

1. Bulgarian Culture, a Historical Perspective, Part 1, 681-1908, From Founding to Independence

The lecture is meant to introduce the mixed audience to the cultural history of a tiny European country that used to be powerful politically and influential culturally in its remote past. Established in 681, Bulgaria is among the first slavonic kingdoms in Europe. It snatched territory from Byzantium, predominantly lands populated by Slavs and by Thracians, but only Proto-Bulgarians managed to claim these territories as a state, turning thus Byzantine Empire into a historical neighbour and an arch-enemy. Being a state based on three pagan ethnic substrates it was crucial for Bulgaria to, first, adopt Christianity, and, second, create its own Slavonic Christian culture. Both projects succeeded in the second half of 9th C. Moreover, in the early 10th C Bulgaria became the main source and exporter of Christian culture and letters for the entire Slavic world, providing most of them with the new Cyrillic alphabet and with books translated or written in Old Church Slavonic, called by some Old Bulgarian language.

This Golden Age of Bulgarian Culture was followed by periods of ascendancy and decline. Bulgaria suffered and survived through two long periods of foreign rule by the Byzantine and the Ottoman Empires. The period of Bulgarian Revival is insurmountable prerequisite for understanding contemporary Bulgaria as the mythopoetic narratives constructing its national identity have been instilled then. Its liberation in 1878 brought the development of a modern national culture. Based initially on a mixture of folklore and the Christian Slavonic tradition of the First and Second Kingdom, it integrated various foreign influences in achieving its own national cultural image and character.

2. Bulgarian Culture, a Historical Perspective, Part 2 1908-2007: From Independence to Unification

We will actually start with 1905 when Modernism emerged. We will continue with the periods before, during and after the wars. The communist period will also be envisaged and evaluated. Finally, the period of Transition, i.e. the last 25 years, will be discussed.

By patiently overcoming its regionalism and provincialism, uncertainty and stubbornness, unproductive sticking to models and confusing vacillations between formative influences, Modern Bulgarian culture passed through a number of cultural models, most of which were in fact competing contemporaries fighting for recognition and authority. Still the wide diversity might be heuristically reduced to two main tendencies, the Nationalist-Collectivist one and the Modernist-Individualist one. By applying such agonistic (rather than antagonistic) model, we'll be able to avoid the illusion of period identity. A particular focus will be put on the contradictions that construct the post-1989 cultural stage, when an opening towards a market dominated cultural production had to put up with an increasingly diminishing international visibility and recognition of Bulgarian culture.

3. Bulgarian Literary Canon in the Context of European Great Books

The second lecture dedicated to Bulgarian culture will focus on the highest achievements of the modern literature and the arts before and after the national liberation. It will outline the most typical features of the masterpieces produced within Bulgarian culture.

The greatest poet Botev is a proper starting point, provoking the question why Bulgarian poetry is so much better than our fiction, or is it? We will shed light on Vazov, Yavorov, Debelyanov, Dalchev, Vaptzarov and a number of contemporary poets.

The overview on Bulgarian fiction will start with Vazov's novel *Under the Yoke*, Aleko Konstantinov's masterpiece Bay Ganyo and Elin-Pelin's and Yovkov's short stories. Dimitar Dimov, Radichkov, Vera Mutafchieva and Ivaylo Petrov will be also discussed.

Contemporary poetry and fiction will be also discussed through the names of Boris Hristov, Konstantin Pavlov, Nikolay Kanchev, Binio

Ivanov, Ani Ilkov, Georgi Gospodinov, Alek Popov, Emilia Dvorjanova, Teodora Dimora

4. Bulgarian Masterpieces in Comparative Perspective

Bulgarian music will be presented through an overview of Bulgarian folk music and its importance for the classical Bulgarian canon, Petko Stainov, Pancho Vladigerov, Ljubomir Pipkov, as well as for the internationally acclaimed musicians Milcho Leviev, Ibryam Papazov, and Teodosiy Spassov.

Theater will be presented through its main characteristics and tendencies. Dimitar Gotschev and Yavor Gardev as international celebrities will be introduced.

Visual arts will be addressed through a cluster of powerful figures like, Vladimir Dimitrov-the Master, Dechko Uzunov and others.

Bulgarian cinema will be presented through the masterpieces of Georgy Dyulgerov, Rangel Vulchanov and Methody Andonov.

Finally, we will pay tribute to Bulgarian performing arts through the names of Bulgarian opera singers and classical instrumentalists.

Internationally acclaimed contemporary Bulgarian artists like Christo, Solakov, Tabakova and others, will allow us to wrap up the overview.

5. Balkan Slavonic Culture Between East and West: a Postcolonial and Gender Perspective

An approach of en-gendering the East-West partnership is crucial for understanding the hidden prejudices and apprehensions that hampered their ongoing attempts to get together and get along. The third lecture will provide such a comparative approach that is both more theoretical and more practical. First we will question the

gaze of the West: why we, the people from the Balkans, have been perceived as the internal, hidden, suppressed and/or displaced other of the European West? What are the possible reasons behind the usual stereotypes and clichés about us? Why our in-betweenness turned out to be an instrument for our internal marginalization and deprivation of phenomenological solidity and clear physiognomy? What are the mythological automatisms still at work in the perceptive models of *the bridge*, *the crossroad* and *the road* between two presumably self-identical entities – Orient and Occident? In order to address this issue the lecture will put together a post-colonial reading of the way the Balkans have been perceived and articulated. A particular emphasis will fall on its gender perception. The paradox is that the Balkans in fact drop from the automatic gender pattern of feminizing the other. The latter is valid for Eastern Europe as Larry Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe* has shown. Yet the Balkans endure an alternative process of extreme masculinization. Why the internal other of the Balkans was perceived through the symbolic imaginary of masculinity, what was their own contribution and what was imposed on them through a masculinization on the verge of monstrosity? What were the responses of the Balkan cultures to such aggressive perceptive model? Was it a predominantly positive embracing or rather a negative adjustment with attempts to reconsider and counter-project such imposed gender perception?