgarian National Radio, "Radio Sofia", "Bulgarian Science" journal, "Az Buki"). We already have media coverage and interest from the newspaper. Az Buki (2023, № 13, edition of the Ministry of Education and Science in Bulgaria).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The paper is supported by the National Science Fund, № KP-06-M 70/2 from 13.12.2022.

## REFERENCES

- Damyanova, R 2004, *Отвъд текстовете: културни механизми на Възраждането*, Ематех, София.
- Aretov, N 1990, *Раждането на новото („Войвода“ и традициите на преводната белетристика)*. В: Любен Каравелов. *Сборник по случай 150 години от рождението му*, BAS, Sofia, 1990.
- Benovska, M 1979, "Някои особености на мемоарите през Възраждането", in *За литературните жанрове през Българското възраждане*, BAS, Sofia.
- Davis, N 1987, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Gospodinova, E 1996, *Живот и педагогическа дейност на Анастасия Тошева*, IPKU, Stara Zagora.
- Ivanov, A 1885, *Черти и записки от живота на Атанас Иванов*, Българско знаме, Sliven.
- Jauss, Hans R 1998, *Исторически опит и литературна херменевтика*. UP „St. Kliment Ohridski“, Sofia 1998.
- Lekov, D 1976. *Васил Друмев – живот и дело*, Nauka i izkustvo, Sofia.
- Lekov, D 1988, *Българска възрожденска литература. Проблеми, жанрове, творци*. Vol 1, Nauka i izkustvo, Sofia.
- Lekov, D, 1970. *Проблеми на българската белетристиката през Възраждането*, БАН, Sofia.
- Penev, B 1978, *История на новата българска литература*, Vol. IV, Balgarski pisatel, Sofia.
- Petkanova, D 1974, "Раждането на автобиографията в българската литература", in *Хилядолетна литература*, Nauka i izkustvo, Sofia.
- Stoycheva, P 2018, *Автобиографията, мемоарите и други жанрове*, UP „St. Kliment Ohridski“, Sofia.
- Toralov, K 1983, "Възрожденската автобиография (Жанрова характеристика)", in *Проблеми на българската възрожденска литература*, Nauka i izkustvo, Sofia.
- Tosheva, A 1911, *Автобиография*. Svetlina, Stara Zagora.