Bulgarian Art and Culture

Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Fulbright Hays Seminar: Bulgaria [Summer 2004]

Nancy Hart
Assistant Professor of Art
Ferrum College
40 Wiley Drive, Vaughn 200
Ferrum, Virginia 24088

540.365.4357
nancyhart3@yahoo.com
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What makes us feel even more proud is the fact that our heritage has not yet become a museum exponent: that folklore not only lives on the stage but also presents a living artistic treasury in which modern Bulgarian composers, poets, writers, and artists look for ideas, characters, motifs and inspiration.

This statement, from the Historical Museum in Smolyan, Bulgaria, demonstrates the integration of the past and the present in contemporary Bulgarian art and culture.
Country name: Republic of Bulgaria
Government type: parliamentary democracy
Population: 7,517,973 (July 2004 est.)
Ethnic groups: Bulgarian 83.9%, Turk 9.4%, Roma 4.7%, other 2% (including Macedonian, Armenian, Tatar, Circassian) (2001)
Religions: Bulgarian Orthodox 82.6%, Muslim 12.2%, Roman Catholic 1.7%, Jewish 0.1%, Protestant, Gregorian-Armenian, and other 3.4% (1998)
Languages: Bulgarian, secondary languages closely correspond to ethnic breakdown
Literacy: 98.6%

Introduction

My first insights into contemporary Bulgaria began in Austin, Texas with our pre-trip orientation conducted at the University of Texas at Austin at the Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies. As a seminar group, scholarly presentations began with an overview of Thracian history and covered important historical moments up to the present context of contemporary Bulgaria. As participants, we had been asked, “Why Bulgaria?” when choosing to apply to the Fulbright-Hays Program. While we might have read about Bulgaria prior to our applications, what did anyone of us really know about this country?

One of the first introductions to Bulgarian culture was with the presentation by Dr. Julia Stefanova, the Executive Director of the Fulbright Bulgarian-American Commission. Among other things, she introduced us to the Bulgarian flag and its color symbolism (white stands for freedom, green for nature, and red for the blood of the heroes). Those colors and thoughts turned out to echo throughout the country in the art, textiles, crafts, and even the food.

I found that Bulgaria is a country rich in history and tradition. Our journey began in Sofia, the capital, with the first week scheduled for scholars to give presentations on many topics: History, Education, Politics, Art, Music, Dance, and Poetry. We were immersed in the history and culture immediately. This led to an extensive travel experience through the relatively small country. It seemed much larger because of the vast history and sense of the past we encountered on our trip. Some of the most memorable places we saw, in my opinion, were Boyana Church with the 13th century frescoes, Rila Monastery with the later wall paintings, and the coast region with the archeological finds at the ancient cities of Nessebar and Sozopol. Along the way we saw churches, Thracian tombs, the ancient Roman ruins at Plovdiv, and ended at the Rhodope Mountains. They were striking because of their scale and dramatic terrain in relation to the small museums and villages we encountered. Hiking gave a sense of place through the colors of the trees, thistle and other wildflowers, the aroma of the herbs by the trail, and the vistas witnessed at the top of Mount Snezhanka.

While at the historic sites, we were also exposed to aspects of contemporary life and culture in Bulgaria. We met with university professors and students at various locations, such at Veliko Turnovo, Varna, and Bourgas. The students expressed their desires to study areas such as business and computer science because of the possibilities for economic advancement. They were excited to share their views with us on politics and world affairs. The educators brought their insights into what the impact of their changing economy has had on their lives and to enlighten us to their personal struggles along with their concerns for the future of their country. Many mentioned the “brain drain” with intellectuals leaving the country to seek more lucrative careers in other parts of the world.

These interactions provided a human quality to the facts and figures we had heard in the lectures and presentations. In addition, the bus rides provided additional insight into Bulgarian culture. For example, we saw the daily activities of the farmers from our bus trip through the country, which appeared to have changed little over the years. Farmers were tending their goats and sheep in the
fields or riding in their horse drawn wooden carts. We also passed through the heavy manufacturing towns that are changing the environment and way of life of the people. On our trip to the Black Sea, our group witnessed the tourism of the resort beaches. Upon return to Sofia, we could contrast the modern aspects of the city versus the sense of the past and history of the regions we had just visited. With the population moving to the cities, such as Sofia, and away from their roots in agriculture, what will happen to the many traditions and customs held for centuries? Bulgaria is truly a country in transition as it moves into the new century and into the European Union.

I found the Cyrillic alphabet made communication difficult and often created a mysterious and foreign atmosphere. It was unlike any place I had ever been before. The warmth and friendliness of the Bulgarian people compensated for lack of verbal communication. It made the experience even more visual for me because the language became a background of sounds. The visual aspects became evident in the colors and shapes forming the rich traditions in the fine and applied arts. Radial designs, organic and geometric motifs emerged from the clay pots and textiles. The woodcarvings and lace showed very different textures and yet both showed intricate details and plays on positive and negative space in their designs. Crosses, icons, and other religious imagery became a common theme in the arts. The icons were abundant and although often commercial in their displays, they still conveyed a sense of craftsmanship and integrity. From the frescoes of the churches and monasteries to the contemporary icon paintings, the work has stayed a constant throughout the centuries showing the importance of their faith and the continuation of the art of the past.

The arts have played a strong role in the shaping of Bulgarian culture. Art, poetry, and music have been integral to different stages in Bulgarian history. The arts inform us about a people and their values and beliefs. It also reflects the expression of the people. My curriculum projects will introduce students to these three areas and provide a framework for learning about the arts of Bulgaria.
The curriculum projects in this document are intended to inform students in the United States about the rich history and culture of Bulgaria through its visual arts, music, and poetry. They are designed to supplement projects in studio art, computer graphics, and art appreciation courses and provide a framework for the art and design student to explore and investigate the following issues:

- What does it mean to be Bulgarian?
- What are the significant elements of the arts (art, music, and poetry) in Bulgaria?
- What are the aspects of daily life in Bulgaria that contribute to the arts?
- How does the rich history of the country impact the contemporary art and culture of Bulgaria?
- What can we learn and understand from art forms?
- What is the specific role of art, poetry, and music in Bulgaria?
- How does it reflect the social and political climate?

The four projects I have designed focus on the teaching of painting, drawing, digital art, and art history at the undergraduate level. They are designed to have students explore the art and culture of Bulgaria and specifically direct students to create a visual vocabulary appropriate to communicating the art, poetry, and music of Bulgaria. The projects are intended to have a supporting lecture by the faculty and a student research component.

**Project 1: Beyond the Expected: Travel and Tourism Poster**
Traditionally, tourism and travel posters create and depict the allure of a place to attract visitors. These messages are often abstracted and far from the reality of everyday life or the experience on the ground. This project is designed to ask students to focus on the lived reality of the Bulgarian people in contrast to the often narrow and stereotypical representations of travel brochures and promotional posters. For example, a student might focus on the intellectual life of the urban population or the relationship of history to contemporary society rather than the depiction of the country as a Black Sea resort or the Rodopes ski resort.

As Bulgaria prepares to enter the European Union, what are the aspects that make Bulgarian culture unique? How can Bulgarian culture be depicted visually? Students will identify significant aspects of art and contemporary life in different regions of Bulgaria. They will then create a poster to show an element of the art and culture of the country that would attract visitors wishing to see more of the lived reality and quotidian life.

**Project 2: Explorations of National Identity: Stamp Design**
The intention of this project is for students to incorporate imagery and ideas from Bulgaria on a series of four postage stamps. Discussion of the stamps from past history will show the connection of the significant events of those times and the images depicted on the stamps. This project emphasizes visual literacy, cultural representation, and principles of visual design, with an emphasis on scale. How do you show a major event or aspect of the country on a stamp?
Project 3: Visual Expressions of Bulgarian Music

Students are asked to visually interpret the music of Bulgaria. The music has been a part of people’s lives and it has been said that Bulgarians sing even when they are crying. Music is woven into daily life in Bulgaria. Students will look at various artists who have used music as a source of inspiration and representation. Students will listen to Bulgarian music to provide insight into the rich musical traditions of Bulgaria. What can we learn about Bulgaria from its unique musical forms?

Project 4: Bulgarian Poetry: Into the Visual

Bulgarian poets have expressed many different ideas through the various historical and political times in the country. How do the ideas and concepts lend themselves to an expressive visual interpretation of the poetry rather than traditional poetic compositions? In this project, students will explore visual representations of aural and written traditions.
Beyond the Expected: Travel and Tourism Poster

This project is designed to explore issues of cultural representation. To really see the lived reality of the Bulgarian people is a much different experience than images traditionally depicted in travel brochures and promotional materials. There is an intellectual life of the Bulgarian population that goes beyond its depiction as a Black Sea or Rhodope Mountains resort. As Bulgaria prepares to enter the European Union, what is the current atmosphere of the daily life in the country? How can this be visually depicted?

Assignment
Identify significant aspects of art and contemporary life in one or more of the regions of Bulgaria. These aspects may include intellectual life, café society, architecture, the contemporary art, poetry, music scene, and the arts and crafts of Bulgaria (textiles, patterns, etc.). Create a poster to show one or more of the significant and interesting elements of the arts and culture of the country that would attract visitors who want to have a more in-depth experience of Bulgaria.

Objectives
To combine text and image to communicate a sense of place or experience of another culture that is not stereotypical; and
To design in a large scale format and consider how a poster functions in a public space.

Specifications
15”x22” (vertical or horizontal)

Media
illustration, collage, or digital illustration

Process
This project requires extensive research into the art and culture of Bulgaria. Resources can be found on the internet and from the library. Brainstorm ideas that would develop into an engaging and meaningful message about travel and tourism and the arts. Consider the signs and symbols that are connotative and denotative of Bulgarian culture. Once you have arrived at an initial idea, begin a series of sketches to further explore your theme.

Timeline
This is a three-week project based on a schedule for a three-hour class that meets for twice per week.

Week One
Research Bulgarian arts and select an area or aspect to investigate in detail. Present your research and ideas about the topic you will be concentrating on in your project. Consider metaphors, connotation, and denotation as you explore issues of visual design. Sketches and preliminary compositions will be due during the second class.
**Week Two**
Written and visual documentation is due at the start of class. The final decisions for typeface, color, images, and design direction will be determined this week.

**Week Three**
Full documentation of the project will be completed. The final project and concept will be presented during the last class. A critique and discussion will follow each presentation. Be prepared to give a complete presentation to the class.
This project focuses on issues of visual literacy and cultural representation. National identity is expressed through many forms of visual communication, but it is government-sanctioned materials that express the formal identity and values. The postage stamp functions is one type of government-sanctioned graphic design. It functions as a form of currency as it is a paid certificate for mail delivery services, nationally and internationally. As a design product itself, the small size becomes a critical factor. How does one communicate an aspect of a culture or national identity at such a small size?

**Assignment**
Create a series of four postage stamps on the subject of “The Art and Culture of Bulgaria”.

**Objectives**
To create a series of postage stamps that are based on the art and culture of Bulgaria – the components should be unified by theme and design.
To communicate, and not merely illustrate, the concept.
Design for a small scale.

**Specifications**
Block of four-grouped in a box format or in a sequential row.

**Media**
illustration, collage, digital illustration.

**Size**
Maximum 1.5 inches (each) in length and width.

**Process**
This project requires extensive research into the art and culture of Bulgaria. You can use resources available on the internet and the library. Once you have arrived at an initial idea, begin a series of sketches.

Remember that this is a series and requires that the design remain consistent even when depicting different aspects of the Bulgarian arts. Each individual stamp should stand on its own and also function as part of the group.

The official currency of Bulgaria is the Lev. Design each stamp for the postage rate of 20 Leva.

**Timeline**
This is a three-week project based on a schedule for a three-hour class that meets for twice per week.
**Week One**
Research Bulgarian arts and select an area or aspect to investigate in detail. Present your research and ideas in the form sketches and color studies.

What are the key aspects of Bulgarian art and culture that you will communicate? Why are these important? To Bulgarians and to others? What do they say about Bulgaria? Are there metaphors or other rhetorical devices that can be used?

**Week Two**
Written documentation is due at the start of class. Design direction will be determined during the first class of the week. The choice of typeface, color, and images will be determined by the end of the second class during this week.

**Week Three**
Full documentation of the project will be presented, including concept statement and significance of what is represented. Present the stamps as a series, mounted on black board as one unit. (Note, while not required, it is useful for the student to see how the stamps will function on an envelope or a card.) A critique and brief discussion will follow each presentation.

**SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Bulgaria stamp packets

The Botev postage stamp (center) was designed in 1998 to commemorate the 150th birthday anniversary of the Bulgarian poet and political activist, Hristo Botev (1848-1876). The artist, Bogdan Mavrodinov, used a famous portrait of the poet painted by Boyan Petrov to make the design. The stamp, with a nominal value of 120 leva, measures 28.5 x 39 mm.

What does this stamp communicate with the image of the poet?

Alexander Bozhinov (1878-1968) was a children’s book illustrator and author. Boris Kitanov designed this series (right) to commemorate Bozhinov’s birthday and death. Each of the stamps has a face value of 120 leva and a 25x35 mm format.
Visual Expressions of Bulgarian Music

Visual interpretations of music have been created by a variety of artists, Wassily Kandinsky in particular. This project explores how the visual arts relate to music or how music can be represented visually. In the beginning, students will explore how one can express identity and experience through the unique musical forms of Bulgaria. What are the rhythms, tempo, sounds, and moods expressed in traditional Bulgarian music?

Assignment
Create a mixed media composition based on a visual interpretation of the music of Bulgaria.

Objectives
To explore the relationships between music and its visual representation.
Explore how color, shape, and space can be used to communicate the expressiveness of music.
To research the unique music of Bulgarian and relate it to the visual arts.

Specifications
18”x24” printmaking paper, such as Arches or Rives. You can gesso the paper to provide a surface for paints and mixed media. A wooden surface or illustration board (rigid support) can also be used.

Media
Paint, pastels (chalk or oil), or any other color drawing/painting materials. Collage is also an option.

Process
Listen to the CD “Bulgarian Folk Ensembles and Songs” and choose one song for the project. As you listen to the song, imagine colors, shapes, images that suggest the sounds you are listening to in the musical composition. Try to visually depict those sounds in your project. Work on a series of sketches that depict the music you are listening to. This may convey a specific interval – such as one minute, five minutes, or be an attempt to communicate an entire composition.

Considerations and Resources
“Synchronism”, synaesthesia, Orphism, and Frank Armstrong (graphic design)

Synchronism was an art movement using pure colors in an abstract composition. It was developed by painters Morgan Russell (American, 1886-1953) and Stanton MacDonald-Wright (American, 1890-1973), and first exhibited in Paris in 1913, then at the Armory Show in 1914.

Synaesthesia is defined as a subjective sensation or image of a sense (visually, as in seeing color) other than the one (as of sound) being stimulated. The most common type of ‘sensorial’ synaesthesia is ‘colored hearing’, usually for music.
Wassily Kandinsky (Russian, 1866-1944), created a series of ten Compositions that were influenced by his synaesthetic experiences of music and the visual qualities he sensed when listening to it. Kandinsky discovered his synesthesia while attending a Moscow performance of Richard Wagner’s opera “Lohengrin”:

> The violins, the deep tones of the basses, and especially the wind instruments at that time embodied for me all the power of that pre-nocturnal hour. I saw all my colors in my mind; they stood before my eyes. Wild, almost crazy lines were sketched in front of me.
> — Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, 1913.

Many young Bulgarian artists of the 1920s were influenced by Kandinsky’s use of Expressionist colors and symbolic forms.

The legend of Orpheus began in ancient Thrace, in Gela, Bulgaria where he was born. Upon losing his wife, Eurydice, forever, Orpheus roamed the Rhodopes singing mournfully.

Orphism – is an art movement that was related to Cubism, sometimes called Urphic Cubism, that used overlapping areas of bright, contrasting colors. It was generally more abstract and more colorful than other forms of Cubism. The name, chosen by the poet Guillaume Apollinaire (French, 1880-1918) in 1913, referred to Orpheus, the singer and poet of Greek mythology. Painter Robert Delaunay (French, 1885-1941) and his wife Sonia Delaunay (French, 1885-1979) were main artists of the movement.
Timeline
Two week project based on a schedule of two classes per week that meet for a total of three hours each session.

Week One
Start basic compositions and shapes as you listen to the CD. Think about sounds and their relationship to color. Consider color, shape, spatial intervals, and rhythm that suits the musical composition.

Week Two
Revisit your first ideas. Consider the final solution and what works visually in the composition. Edit or revise aspects of your drawing or mixed media piece. Class four will consist of a critique session. Present your musical and visual composition. Be prepared to discuss the decisions you have made with line, shape, color, and composition.
Bulgarian Poets have expressed many different ideas, thoughts, and emotions through the various historical and political times in the country. Poetry is often meant to be heard – it is based on the oral-aural rather than the visual. Today, when we read poetry, it is typeset in a manner that does not consider the relationship between the spoken work and the act of listening. This project is intended to reconsider these issues. How does the Bulgarian poetry provided, translated into English, lend itself to a visual interpretation of the words from the poets? Given that we are working with translations, from Bulgarian to English, how can we obtain a similar expressiveness without being lost in translation?

**Objective**
To visually represent a poem.
To research the arts from another culture and discover how the historical events impacted the artistic expression of its artists and poets.

**Assignment**
Choose a poem from the poetry handout.
Consider what the poet is saying, based on your research and understanding of Bulgarian culture.
Consider how you would visually interpret the poem.
Typography will be an important consideration in this project.
Explore the meaning of the text and the meaning created by its arrangement.

**Specifications**
Vertical or horizontal orientation, any size.

**Media**
Collage, digital illustration, drawing, painting. There are many methods to visualize this project. The words may be traced and enlarged then rendered by hand or cut out of paper; they may be written by hand with a digital stylus and brought into a digital project; or they may be typeset in a way that is expressive. You may also use the Cyrillic alphabet in your project – however, you should investigate the meaning and translation of this alphabet.

**Process**
Read your selected poem out loud. Think about the words and their meaning. Consider the time the poem was written and the social and political climate of Bulgaria. Do several thumbnail sketches for your idea before beginning.

**Timeline**
Three week project based on a schedule of two classes per week that meet for a total of three hours each session.
**Week One**

Select the poem and research the poet. When did they write the poem? What historical events were occurring at that time and how did that atmosphere influence the poets and artists? Compose three rough ideas for the final work. Consider the text and how you will visually represent the words.

Images can be used with the type but should be used not to “illustrate” the text, but instead to enhance the meaning and expression.

**Week Two**

Further develop your ideas and be prepared to discuss your decisions for the visual elements and type selected. Try several solutions to your ideas. Experiment with composition and placement of the text.

**Week Three**

Complete the assignment. On the last class, present the Bulgarian poem with your research about the poet. There will be a critique and discussion about each project.

**Considerations**

Material Poetry, Concrete Poetry (Appolinaire, Mallarmé, Futurists, Dada)
This section draws directly from lectures and materials of the Bulgaria Fulbright-Hays Seminars Abroad. These are the voices of contemporary Bulgarians, voices that are not easily accessible by a US audience. This information is relevant to educators wishing to implement the above projects that require research by both faculty and students. Where possible, the lecturer information and lecture dates have been listed.
Notes from the lecture presented by Professor Boyan Dobrev
Academy of Fine Arts, Sofia, Bulgaria
boyandobrev@hotmail.com
July 22, 2004

ART IN THE BULGARIAN LANDS

Prehistory
Thracian art
Art during Roman rule
Early Christian art in the Bulgarian lands
Art in the First Bulgarian Kingdom
Art in the Bulgarian lands in the 11th and 12th centuries
Art in the Second Bulgarian Kingdom
Bulgarian Art from the 15th century to the first half of the 18th century
Art of the National Revival period
The art of the Third Bulgarian state

Prehistory
The style of pottery making and modeling that characterized the Neolithic and Copper Age in communities in present day Bulgarian territory is one of the high marks of prehistoric European art. The culture of this period is the culmination of 2000 years of indigenous development in this area when the traditions established by the earliest farmers reached their peak. The fully developed style of painted pottery emerged in the late 5th millennium B.C. from earlier traditions based on repetitive geometrical motifs executed as incisions filled with white paste. The vessel forms became more complex. At the same time, more developed forms of terracotta came into use. They included not only human figures but also items of furniture.

The discovery in 1972 of a large cemetery near the city of Varna on the Black sea coast has put Southeastern Europe in the forefront of early metallurgical technology, especially goldsmithing.

The cemetery is 6400 years old. One grave mount alone contained 1.05 kg of gold objects. Among the royal finds were also scepter mounts, gold pectorals, animal profiles, plaques, etc. In one of the royal looking grave features were modeled in clay with beaten gold diadem and a mouth cover lying on them. Recent discoveries have revealed very early mining for copper ores. The mines at Aibunar in southern Bulgaria are contemporary to the Varna treasures.

Thracian Art
The Thracians, who some scholars say lived in what is now present day Bulgaria, Romania, northern
Greece, and Turkey from 4000 B.C. until being absorbed by the Roman Empire in 46 AD.

The vessels of the Vulchitrun treasure are the earliest evidence of Thracian art. Their exceptional workmanship seems to confirm Homer’s admiration for the skills of the Thracian masters. During the Old Iron Age, geometrical art continued to exist and the main objects that were produced were cult axes, amulets, and bronze ornaments on horse trappings.

The classical period started with the emergence of the first Odryssean kingdom. Masters gradually abandoned the anachronistic geometrical style and turned their attention to the major players on the world art market: Achaemenid Persia and Greece. The imported objects that have been found attest to direct links between Thrace and Persia. The influence of Greece steadily grew through trade with the Greek colonies on the Black sea coast and the conquests of Philip of Macedon and his successors.

The Greeks considered the Thracians inventors of the Dionysiac mysteries, a semi-secret cult of ancient origins. Dionysus, the god of wine, is a deity of Thracian provenance. The vases from Panagyurishte and the Borovo treasure are precious items of ritual sets used in the mysteries of the Kabyri.

Some Thracian monuments afford complex pictorial texts. The appliqués from the Letnitsa treasure represent mythological stories that cover almost the whole of Thracian mythology.

The late Hellinistic era in Thrace (2nd-1st century B.C.) is represented by precious objects that were executed in the new international style that spread from Iberia to China.

**Art During Roman Rule**

When the Romans conquered Thrace in the 1st century B.C. the local aristocracy lost their power and no longer needed social insignia. The art retained the old mythological ritual traditions.

On the sites of the old Thracian settlements towns were built bearing the hallmark of Roman architecture and art. New urban centers developed: Abritus, Nicopolis ad Istrum, August Trajana and many others. The portrait genre became popular, especially in memorial sculpture. A remarkable example of cult sculpture is Apollo’s head for Serdica, a copy of Praxiteles and the statue of Eros from Oescus. Of the portraits of emperors, worth special attention is the portrait of Gordian 111, dating from the 3rd century A.D.. The mosaics in Villa Armira, Ivailograd district, bear witness to the luxurious life of the important Roman landlords in those remote times.

**Early Christian Art in the Bulgarian Lands**

The period between the 4th and the 7th century was unstable and turbulent in the present day territories of Bulgaria. It was rife with wars, invasions, and far reaching demographic changes. The Slavic tribes settled permanently in this part of the Eastern Roman Empire but did not create artistic culture of any significance. The classical culture of Antiquity was on the wane and gradually gave way to a new culture melding the rich legacy of the ancient past and the sublime spirituality of the new Christian religion.

The extant monuments of the 4th-7th century reflect the whole gamut of artistic phenomena and processes characteristic of other parts of the Roman Empire as well. Construction of Christian
monuments in the Bulgarian lands was most intensive in the 4th and 5th centuries. The earliest example is the church in the eastern necropolis of Serdica (Sofia) erected shortly after 313. The St. Sophia basilica was rebuilt many times after numerous invasions and earthquakes. Most numerous were the richly ornamented churches (e.g. the Old Metropolis in Nessebur). The structures with a central plan are fewer in number but they display a greater variety. They are either independent baptisteries or martyries. Of especial interest is the so called “red Church” near the village of Perushtitsa with its four conches and mural fragments. Mural paintings covered not only the walls of the churches but also tombs. Most interesting are the monuments created on the borderline of paganism and Christianity. However, they do not easily lend themselves to identification. A good example are the fairly well preserved paintings in the Silistra tomb featuring the deceased and their servants. Over twenty tombs from the Serdica necropolises have mural paintings representing paradise and the afterlife. Lots of richly ornamented cult objects of fine workmanship have also been found on Bulgarian territory. The establishment of the Bulgarian state on the Lower Danube in 680-81 put an end to the period.

Art in the First Bulgarian Kingdom Time

The culture of the first Bulgarian kingdom can be divided into two periods: pagan and Christian. The Bulgarians created their state and their artistic culture from elements they had brought during the long migration from their original homeland in the Volga region to the Danubian lands. Their notion of the ideal ruler is expressed in the most striking monument of stone sculpture from the pagan period, the Madera Horseman dated back to the 8th century. The richest and most famous treasure housed in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna is that of Nagyszentmiklos. It consists of 23 gold vessels weighing a total of 10kg. The first capital of the young Bulgarian state was situated near the present day village of Pliska. The city was surrounded by earthworks, an exterior stone wall and an interior brick wall. The palaces of the Bulgarian rulers were located in the inner city. The grand palace was 52 m long and 26, 50 m wide. It is in Pliska that the Bulgarian Khan Boris-Mihail adopted Christianity in 864 and declared it a state religion. This opened the second, Christian, chapter in the history of the first Bulgarian Kingdom.

With the conversion to Christianity, the first Bulgarian state joined the family of European Christian states. Christian temples began to be built everywhere. The most representative example of this early period is the Grand Basilica (99m long and 29, 5m wide) near Pliska. The peak period of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, known as the Golden Age of Bulgarian culture, is associated with the rule of Tsar Simeon (804-927). In 893 Simeon moved the capital to Great Preslav and decorated it with palaces, churches and monasteries rivaling the beauty and splendor the capital of Byzantium. The most magnificent building was the Rotunda or Golden Church. It was decorated with mosaics, marble facings and painted ceramics. A masterpiece of the Preslav school of painted ceramics is the large icon of St. Theodore. The rule of Tsar Simeon is above all the Golden Age of Bulgarian letters and manuscript books. The ornaments in the oldest manuscript, eg. Savina book, the Supersul collection, the glagoltic Gospel of Assemanius are closely related to the artistic tradition in Preslav. In 971 the Byzantines captured Preslav and destroyed the heart of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. Its traditions were preserved for a short time in the south-western fringes of the Bulgarian kingdom during the reign of Tsar Samuil.

Art in the Bulgarian Lands in the 11th and 12th centuries

The death of Tsar Ivan Vladislav in 1018 put an end to the first Bulgarian Kingdom. Bulgarian lands
fell under Byzantine domination which lasted over a century and a half. Art was heavily influenced by Byzantine conventions. However, manuscript books in Bulgarian continued to be produced, thus preserving and transmitting the traditions of the Preslav school. (eg. The Apostle of Enina, the Slepchen Apostle, the Dobromir Gospel, etc.)

Examples of monumental painting of the 11th and 12th centuries are quite fragmentary but they can still be divided into two groups, depending on their relation to the Constantinople tradition. The well preserved frescoes from the Bachkovo ossuary, the frescoes of the first and second layer in the St. George’s Rotunda in Sofia, and the first layer in the Boyana church inarguably point to contacts with the Byzantine capital. The Bachkovo ossuary is the only Byzantine monastery church with well-preserved frescoes. Their style reflects the major trends in Byzantine painting of the 12th century. The frescoes of the first layer of the church in the Zemen monastery, the church in the village of Kolusha, St. Dimiter’s church in Patalenitsa, and the Church of St. Archangel Michael, in the town of Rila, despite their fragmentariness, demonstrate the evolution of a trend which was marginal to the art of the large, cultural centers in the Byzantine empire.

**Art in the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (12th-14th centuries)**

The uprising led by brothers Assen and Peter in 1185-86 laid the foundations of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom with its capital in Turnovo. Turnovo fell in the hands of the Ottoman Turks in 1396. Apart from Turnovo, there were other important art centers such as Nessebur, Melnik, and Cherven. The church of SS Peter and Paul in Turnovo is a remarkable architectural monument of the 13th century. The ruins of the Church of the Forty Holy Martyrs go back to the same period.

Dating from the reign of Tsar Ioan Assen (1218-1241) are the famous rock cut monasteries built along the river Roussenski Lom near what is today the village of Ivanovo. They survived until the end of the 14th century. The earliest among them is the “Buried Church”. It is the best preserved example of the late Paleologian Renaissance and goes back to the times of Tsar Ivan Alexander. The frescoes in Boyana church are the most representative of the style of the Bulgarian capital. They were commissioned by Sebastocrator Kaloyan in 1259 during the rule of Tsar Constantine Assent the Quiet. He and his spouse are represented in the narthex. The Boyana frescoes provide valuable clues to medieval Bulgarian art and Byzantine art in the Balkans of the 13th century.

During the Second Bulgarian kingdom, monasteries flourished and construction of new monasteries were in full swing. Among the very few remnants of these complexes stands out, Hrelyu’s Tower in the Rila Monastery erected in 1335. The first three decades of the 14th century are attested to by the Church of St. Nicholas in the village of Stanichev (1333), the church in Dolna Kamenitsa (situated on the territory of present day Yugoslavia, although in the 14th century, the donors were under the authority of the Vidin Kingdom), the church of St. Apostle Peter in the village of Berende (1331-2), the Church of St. Nicholas in Kalotina (1333-4), the second in the church of the Zemen monastery (mid 14th century), etc. Dating from the same time is the frieze featuring the apostles in the drum of St. George’s church in Sofia.

The art of the manuscript book during the Second Bulgarian Kingdom reached a peak during the reign of Tsar Ivan Alexander. He commissioned lots of richly ornamented manuscripts such as the London Tetraevangelia, Chronicle of Manasses, and the Tomich Psaltir. Table and decorative ceramics were emblematic of the art during the Second Bulgarian kingdom.
**Bulgarian Art from the 15th century to the first half of the 18th century**

The Bulgarians were among the peoples that suffered most from the Ottoman invasion in the late 14th century. The Ottomans destroyed the independent Bulgarian kingdom and church together with thousands of art monuments. The Ottoman domination lasted almost five centuries. After the initial shock, art on the territory of Bulgaria ceased to exist for over half a century. The earliest monuments date back to the second half of the 15th century. Only four churches have survived: the church of the Holy Virgin of Vitosha in the Dragalevtsi monastery (1476), St. Dimiter’s monastery church near the village of Boboshevo (1488), the Church of SS Peter and Paul in the Orlitsa convent in the Rila Monastery (1491) and St. George’s Church in the Kremikovtsi Monastery (1493).

The frescoes in the small church in the Ilentsi Monastery near Sofia were painted in 1550. Art came back to life in the last quarter of the 16th century. Examples of that period are the church of St. Petka Samardjiiska in Sofia, the Kurilo monastery “St. John of Rila” (1596); the refectory and katholikon in the Rozhen monastery; the first layer of the Navitiy Church in Arbanassi (1597); St. Petka in Vukovo (1598); and the frescoes in the New Metropolis church in Nessebur (1599).

Artistic growth continued until the third quarter of the 17th century when the Turkish brigands, known as kurjali, started their attacks. Most parish churches were then concentrated in several towns and larger settlements: Turnovo, Arbanassi, Vidin, and Boboshevo. During that period relatively few monasteries were built but a large number of the existing ones were renovated. In the early 17th century the new katholikon of the Bachkovo monastery was built and in 1740 the southern residential wing with the refractory was added to the complex. The renovation of the Rozhen monastery started at the close of the 16th century and was completed in 1732.

Bulgarian crafts flourished in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Chiprovo goldsmith school played a leading role in the Balkan region and the works of the Chiprovo masters were in great demand everywhere. Even during the Ottoman rule, liturgical books in Bulgarian continued to be copied and executed.

**Art of the National Revival Period**

During the 18th and 19th century Bulgarian art underwent far-reaching changes. The economic prosperity of some portions of the Bulgarian population gave a boost to their self-confidence and spiritual culture. Intensive church building went hand in hand with advancement in painting, woodcarving and the goldsmith’s craft. The texture of the artistic image dramatically changed which marked the transition from medieval to secular art.

In close of the 18th century a number of churches in Bulgaria were renovated and the process reached a climax in the 1830s. The most impressive monastery ensemble from that period is the Rila monastery. The Main Church built in 1835-1838 is the most remarkable architectural monument of the National Revival period. The most renowned architect of the National Revival is Master Nikola Fichev from the town of Dryanovo who built dozens of churches in Turnovo, Svishtov, the Transfiguration monastery near Turnovo, etc.

Characteristic of the National Revival art is the formation of art schools. The Tryana school is among the oldest of its kind. As early as the beginning of the 18th century a large number of builders,
woodcarvers and iconographers worked in the Balkan town of Tryana and the neighboring villages.

The founder of the most famous family of artists in the Samokov school is Hristo Dimitrov. He was educated in the artists’ studios in Sveta Gora. His sons Dimiter Hristov and Zakhati Zograph and their successors created a wealth of icons and murals in Bulgaria and Serbia. Zakhati Zograph is not only the best-known representative of the school, but also the most remarkable painter of the National Revival period. He worked in the Rila monastery and the Great Laura St. Athanasios in Athos. Stanislav Dospevski received his education in Russia and this enabled him to enrich the traditional art of his family with secular elements. Black and white drawing was also quite well developed in Samokov, books were printed, as well as the paper icons, and panoramic representations of monasteries and churches, known as National Revival plates. The most representative example of the Samokov school of woodcarving is the large iconostasis at the Main Church of the Rila monastery.

The other major center of art was Bansko. The founder of the largest family of artists, the Molerovs, was Toma Vishanov. They were the first to introduce oil techniques in painting. The Bankso artists were mainly iconographers and gifted master builders.

The Art of the Third Bulgarian State
After the liberation from Ottoman domination in 1878 the newly established Bulgarian state entered a period of transition in which Bulgarian art began to be gradually institutionalized. In the 1880s and 1890s the first post-liberation artists with academic education began to return from abroad. They were the painters Anton Mitov, Ivan Angelov, Ivan Dimitrov, Ivan Mrkvieca and Yaroslav Veshin from Czechia, and the sculptors Boris Schatz, Marin Vassilev, Zheko Spiridonov, etc.

Circa 1900, diverse European trends began to influence Bulgarian art: academicism, art nouveau and impressionism. Impressionism became very popular although the variety that spread in Bulgaria differed from the academic Parisian mode. For example, the works of the most significant representative of the period, Nikola Petrov and the first women artists in Bulgarian art- Elena Karamihailova and Elissaveta Konsulova-Vazova. The landscape genre was developed by Atanas Mihov, Yordan Kyuvliev, Alexander Mutaffov, and Nikola Tanev. The new urban vision is best demonstrated in the compositions and portraits by Nikola Tanev. They were institutionalized and supported by the Society of Modern Art, founded in 1903.

After WWI, Bulgarian art became preoccupied with the expression of the national identity. The Society of National Art was established in 1919. The most brilliant representatives of Bulgarian art of that period are Ivan Milev, Sirak Skitnik, Pencho Georgiev, Dechko Uzunov, Ivan Boyadjiev, Vladimir Dimitrov-Maistora, Boris Denev, etc. The first decade of the 20th century also witnessed the emergence of radical avant-garde trends associated with the expressionist journal “Vezni” edited by Geo Milev. Major contributors to “Vezni” were Max Metzger, Nikolai Dyuigerov, Krum Kyulyavkov, Hristo Kavarnaliev, Peter Dachev, and Mircho Kachulev.

Unlike the decorative twenties, the thirties developed a more plastic vision based on the Paris school and Cezannism. This change is best illustrated in the works of Bencho Obreshkov, Dechko Uzunov, Stoyan Venev, Stoyan Sotirov, Vassil Barakov, Kiri Tsonev, Vladimir Dimitrov-Maistora, etc. After the mid-forties, Bulgarian art became untrammeled by normative Party academicism,
characteristic of all totalitarian states.

Around the second half of the 1950s the socialist realist canon became less rigid. From the early sixties to the seventies the young generation of artists tried to reinstall individual expression through chromatic intensity and distortion of form.

The most important development in the mid-80s was the emergence of alternative non-communist art. This was an uneven and multidirectional process, which was completed in the mid-90s. Today Bulgarian art is in the mainstream of world art.
Music and Folklore of Bulgaria

This section is a compilation from lecture notes and other resources.

Notes from the lecture entitled

The Charm of Bulgarian Folklore

presented by Professor Daniela Ivanova, Institute of Art Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
July 21, 2004

Introduction

Bulgarians’ system of festivity rituals, which is one of the essential aspects of the traditional cultural, includes four subsystems of calendar, clan, family and labor holidays. (source: Daniela Ivanova)

Many of the songs in Bulgarian folklore have an easily discernable archaic layer: characterized by an extremely narrow range of tones, and there are even melodies based on a single tone. One-voice melodies are mostly those found in Eastern Bulgaria, while two-part ones are those in Central Western and South Western Bulgaria. (source: Daniela Ivanova)

Bulgarian women have limited access to musical instruments so they usually perform the vocal parts. It is a type of singing, called “open-throated”, produced in the throat and it is very powerful and resonant. They would often sing while doing everyday household chores or weaving. (source: Lonely Planet, Bulgaria) There are three or four part choirs of women singing with an unusual voice quality. Bulgarian female singing is polyphonic with shifting melodies and many voices. The singers themselves say they try to sing, as the way bells would sound. In the Pirin district, the women sing two different two-voiced songs with two different texts simultaneously, resulting in a four-part texture. (source: Rough Guide, Bulgaria)

Rhythm

Bulgarian folk music also reflects the musical culture of the neighboring peoples but that culture is of a peripheral rather than decisive significance. The large variety of rhythms and melodies – the melody beat can be 5/8, 7/8, 9/8, 9/8b, 11/8, 13/8, 15/16, a combination of 7/8+7/8+11/8, 9/8+9/8+5/8+5/8+9/8, or an even one: 2/4+3/4+4/4, as well as the opulence of unmeasurable melodies (the melodies have their internal rhythm, but one cannot beat the time) are due to several factors: on one hand there is the input of the interrelations between the cultures of different tribes, on the other hand there is the energy of the ancient mountains, a third influence is that of the fact that Bulgarians “sing even when they weep”. (source: Daniela Ivanova)

Musical Instruments

The following musical instruments are typical for the whole country: kaval (wooden flute), gadulka (rebeck), gajda (bagpipe), tapan (kettle drum). The following can also be encountered: duduk (wooden pipe), dvouyanka (double pipe), oracina, tambura (pandore), tarambouka, zourna, kaba gaida (a kind of bagpipe), etc. (source: Daniela Ivanova)
Bulgarian Literature Today

Notes from the lecture presented by
Professor Vladimir Trendafilov
Department of English and American Studies, Sofia University
July 21, 2004

Bulgarian Poetry

Narrow Rooms
VLADIMIR TRENDAFILOV

Often space is experienced
oftenest
in narrow rooms, locked
against air. The walls
stay out of meaning if
you close your eyes.

You need also to shout. Its
Inner body
is an echo from immediate walls
where eyelids choke

Introduction
Bulgarian poetry has an abstract and detached quality even though it is personal. Unlike American
poets who have a vastness of territory and sense of ownership, Bulgarian poets have no space of
their own. After liberation from the Ottoman Rule, there was an urge for privacy. Bulgarians looked
to nature, especially the mountains, or turned inwards.

In Bulgaria there is a mythological past of a primarily agricultural society. The large, urban space is
a new theme for Bulgaria. Also, Bulgarian poetry has a meditative quality with memory and dreams
about sacred spaces for themselves. US poetry has more of a sense of the “here and now”, a
newness, in comparison with Bulgarian poetry. In Bulgarian poetry, there is a feeling of isolation
from Europe and the rest of the world. The poetry has been language bound but now with the
internet, there is more globalization and languages are coming closer together.
Main Trends in Bulgarian Poetry
by Vladimir Trendafilov

THE CORE OF THE BULGARIAN LITERARY CANON
Key Poets
Christo Botev (1848-1876): revolutionary lyrics; the poet-hero summoning the people to rise against Ottoman oppression.

Ivan Vazor (1850-1921): major figure of the literature of the newly formed Bulgarian state (1878). Poet and novelist (author of the greatest Bulgarian novel); “patriarch” of national literature; glorification of recent revolutionary past, criticism of present social problems.

Pencho Slaveykov (1866-1912); poet and critic; call for European orientation of national literature.

Peyo Yavorov (1877-1914); poet; partly revolutionary (a lesser Botev), partly lyric (a father figure for later love poets).

Later Europe oriented development: symbolism and expressionism.

Teodor Trayanov (1882-1945): German influence; blend of nationalism and Nordic type symbolism; positive attitude and glorification of the body.

Geo Milev (1895-1925): German and Russian influence; blend of expressionism and revolutionary thematics (another lesser Botev figure, Communist type).

Elisaveta Bagryana (1893-1991): figure of the liberated woman and the paganism of the emotions.

Atanas Dalchev (1904-1978): first typically urban poet; beauty and spirituality deducible from simple immediate objects.

THE PERIOD OF COMMUNIST RULE
Early Stalinist propaganda years: 1944-1956
Poetry was an instrument of propaganda. The poet was a minor figure in the sphere of writing: the ideologue or critic comes first, the poet just fulfills his/her task or duty;

Formal verse is obligatory; Soviet type internationalism, no less obligatory; Expression of personal feelings forbidden, esp. that of pessimism; the best choice of attitude in collective dreaming about the political future.

THE APRIL GENERATION OF 1956-1960
A group of young poets within the system (all of them members of the Young Communists’ League, later of the Communist Party) try to loosen its strictures, often conflicting with the conservative authorities.
Key Poets
Lyubomir Levchev
Vladimir Bashev
Ivan Dinkov
Stefan Tsanev
Konstantin Pavlov

THE NATIONALIST REVIVAL
Preoccupation with local details and values; a sort of quiet, soft patriotism. Parochialism.
Glorification of past history. Restrictions still exist, but have been thematicized; a first book of a young poet had to contain 2 or 3 poems praising the system or its ideology, 5 or 6 had to extol the beauties of the author’s birthplace, the rest could have any form or content except criticism against the system.

Key Poets
Ivan Tsanov
Georgi Konstantinov
Ivan Teofilov
Binyo Ivanov

THE LEVCHEV PERIOD (1979-1989)

Key Poets
Ekaterina Yossifova
Ivan Arnaoudov
Ivan Metodiev
Vladimir Levchev
Georgi Belev

THE POST COMMUNIST PERIOD (DATES)
Balkanization of themes and styles. Individualism to the bone. Further production of good stuff by older poets. The Georges Soros Foundation as a substitute for the former Bulgarian Writers’ Union. Formation of two writers’ unions.

Key Poets
Palmi Ranchev
Kristin Dimitrova
Velizar Nikolov
Mirela Ivanova
Georgi Pashov
Sylvia Choleva
Tanya Kolyovska
Georgi Gospodinov
BINYO IVANOV

SOMEBODY STOLE

Somebody stole the air, ah the translucence:
at the world’s end, beyond, a limpid stone is shining;
I stop, as if with lips, its pulsing motes,
its rounded edges, its gaps and their mud-lining.

Between us two - each line is on my hand,
its shadows bend where my fingers always do;
the alien lakes surge frothily in my eyes,
to pupils, through lashes thin fish stealthily go.

Now I reach and open the gates - it seems I’ve come
to the pot and the cat of a fireplace I recall;

but different is the slant, the angle to watch
and be watched from. So different I see nothing, nothing at all.

THEN

Then I’ll put on my hat,
will take my farewell - farewell, cat -
and go out to look for you.
They say the road’s all thorns -
so I’ll come back for my shoes,
and tossing the hat on the bed,
will take my farewell - farewell, cat.
Then putting on my hat again,
will take my farewell - farewell, cat.
They say all sky beside you
is disarrayed in clouds -
so I’ll come back for the coat,
will shake hands - hello, cat.
I’ll have forgotten the words
which I must say to you,
and they don’t hide behind the door,
the coatrack doesn’t hold them out.
Then I’ll take off my hat, and
put
the
cat
in
it.
**A DRAWING OF A WIND**

It made the wood sob
its heart out,
this wind.
Gone are all snails, all strawberries,
and a deer path,
and a nap beside a doe;
all to pieces went
          shadows and meadows,
acorns
and spouts
and wolves.
Around, the flitting of random wings of boughs,
          leaves of birds,
          ants
          and flies:
my ear can’t hear,
I stretch out my hand -
reaching stark air…

Even I
am not downright honest -
what’s the taut pencil to me,
this
isn’t a regular wood;

I’d better
lie down most differently,
lie down,
lie for a while
and think up:
A wind, it’s dead still like in a wind.

**EKATERINA YOSSIFOVA**

**A SONG ABOUT THE OTHER HOUSE**

When it is sunny and simple,
like a whitewashed house in a spot
(a bed for lovemaking, wine for friends,
and on the sill a flower-pot) -

when it comes to a house in a field,
even life doesn’t take pains:
it is nice, then, with the sky,
it is nice with the chains.
A MEMORY OF A ROOM
The roof made of books.
Nudging each other, bleaching,
until it leaked.

Walls papered in flowers;
diapers vapor in place of curtains.
The greedy flowers ate up the sweet haze.

Youth soothes like a cat:
you stroke her,
she sparks.

COLD
There are such apples: ripe only where
the sun shone on them.

Nowhere else sweet.

I feel cheated: the cold half
is longer than the warm.

I AM THE CHILD
I was the child
that climbed the hill at dusk

even nowadays setting my life
to the shining outlines of that horizon

so many years since then and still
not everything has been lost

a looming without luminaries
that was here all the time

beyond the sunset shapes flicker
with nothing to match them.

MIRELA IVANOVA

TOO
“Reason is more and more of a seismic area,
the cracks in thought are no metaphor.”
“You stretch it too far.”
“Rents on our skin grin their ugliness, when despair has no other ways out.”
“You complain too long.”
“Being kicked out of life, the truth is we kill each other for a chunk of bread.”
“You speak too much. And Truth isn’t a reliable witness.
You know, she doesn’t like the living.”

PERIOD
Our war came to an end
The hectic preparations hardened
the rushing more often than not jubilant
against to or inside each other
the screams curses grimaces and the blood
the enameled kidneybasins
the trenches hardened the humiliating waitings
the treacheries the third degree burns
the torn skin the guilty dreams hardened
we crept out of the pain out of our gaping bodies
spat out the poisons exhaled the smoke
spoke out the hate saw all
lost years children gods heal
It’s so good you killed me
and our war
came to an end

INSOMNIA CHRONICA
Nights
the sheet is a spread map of the world.
And sleeplessly I crawl
into the arms of North America,
get larger sleeplessly, become 9 996 000 km2,
get first
in the production of nickel, zinc,
platinum, asbestos.
Nights I’m Canada calling you:
escape to me.
UNDER THE CREED’S MANTLE

it’s cozy, safe and warm.
Say they.
Something like a sanatorium
for fanatic manikins.
But I don’t buy this.
Both my eyes have seen
this mantle trailing
on its own.
No wonder
it’s the choicest tablecloth
for stains.
I can hear them humming underneath:
“The creed is part of the particular.
What’s common is the sum of stains.
The sum total of all soups makes
aesthetics out of hunger.”

Who has spat in my bowl?
Who has walked in my soul?
Who has slept with my dreams?
Who has crunchéd the twilight’s glass?
Who has swallowed my expectation?
Who has shoved his hand in the bird’s throat?

Who has fed with flesh my angel?

WITH THE TIP OF MY TONGUE

Every morning I tear away the tip of my tongue
so that I can lick
so that I can lick
and I lick
and I lick tranquilly
the fishbone of tranquility.

Who can keep me from licking
I was ordered to lick my lips
I was ordered to lick my lips
like the cat that generated
the cat that generated herself
I have degenerated myself
I am my father and mother
and I am the newborn
a blind kitten a little bitty shitty kitten
as much as possibly a kitten
a half-mouse,
but still a kitten
sharp-tongued.

**MISERY**
Because my straitjacket armor was a bit too short
they shod me in a pair of knights’ boots,
they pulled a helmet over my eyes, my hands
they chopped off, just in case.
And because since then it’s only knights I meet
I rush to handshake them,
rush to handshake them,
rush to handshake them.
And sometimes I survive.

**FEAR**
I fear my laughter.
I’ve got no guts to laugh my head off,
I head off.
And only my thick lips
are smiling thinly.
A most serious of citizens
choked yesterday
on an unchewed smile and died.
I fear my laughter.
Laughter is health if only
the spirit is healthy...
But those
suffering from laughter walk about grinning.
I fear my fear.
I do not shake with laughter.
I shiver.

**WHAT AN AWFUL PLEASURE**
awful pleasure
thinking is.
Even if a person thinks
whether it’s worth thinking.

It’s awful when one relaxes in repose
and doesn’t want and cannot
think about one’s brains.
It's awful that homo sapiens
doesn't think.
And there comes the homunculus
and there comes the homunculus
stalin-hitler
and with what an awful pleasure
what an awful pleasure
the thugs march in throngs.

Wow, Jeeeeeeeze!
What an awful pleasure,
what an awful pleasure is
to have somebody think instead of you.

KONSTANTIN PAVLOV

THE AU-THOR, THE AU-THOR
Six billion lousy actors
curse each other’s mothers,
kick each other in the groins,
bite each other’s noses,
tear each other’s ears…
That’s how they entertain The Old Gentleman with the beard -
the only spectator; -
who is (at the same time) -
Father of the actors
and Author of the disgusting play.

VOICES
A blaze. And then - a Voice:
“Dead man, stand up and walk!”

And - darkness - brighter than the blaze.
And - Voice - Another Voice:
“Dead man,
don’t walk!”

(I had half risen -
I lied down back.)

And I heard Voices
(darkness and blaze)
that bitterly bit each other -
on the places
where the Voice came out.
(The Voices were Different.
The Throat was the same.)

And I heard clatter of hoofs too...

P.S.
(The day is a stallion,
the night is a mare.
But I’ll mount the mule of sunset
and gallop along the edge
until I’m done up.

**WHILE THE CONQUEROR IS FEASTING,**
**THE GUARDSMEN THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE**
The ultimate Conqueror
visits the places
where he has lost SOME
Definite Battles.
(Has been mucked up.
So to say.)
He raises the Memorials -
granite, musical and verbal.
Exactly There.
And he sleeps with the widows of his Eminent Enemies.

The Conqueror’s Guardsmen
change their swords with scalpels.
And - for the time being -
improve their skills
on naturally dead people only.

**PROPHECY**
The murder of a she-wolf
will change human history.
Romulus and Remus suck rubber nipples.
Rome will not be built.
TSANKO LALEV

SAND QUARRY
I the day was slashed and was dripping dry clues.
Only my feet were bare, all the others wore shoes.

Drops of blood, drops of blood so I could cry.
I was the sand, and the hangman, and the person to die..

There was no bridge around and the river was masked.
Who am I, shouted I, but nobody had asked.

Clenching teeth I went searching at least for a bone
from the man or the god who dug sand in this stone.

And the dry river buries my expressionless stare,
and I creak underneath and I know not a prayer.

Teary-eyed in the upturned sand cone of space
I imagined I came from a wild and extinct race.

I don’t need bread, nor water, nor love, nor hate.
They are all inside me, I am outside and wait.

IVAN RADOEV

AUDIOVISION

To Rumen Leonidov

There’s still no electricity.
There are no frog drumsticks either.
There’s no radio - in the couriers’ bags
the news starts stinking of cheese,
the coffee sleeps in the cobras’ feet,
dreaming in beans of international meetings.

There are no Japanese.
There are no other Japanese.
It’s hostile, illiterate, rough, provincial.

...And the Earth on her back in space
rotates the rings of Saturn.
And Mars - the best of jugglers -
tosses up Phobos and Deimos,
and Jupiter and Mercury,
on future commercial feet,
keep to their interested orbits,
while Venus, unsung of and naked,
dips in her hundred per cent moisture.

And not a single poet to shoot.

... It was night and my granddad told me:
"Where there are no natural poets
poetry turns into a linguistic problem.
Now off to bed for tomorrow morning
progress will come."

**OH, ALMOST**

*To Georgi Borisov*

All alone!
All alone?
I killed him, Mozart, at the entrance,
and soccer, ah soccer,
ah, my ancient Pleven period!

Now what?

Who is that man by the corner
with a toothpick smile?

Hello, Mr., come in,
we’re already in the office!

On my white-green, wet-green hair
thousands of sick skies perch.
They weigh on my boughs,
each with its thermometer,
each with its fly in the mouth.

Well, how is it elsewhere?
Oh, more or less the same!
Thermometers, flies...
From WHITE SINKING

EXIT
My life lived in a white cave.
I am the struggle, a voice said, and I walked,
and went out, and in front of me saw a white cave,
just follow me, and I walked on, and went out,

and again - a white cave.
Despair not, and I walked on, and went out,
and in front of me saw a white cave.

Are you tired, no I wasn’t, and I walked on,
and passed another, and yet another...
And it’s only then that in front of me I saw

a white cave.

RELIGIONS

To Konstantin Pavlov
Grown over with words, I move exhausted.
And will forget my eyes somewhere just like that.
And a warden will click. And the world will gape
like a stuffed squirrel against me.

And I’ll totter in an unprepared pose.
And my steps will break. And my hands
will tear the government edict off the sky.

Hey, you, drunk, why do you coax us
with this broken-clouds forecast?

And once again they’ll call up for Jesus, and Nero will come.

Translation Credits

Binyo Ivanov, Ekaterina Yossifova and Mirela Ivanova translated by Vladimir Trendafilov
Rumen Leonidov, Konstantin Pavlov, Tsanko Lalev and Ivan Radoev translated by Kristin Dimitrova
Being able to experience the art and culture of Bulgaria first hand has been a remarkable gift. As an educator, I want to share the knowledge and insights with my students and others in my academic and outside communities. Expanding our understanding of other cultures is invaluable as visual artists. It enhances our own work and makes us better global citizens.

Matisse visited the Rhodope villages and was especially interested in the craftsmen, especially the women at the old, wooden looms, weaving their traditional, colorful wool rugs. When he was asked by the Bulgarians about his vibrant use of color after his travels he said,

I have borrowed this from you, from the Rhodopes…women there are doing such incredible things!
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