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P. K. YAVOROV – Broadening his Cultural and Historical Legacy
P. K. Yavorov – an emblem of cultural missionary work and modernity

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In the second decade of the 21st century, one hundred years after Yavorov's tragic death, reading his works has urged me to outline several important points which broaden his contribution and turn him into an emblem of cultural missionary work and modernity.

The first one is the pursuit, which he and his fellows from the Thought circle – Pencho Slaveykov, Petko Todorov and Krastyo Krastev, Ph.D. – have become aware of, after the liberation of Bulgaria, of general transformations in the culture and the interrelated renewal of aesthetics, literature, dramaturgy, theatre and literary criticism. The new Bulgarian culture needs to make up for lost time and it needs an overall drive in all its aspects to qualitatively new artistic trends as compared to the previous ones. Efforts have to be made to change the entire complex of cultural activities which create premises for a new civilization model turned towards europeization and towards modernity. That is why nowadays the building of cultural institutions stands out at the center of the contribution of Yavorov and his fellows from the Thought circle, such as the National Library and the National Theatre in Sofia, the publishing of the Thought magazine, translations, literary criticism, theatre activity. This historic role puts Yavorov in a broader context than being regarded only as a great poet. I consider precisely this multicreativity and cultural missionary work as the true landmark when reading through his cultural and historical legacy.

Nowadays, in the second decade of the 21st century, this multicreativity makes Yavorov on par with the idea of modern culture, intransient as every great person who is ahead of his time. The motivation of this study is precisely that – to broaden the creative biography of Yavorov known so far, both as a poet and mostly as a literary figure. His important contribution related to dramatic works, theatre, translation, literary criticism and even stage production confirm that Yavorov is not only a talented person but also a missionary with modern views. Revealing him in such a culture-wide

focus 100 years after his death, it is important to make sense of the intransience of his work – as an emblem of cultural missionary work and modernity.

The successor of the first generation after the Liberation – the architects of modern Bulgaria, Yavorov is one of the figures who have turned into an architect of civilized Bulgaria. His path – of life and of creative work – reveals the dramatic efforts to modernize society and culture. In the struggle against prejudice and in the building of a new attitude towards the individual and the universal values Yavorov has a major contribution as a person and a leader in the transformation of the society.

The existential tragedy of Yavorov is in fact the tragedy of the spiritual development in the early 20th century in Bulgaria. Peyo Kracholov from the town of Chirpan, a telegraph operator from Anhialo, is not as educated as his fellows from the Thought circle, who have graduated in Europe, gas hone through a lot in order to become Yavorov – one of the cultural missionaries and creators of civilized Bulgaria on the map of Europe in the early 20th century. He specialized in France twice, learned the language, touched the modern culture of Europe and became a part of the building of two fundamental cultural institutions of Bulgaria after the Liberation, which are the pillars of our national identity, language and culture – the National Library and the National Theatre.

Yavorov also fills his **cultural missionary work** with his incredible sensitivity, individuality and decisiveness, combined with talent and infinite energy to create a new cultural environment, with modern criteria and vision for the society and for art. From the realm of poetry Yavorov moves on to a broader social field – the theatre, the dialogue with the audience through the stage, as well as the press, with his conduct of an uncompromising rebel and a tragic hero in the social life in Bulgaria in the early 20th century.

Yavorov gives the emblematic diagnosis, which unfortunately is valid to this day, is that at the foot of Vitosha Mountain people are killed with cruelty and with an axe. This roughness, which suffocates any attempt at demonstrating new and more civilized ways of social existence and cultural development, still weighs heavy at the foot of Vitosha Mountain, even 100 years later; an environment which does not give a breath

of fresh air to a new type of sensitivity, thought and conduct and which imposes by the force of the fist the predetermined choices of society: political, moral and personal.

With his play “At the foot of Vitosha Mountain” (1911) Yavorov tragically makes a full confession about his autobiographical experiences in this environment of ours. He tragically uncovers on the stage, before the audience, some typically Bulgarian tragedies; the blood marks are turned into a local remake of the timeless problems of love that dies amidst hate, of love as a sister of death, because it cannot be requited. Taking into account that Yavorov makes a full confession “At the foot of Vitosha Mountain”, we can conclude that the playwright formulates the Bulgarian problem on a timeless subject, and not with poetry or some elite genre but with his first dramatic work “At the foot of Vitosha Mountain”, which became very popular with the audience from its first production on the stage of the National Theatre in Sofia (September 1911). This confirms Yavorov’s role as a spiritual leader in the early 20th century.

At a time when free love is impossible, when it is a part of the tragedy to live through an impossible relationship, such as that of Yavorov and Mina, who lives outside the rules of the patriarchal and wealthy Todorov family. Petko Todorov himself describes her in his play “Dragon’s Wedding”. Regardless of the fact that he is a friend of Yavorov in the Thought circle, Todorov sees Yavorov in the role of a Dragon who lives outside the society and wants to take his sister Mina precisely there – where freedom lives. This demonstrates to the full extent the tragic impossibility of Yavorov’s pursuit of love outside the rules, or rather outside the prejudice, of society. For both Petko Todorov and Yavorov this is a complex and autobiographical dilemma; however, each of them solves it differently both in their lives and their creative works. In fact we have not yet mentioned the fact that “Dragon’s Wedding” and “At the foot of Vitosha Mountain” are produced on the stage of the National Theatre in quick succession: first Todorov’s play produced by Yavorov in April 1911 and then on 1 September 1911 – “At the foot of Vitosha Mountain”; both were played in the same season – 1911/12 – on the stage of the National Theatre in Sofia. This peculiar theatrical dialogue between the irreconcilable opponents in life – with regard to the relationship between Mina and Yavorov, develops into an artistic debate between the

fellows from the Thought circle which takes place on the stage of the National Theatre. This indisputably demonstrates that the drama and the stage are the focus in Yavorov's creative work in his mature period – 1910-1914, and that he is a leader in the painful debate in society and in the search for new paths for the modern man.

This is where I should mention that this focus in Yavorov's creative work and overall cultural activity started with his appointment as a artistic secretary of the National Theatre in Sofia in 1908 and it continues with the writing of "At the foot of Vitosha Mountain" in 1911. As early as in 1910 in Paris, following the death of Mina Todorova, Yavorov emphatically refused to return to poetry and wrote that he "will look for something else...". The paths that he outlines in his poems seem narrow to him, Yavorov wants to arrive at a wider path – "The thing is that I need to express myself more fully and more clearly. That is why I must look for another genre." (1910) This creative urge of Yavorov demonstrates that he was looking for a more powerful expression of the sense of making a full confession and of the autobiographic element in his creative work. Perhaps that is why the tragedy "At the foot of Vitosha Mountain" is not only a dramaturgical masterpiece but also an emblem of a difficult civilization change, of a typical Bulgaria spasm in the clash between prejudice, cruelty and sensitivity of a new type of an individualist, the man of the new age, the man of change and destructive passion who finds not a pretended but a true new space to express the ego. This is the essence of the worldly and creative mission of a great talent who sacrifices himself.

His second play "When thunder strikes, how the echo fades away" (1913), written shortly before his tragic death, is not as successful as the play "At the foot of Vitosha Mountain". In the early 20th century to put on stage the dramatic unraveling of a personal affair – of love and sin, of responsibilities of fatherhood and the pillars of family turned out to be too revolutionary in the light of the prejudice of the society of the time. Marriage as a convenience, as a consolidation of a social or material status quo in which feelings are not of prime importance, is this universally accepted prejudice which the characters of Yavorov's second play are faced with.

One century after the writing of Yavorov's two play it is clear that in "At the foot of Vitosha Mountain" he demonstrates from the stage publicly the dramatic fight for the

rights of the modern man to share feelings and to create a new kind of family, and in “When thunder strikes, how the echo fades away” he deals with the crises of existing in that family circle in the early 20th century. At the tie both his dramas are essentially tragedies on issues which open deep wounds in the structure of Bulgarian existence, which cannot acquire the normal views and freedoms of the modern society.

Yavorov gave voice to a completely new sensibility, which had turned its back on patriarchal and patriotic pathos of the Revival and the post-Liberation age in Bulgaria. He abruptly changed all that had been inherited, all this collective imperative of society, with the longings of the individual, with the uncovering of **the crises of the modern man**. Yavorov turned to his inner world, to its spasms and throws, to his personal territory of feelings, sins and painfulness. Both his plays demonstrate his interest in the universal torments of the individual. He showed this to the broader audience of the National Theatre in Sofia, an issue quite similar to the plays of Chekhov and Strindberg, to the dramatic dilemmas of the modern man. Recognizing these dilemmas and their uncovering on the stage in the early 20th century, Yavorov is the most prominent spokesman of the hopelessness, of the moral tests and dramatic problems of the individual of the new age. That I why his closeness to the sensibility, characters and problems of Ibsen, Chekhov and modern literature is only natural. He translated poems by Maeterlinck and got into the essence of the Gorkian characters. it is no coincidence that precisely Yavorov was one of those who were first tried to acquaint the Bulgarian people with the new artistic values of the European drama of the time; he defended its place in the repertoire of the National Theatre in Sofia and through his own plays he became the spokesman of the original Bulgarian expression of the problems of the age. Through theatre Yavorov expressed himself and believed that he can most actively engage his contemporaries with unresolved problems and conflicts. That is why the relationship between Yavorov, drama and theatre is a principal distinguishing feature of his work in the first decade of the 20th century.

The most important period to shape the broad format of Yavorov’s cultural missionary work is his work at the National Theatre in Sofia (**5 august 1908 – 30 January 1914**). This is where the two great authors from the Thought circle – Slaveykov and Yavorov – meet, the former as a director and the latter as artistic secretary, and this is a truly

significant moment in the development of the Bulgarian stage art. For the first time in the then-short biography of this young cultural institute its management was taken over by two creative personalities who solve its administrative, organizational and creative issues with responsibility, understanding and spirit of reform. The most important thing is that they focus the importance of the stage as a strong public instrument which can influence the spiritual development of society and its views. The box-office and the financial success are not the important things on the stage but precisely the opposite – theatre and art lead the audience to the dimensions of the universal, of the experience and meaning. This is the broad circle of pursuits and aspirations of reforming nature which had accompanied Yavorov's contact with live theatre and with public life in the early 20th century. Yavorov's other step in public life is related to Macedonia and with the fight for its liberation. This gradation in Yavorov's biography, this not only creative but also civil relentlessness and pursuit of change in the complicated times in the early 20th century turn him into an emblem of spirit. Precisely in this format his cultural and historical contribution is especially important – 100 years after his death.

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