



Peyo Yavorov

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1878-1914

Peyo Yavorov never studied European modernism systematically, yet his works do belong to the movement in terms of range and depth. The poet's artistic evolution reveals an extraordinary ability to recognize and represent modern literary trends without deliberately following them. To the question posed to him by Michael Arnaudov in a questionnaire of 1911 whether he was influenced by foreign models, Yavorov answered in the negative, "If I've been exposed to some influence, it's your job to discover it. I only gradually developed in this direction and found my own way to express what is new."

Even though Yavorov visited France several times, he never espoused the ideas of Bulgarian modernism, as did Dr. Kristev, Pencho Slaveikov, and later Geo Milev, Sirak Skitnik and Nikolai Rainov. It is most unfair to blame the then Minister of Education Professor Ivan Shishmanov for having all but destroyed Yavorov's original talent by sending him to France. Yavorov was not tutored in the platforms of European modernism, yet he was unquestionably the most talented spokesman of the modernist circle *Misal*. The circle emerged at the turn of the twentieth century and sought to harmonize Bulgarian literature with European standards. What is more, the symbolists, the first generation of Bulgarian modernists, acknowledged Yavorov as their teacher. His influence spread even beyond their time and cast a spell on such poets as Atanas Dalchev and Nikola Vaptsarov who lived in the 1930s and had little to do with Yavorov's poetics.

Of the poets before him, Yavorov was akin only to Christo Botev (1848-1876). He was deeply impressed by Botev's personality and poetry and, together with the other members of the *Misal* circle, he created the myth of Botev. Yavorov wrote, "Botev was a clairvoyant... He was a genius. We will never be able to fully appreciate the magnitude of his spirit."

Yavorov himself has often been ranked as a poet of Botev's stature. There are quite a few poetic parallels with Botev's poetry, for example, the picture of dawn in "In the Fields" and the mythic night in "Hadji Dimitar."

It should be noted that the association of Yavorov and Botev does not by any means imply the former's indebtedness to the Bulgarian National Revival. The *Misal* circle considered him a modernist by identifying typical individualistic themes in his poetry, especially man's loneliness. In the preface to the second edition of Yavorov's poetry (1904), Pencho Slaveikov draws a curious parallel between Yavorov's "The Eccentric" and Botev's "To My Mother", "Try to empathise with the character of the tacit Eccentric. If you are able to imagine him talking, you will surely hear a line from Botev: 'Is that you, mother, singing so sadly?'"

On the other hand, the comparison between Yavorov and Botev does not bring out similarities alone. Yavorov's *Haidout Songs* seem to foreground the differences between the two poets, even though the title implies a direct influence. These poems deliberately stylize the haidout lore and put the emphasis on orphanhood, devotion to a cause, and the ultimate loneliness of the haidout. Critic Vladimir Vassilev rightly points out that "These songs are not about the woeful plight of the slave; rather they celebrate the haidout's freedom and individualism thus opening a broader horizon for the first stage of Yavorov's poetry."

It is no exaggeration to say that Yavorov is by far Bulgaria's most popular and most modern poet of the early twentieth century. Yet this definition does not say everything worth saying about him. Yavorov was both a revolutionary deeply involved in the activities of the Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization and editor of a number of its publications. He participated several times in military actions of revolutionary bands in Macedonia that fought to liberate and annex it to Mother Bulgaria (1902-3). In 1912, Yavorov led a band of his own. His activities in Macedonia strongly resemble Botev's revolutionary exploits. (Small wonder that in Gotse Delchev's band he was named "The Botev of Macedonia"). His letter to Lora, written before he went to Macedonia, is strongly reminiscent of Botev's letter to Veneta, "Believe me, we will see each other again, just as I believe that you are the best Bulgarian woman."

Yavorov lived in a different historical period and in a different social and political situation. This seems to explain why he was unable to make the connection between poetry and revolutionary struggle the way Botev had done. Nor could he fuse them through his self-sacrifice. The failure of the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie uprising caused a profound crisis in him not only because his patriotic dreams had been crushed. Even at the very end of Yavorov's life, before he committed suicide, he still cherished patriotic hopes for Macedonia.

It is not surprising then that between the biography of the prominent Macedonian functionary Gotse Delchev, which Yavorov wrote as a friend and associate in 1904, and his own experience as a band member reflected in *Haidout Dreams* (1908), there stands his first completely modernist collection of verse entitled *Insomnia* (1907). It is deliberately detached from social and national

issues. Ultimately speaking, Yavorov the poet overpowered Yavorov the rebel. Alternatively put, the man of the people was superseded by man the individual. The poet's spiritual world went upside down. The new Bulgarian poetry underwent a radical change as well.

The creative pursuits and transitions in Yavorov's poetry reflect the beginnings of modernism in Bulgaria. They responded to the appeal of the *Misal* circle, to which the poet himself belonged, for the autonomy of art as an expression of artistic subjectivity. Literary critics tend to compare the divide Yavorov caused in Bulgarian lyrical poetry of the early twentieth century with what Baudelaire had done to European poetry in the nineteenth century. The analogy has been made by the critic Vassil Pundev who holds the view that along with Baudelaire, Maeterlinck and Albert Samain also influenced Yavorov's poetry.

The earliest poems sent to Dr. Kristyu Kristev, then editor-in-chief of *Misal*, by one Peyo Totev Kracholov, a completely unknown clerk born in the town of Chirpan, who often changed jobs, made a striking impression on critics. Dr. Kristev himself was amazed at the remarkable workmanship of the budding poet. He particularly liked the poem "Calliope" (1900). Even though the verse is light, it nonetheless contains the image of the barrier which would become productive in Bulgarian modernist poetry.

Dr. Kristev was by far not the only one to praise the beautiful poetics of "Calliope" because of its classical theme (an amorous couple divided by a barrier) developed in several parts with different stylistics, a varying tempo and changing points of view. The name "Calliope" first appears in the thoughts of the enamored young blacksmith and resounds in the sounds and sparks of the hammer pounding the anvil. The abrupt change of scene in the next part introducing the fairy tale motif of the beautiful maiden locked up in a castle by a magician lends a universal ring to the story, but also makes use of a completely new kind of imagery. The variations continue in the remaining parts introducing more images rendering love pain: lyrical folkloric, and even some overtones of popular songs.

Not only did Dr. Kristev publish the poems in his prestigious journal but also, full of enthusiasm and responsibility for the young poet's divine gift, he helped him move to the capital and even offered him a job. When Yavorov arrived in Sofia, he was barely 23 years old. His initiation into the modernist circle was marked by his adoption of the pseudonym Yavorov suggested by Pencho Slaveikov. This is the reason why Slaveikov was later referred to as the poet's godfather.

The high aesthetic threshold from which Yavorov commenced his career did not prevent him from evolving his own thematic and poetic dominants, e.g. the night, death, the barrier. Yet he was not in a hurry to start exploring the depths of the human mind and language. Nor did he immediately grasp the modernist

trends underway in western Europe that had started in the impressionist salons in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century.

The description of Yavorov's poetry as "divided yet unified art" proposed by the literary scholar Nikola Georgiev seems more serviceable than the earlier critical clichés which divide his output into first and second period without seeing any connection between the two. At least the book of his life *Following the Shadows of the Clouds* (1910) containing works selected from his entire poetry invites an anthological reading of his works. Critics should take into consideration the author's claim that this is his most important and only book. Ivan Meshakov calls it "our Book of Revelation, our Ecclesiastes." In other words, at the end of his life, the poet reconstructed his whole output. Yet his "unified art" is also "divided" and exhibits a distinct pattern of evolution.

Yavorov's first collection *Poems* (1901) is dominated by social motifs ("In the Field," "Hailstorm," "Armenians") and contemporary critics described the works included in it as "poetry of social misery." As one of them states, "Yavorov's poetry is realistic in every way and does not go beyond ordinary life." This view prompted Pencho Slaveikov to write his famous preface to the second edition of the collection in 1904 and suggest an alternative reading strategy, "I wish they were less popular." According to the preface, Yavorov's poetry should not address the mass reader. Mass readers can only debase it; they are unable to appreciate it properly as a work of art. Its high artistic form (Slaveikov calls it "decadently refined") and language make it a "precious jewel." Therefore, it should not be popular. In Yavorov's later works, the number of "jewels" increased and their abstract symbolism estranged mass readers. In the attempt to visualize the subject's inward eye and pose "suprahuman" questions, Yavorov's poetry became difficult to even his readers from the *Misal* circle.

The trend towards greater complexity clearly discernible in *Insomnia* (1907) appeared as early as in the 1901 *Poems*. Dr. Kristev noticed the absence of unity in the very first collection, "His moods and the motifs he develops are so disparate and remote from one another. One would think they were not born from the same soul." Thus, poems such as "May," "In the Field," "Spring" clash with the "The Eccentric," "Easter," "Night" as well as the cycle *Autumnal Motifs* which expresses a resigned attitude towards man and the world.

Even the titles of the poems in the first collection suggest a movement from concrete social to abstract symbolism. "Hailstorm," "In the Field," and "Armenians" are customarily treated as social poems. Even though their message transcends the merely social concerns, they nonetheless have national and historical references. It is clear that the poet wanted to raise the social fact to the status of symbol, and infuse the concrete situation with figurative meaning. Later on, he tried to see a symbolic meaning in psychological facts. For example, if suffering,

an emblematic state of Yavorov's persona, stems from specific causes and does not yet claim a universal meaning, in the poems after 1906, it is elevated to the essence of being "the entire human anxiety under heaven;" it has no beginning and no end and is transmitted from generation to generation.

The two types of symbolism in Yavorov's poetry derive from two different philosophical vantage points regarding human existence. One refers to man's active attitude towards the world (as in the poem "To a Pessimist," which betrays *narodnik* leanings and echoes the National Revival belief in the man of action who wants to change the world). The other is introspective, yet concrete reality is still there. In general, Yavorov's poetry never loses the connection between the physical and the metaphysical. In the poet's words, "The external picture transformed symbolically becomes a kind of "symbolization of the human spirit."

The change of attitude towards the world predicates the change of symbols. It is interesting to trace its fluctuations as early as the collection *Poems*. Sometimes the transition from one type to another happens within the same poem. For example, "Hailstorm" traces the path of an initially active attitude towards the world ("until there's strength, the peasant toils and toils") right through to the final picture after the hailstorm, when the terrible disaster has overpowered them mentally. The victims are "running" towards "nothingness" driven not by hope but by" eternal evil "towards silent devastated fields."

The individualistic poem "Night" opens where the social poem "Hailstorm" closes. The active involvement in the world is but a memory. The persona here is chained and forced to be passive ("Who put me in chains and when?"). In "Ice Wall" the metaphorical barrier is growing stronger to become a genuine symbol.

The disregard for the external and the search for value solely within the self is openly proclaimed in "Song of My Song," the first poem in *Insomnia* (1907). Critic Stoyan Iliev defines it as a programmatic work not only for Yavorov but also for nascent Bulgarian symbolism. Dr. Krastev too read "Song of My Song" as a poetic manifesto, "From now on, the manifestations of the people's soul and the objective life will be expressed through the subjective vibrations of the individual soul."

The entire collection occupies a special place in Yavorov's evolution, because it shows most clearly the poet's kinship with European modernism. According to Dr. Krastev, in his first collection Yavorov remained within the national tradition, but in *Insomnia* he was on a par with great European literature. It is the Bulgarian equivalent of *Fleurs de Mal* which overcame the parochialism of Bulgarian poetry.

Insomnia has a strikingly original composition. The poems are grouped in cycles: "Song of My Song," "Diary," "Death," "Refugees," "Towards the Top," "In the Dark," "Demon," "Nocturnal Visions" etc. The drawings and the Art

Nouveau vignettes by Christo Stanchev point to the influence of decadence on Yavorov best defined by Professor Shishmanov in a letter, “of all those who call themselves ‘decadents’, you are the only one that has not yielded to mannerism.”

The main theme of the collection is the individual soul and its vibrations, which Yavorov calls “gymnastics of the soul”. The approach is one of absolute self-reflection, whereas the structure is often amorphous as is his outlook. Being oscillates between polarities: God – Satan, innocence – lechery; love – hate; truth – lies. The split of the Self into two hearts and two souls – that of an angel and a demon – is profoundly symbolist. The split of the Self is a characteristic of the modernist mind searching for new categories to express human individuality and ambivalence as a paradigm of the modern world. This search creates intellectual tension, but does not weaken the mind. Rather, the metaphysical equinox, so to speak, causes its split. Ambivalence becomes an impenetrable wall blocking thought and speech and reaches its utmost limit in silence.

Yavorov’s change of outlook affected his poetics as well. This is supported by a shift in the function of epithets: from denoting the external to denoting the inner world. The role of adjectives, especially in the cycle *Epiphanies*, has become so important that in some instances the poet’s style becomes decorative. In “Nirvana,” for example, the sense of eternal time and indiscrete space is enhanced by the wide use of epithets. They are part of the very structure of the poem.

Yavorov’s entire output is marked by linguistic extravagance. At times, epithets precede the very naming of the poetic object. The object is created by means of a lyrical mystery. It may generate a large number of epithets and even a whole text. In the course of this process, the object may change its meaning as well. In “Song of My Song” the plethora of epithets (“faceless sorrow,” “abject and boundless”) intensifies the meaning of the signified to its utmost. The epithets are the building material of the symbol in “Ice Wall.” The variation of epithets having the same signified recall Stephan Mallarmé’s “orchestra.” They interpenetrate and thus turn the “wall” into a symbol of the barrier imposed upon the subject both from the outside and the inside. A similar orchestra of symbol-building epithets can also be found in “Solitary Whisper-III.” In it the “window-pane” (“wide, cold and separating”) and the “fly” bumping against it construct the symbol of the barrier blocking the soul from striving to go to the beyond.

The oxymoron plays a prominent role in Yavorov’s poetics. It is absent in *Poems* whereas in *Insomnia* and *Epiphanies* it becomes a characteristic device. Its wide use may be one reason why the poems of that period were difficult for the readers. Worth mention in this regard is Slaveikov’s remark in the preface to *Poems* (1904), “Where Yavorov is going, he will be all alone.” Critic Andrei Protich too draws attention to the passages that “remain unintelligible to the broad public. A chasm stands between them and the poet.”

The argument that paradoxes appear on the borderline of poetic canons and scientific paradigms to signal the latter's decline, raises the question of the special place of Yavorov's poetry and personality in Bulgarian modernist poetry. Bringing together two incompatible oppositions, the poet achieves extraordinary intensity of meaning. Any attempt to rationally break down the components of the oxymoron would destroy its charm and intellectual power.

Why did Yavorov resort to such a wide use of the oxymoron? May be for him the conventional concepts had lost their heuristic capacity to express the depths of the Self and the Universe. The "superhuman" questions remain unanswered because they are multi-dimensional and impossible to express in words. They are "a silent question": "The superhuman questions that no age could answer/I dug deep, dumb and all alone" ("Mask"). Yavorov reaches the very limit of the power of words to express meaning. Behind it is the text of the inexpressible or simply silence, "my heart knows everything and will be forever mum" ("Sphinx"). Here the language of silence is the language of irrational knowledge untranslatable by conventional means.

The problem of verbalization and nomination can be found in quite a few poems, especially in "One Word," "Good and Evil, beginning and end, I would put them in one single word/No language can utter." His efforts to find this word leads the poet to the antinomic epithets, "endlessly long and immeasurably short, / at once darkness and fire," "the holy and the damned word." It turns out that Yavorov applied his antinomic vision in order to undermine such extreme opposites as good and evil. This seems to point to a major reevaluation of fundamental axiological categories in terms of their complementarity and interdependence.

The depressing view on goodness and faith can be found in other poems as well. The declaration "How I pine away for goodness, how I believe in it" in the poem "Come and Do Not Be Afraid" is but wishful thinking; the real and dominant state of Yavorov's persona is that of "dark hopelessness." Put in Yavorov's own words, Goodness is hope in hopelessness ("hopeless in hope, you, sick violets, are fading away" ("Violets")). It is precisely the shattered belief in a humane moral system that Yavorov's oxymoron stands for.

"Song of My Song" is a programmatic work as regards Yavorov's use and meaning of the oxymoron. The truth/lies opposition is a result of the knowledge the persona has acquired: "A suffering faceless, abject, boundless, somewhere in between truth and lies." For Yavorov suffering is a cognitive tool. It helps him find his own measuring unit to rearrange his own subjective world.

The theme of suffering is central to Yavorov's poetry. It has attracted a lot of attention, especially by the critics who see a divide in his poetry – from the reflection of social suffering to the suffering of the soul. It is not surprising then that Dr. Kristev considers the poem "I Suffer" as another emblematic work following

“Song of My Song”: “A prelude to life and doom written by life itself.” The main tone of this life is contained in the song “I Suffer.” Its helpless realism fills the reader with horror. Calm and detached like a chronicler of someone else’s life, the poet enumerates the stages of his suffering: the forgetfulness work brings; the pain of peace and quiet; the storms of night and day; the cold messages of extraterrestrial riddles; the aspiration for heaven and the pain of weak flesh.” Here again the antinomy expresses the essence of the persona’s suffering. Geo Milev’s well-known comment that such suffering exceeds the individual capacity to endure is at the basis of his argument that Yavorov’s lyrical verse is an emanation of collective suffering accumulated through the ages.

The antinomy belief/disbelief can be found in Yavorov’s interpretation of love. It is a polarized experience as well. The spirit emancipated from social dilemmas immerses itself in the irrational and demonic experience of the world and its own self. Hence, the themes of demonic love (“To Lora,” “Demon,” “Come and Do Not Be Afraid”) and the ambivalent portrait of the demonized woman as a combination of beauty and sin (“Monster”) and the deified beloved (“You Will Be All in White,” “Two Lovely Eyes”) as a combination of beauty and innocence. The cycle *Queens of Night* is a variation of diabolical love with erotic connotations (“Cleopatra,” “Messalina”). It is a peculiar female mirror of the evil narcissistic essence of Yavorov’s persona. The demonization of womanhood may be seen as a reflection of decadent ideas, e.g. Przybyszewski’s misogyny or Otto Weininger’s idea of love as the egotistic projection of the male.

The persona objectifies itself by splitting into separate animated essences and constructing subject-object relations within the Self. In “Dedication” there is an antithetical counterpointing between the Self and “my thought”. The poem’s title implies an addressee whose name is disclosed only in the last line of the first stanza as the unexpected “my dear mate, my free-riding thought.” The second stanza characterizes the named object through clusters of similes further developing and complicating meaning. Antinomies are built through the oxymoronic epithets: “insidiously kind” and “sadly joyful.” Engendered in the mind, thought engulfs its creator in a demon-like fashion, “dying in your despotic embrace.”

The self-reifying and self-alienating “I” originates in a modernist sensibility hostile to conventions and ceaselessly building worlds within worlds only to deconstruct them. In “Song of My Song” the different worldview of the persona is expressed through the dialogic relationship between the “I” and “my song.” The words uttered earlier remain in the past, no longer able to identify themselves with the speaker who has passed beyond the old meanings. The lyrical persona is searching for a new accord with its alienated Self (“Come to me, come within me”). In the early poem “Night” the poet uses the same device of severing and reifying a spiritualized aspect of the persona, in this case the dream. The two

poems exhibit another similarity: the dream summoned in the adjectives “frightened, listless, in tattered dress and hair hanging loose” resembles the feminized language of “weary, frightened, broken” evoking the image of the song in “Song to My Song.” The “thought,” the “song” and the “dream” are personified into feminine images characterized by listlessness and reminiscent of Jung’s anima. The cluster of personifications recalls the inner feminine part within the male. Some critics see in the above clusters an attempt to emancipate the demons of the male Anima by the feminine imagery thus opening up a new semantic field in Bulgarian literature.

The theme of death is the particular area of human experience within which the poet solves the mystery of being and reconciles polar opposites. Death figures as the most totalizing symbol in Yavorov’s poetry eclipsing his other great symbols of love, the mother and the homeland. The symbol of death expresses the very essence of the poetic sensibility prompting critics to call him the “poet of death.” In one of his most perceptive philosophical poems “Death” the poet probes deep into “the beginning and ending of all human suffering under the sky” to find the answer in death, “the soul of ages and eternal thought.” In “Days in the Night” life is only a dream of death as day dawns and dies in the omnipresent night.

In his *Philosophical-Poetic Diary* (1910) begun in Paris after the death of his great love Mina, Yavorov dwells on the theme of death, “the darkest secret,” “staring one in the face” and expresses his personal reflections and mystical insights. The diary transcends the personal tragedy viewing death as a universal human condition and examining its metaphysical dimensions. Death is represented through the mortality/immortality dichotomy, “she lived and she is gone; she passed through life and passed away; has she ever existed, all I can remember are two lovely eyes.” The connection of the diary with his famous poem “Two Lovely Eyes” is obvious. Yavorov’s poetry reflects his life just as much as his life imitates his poetry. This suggests a kinship with Oscar Wilde and his aesthetic ideas. For example, the poem “Moan,” inspired by Mina, appears in Yavorov’s last book of verse with a new dedication and title “To Lora” – his last great love who committed suicide and brought about his own untimely demise.

The level of Yavorov’s thought is far removed from the rational. The poet intuitively feels that his “extreme” mysticism is the most irrational aspect of his poetic nature: “There is plenty of mysticism in me which I do not express. It grows on the soil of death. I do not think about death, I dream of death. It haunts my verse.” One wonders what anguished revelations his verse might have held, had the poet expressed his mysticism to the fullest.

In a comment on his poems “Death,” “The Song of Man,” “Appeal” critic Stoyan Iliev remarks that “the horrible visions of the beyond, so dizzying that a further step into this kind of mysticism will be threatening to one’s individual-

ity.” In Yavorov’s late verse death emerges as the most important philosophical category in the metaphysical quest.

Yavorov’s last verse book *Following the Shadows of the Clouds* (1910) is interesting for its intertextuality. Critic Mihail Arnaudov establishes an intertextual reference of the title to one of Baudelaire’s prose poems, “I love the clouds passing in the sky,” published in translation in the journal *Misal*. The poet Atanas Dalchev thinks that Yavorov’s title was prompted by Kiril Christov’s poem “Following the shadow of the cloud,” whereas another critic sees in it a self-quote from the poem “Militsa.” The poem “Pansies,” published in *Misal* in 1906, carries allusions to Maeterlinck’s poetry. Yavorov had already translated and published several of Maeterlinck’s poems. “Pansies” sounds like a song from Maeterlinck’s “Serres Chaudes.” Another common theme is the motif of waiting present in Yavorov’s poem “Maybe.” To sum up, the poet prevails over the translator of Maeterlinck by reworking and altering meanings.

Yavorov’s interest in Lermontov’s poetry is also well-known. The intertextual allusions to the Russian romantic appear as early as in the poem “A Shed Leaf” from the cycle *Autumn Motifs*. The poem “Night” is associated with Lermontov’s *Nights*. Yavorov’s is an apocalyptic night in which the parting with the homeland, the mother and the beloved is motivated by the persona’s shackled willpower and the impossibility to withstand cosmic evil. The first publication of the poem “Demon” carries a motto which makes explicit the association with Lermontov. Although the motto was deleted, when the poem was included in the anthology *Following the Shadows of the Clouds*, this did not change Yavorov’s attitude towards the Russian romantic. In a letter from 1906, the poet wrote: “You are asking whether I still read Lermontov. I find this question odd... I never re-read my own poems; I can do without them as I can do without any other poetry, except for Lermontov’s. His poems are the perfect expression of my own soul.” Some critics see a connection between Yavorov’s poetry and the Byronic hero that has come through the mediation of Lermontov’s verse. Furthermore, the anticipation of death in Yavorov’s “The Song of Man” can be associated with Lermontov’s “Dream,” written just before the fatal duel. “The Song of Man” is the last poem from the cycle *Epiphanies* where space and time point to eternity.

“Homeland” is another poetic dialogue with Lermontov’s eponymous poem. It marks a turning point in the treatment of the homeland theme in Bulgarian literature. Vaptsarov develops the same theme in his “Songs of the Homeland” echoing Yavorov rather than Lermontov.

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Along with lyrical poetry, Peyo Yavorov wrote dramas which reveal the influence of the psychological plays of Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg, Maeterlinck

and Hauptmann written at the turn of the twentieth century. Between 1908 and 1913 he was artistic secretary of the National Theatre. His plays “At the Foot of Mt. Vitosha” and “When Thunder Strikes, the Echo Dies Down” became the new medium through which he examined the existential and philosophical problems of death and life.

His first drama “At the Foot of Mt. Vitosha” written in Paris in 1911 shows the influence of neo-romanticism and symbolism. Yavorov and his beloved Mina are prototypes of the protagonists Christoforov and Mila. The poet called the play a tragedy and, indeed, it can be read as a sublimation of his personal drama of lost love. He also described his work as “social drama” obviously pointing to the insoluble conflict between the protagonists and the social environment. Split between the personal and the social, the desirable and the real, the characters are involved in a concentric unfolding of the dramatic situation. The “child-doll” motif borrowed from Maeterlinck implies female immaturity, whereas the Ibsenite “woman-doll” motif suggests adoration of womanhood. Mila is featured as an elfish and magical fairy that evokes parallels with the poetic portrait of Mina in Yavorov’s verse. The traditional symbolist image of the lily with which Mila is identified recalls Maeterlinck. Yavorov translated Maeterlinck’s verse and was familiar with his drama “Monna Vanna.” According to some critics Strindberg’s drama “The Father” also influenced Yavorov’s plays.

“When Thunder Strikes, the Echo Dies Down” (1913) can be described as an ethical and philosophical play. According to Yavorov himself, the idea to write it was prompted by a “psychological problem” he sought to resolve. Similarly to Ibsen’s “Ghosts” and Strindberg’s “The Father”, the basic conflict here is between the individual and his social environment. The play’s first title “The Mother” reveals an unequivocal connection to the Scandinavian playwright. The dramatic conflict is psychological and comes from the split of the Self, the clash between the values of the heart and the values sanctioned by society. The divided Self of each protagonist faces the disclosure of long concealed secrets leading to inner conflicts. The feeling of isolation adds to the dramatic tension. The conflict with oneself plays a paramount role. Events move from external communication to internal reflection. The same movement is present in Yavorov’s poetry.

Following the aesthetics of modernist drama, “When Thunder Strikes” turns the inner life of the protagonists into a motive force of the dramatic action. As Yavorov himself remarks in his essay “Two Bulgarian Plays,” “The true drama of all times has one major goal: to portray the inner man who lives, suffers and dies, operating in particular circumstances.” The core of the conflict in both plays is the hard road to self-knowledge, a motif also underlying *Insomnia* and *Epiphanies*.

Yavorov’s translations also reveal the poet’s interest in European modernism. Worth mention are the six poems by Morris Maeterlinck, taken from an anthology

which Yavorov bought in Geneva in 1904, and Oscar Wilde's scandalous drama "Salome." Yavorov translated "Salome" during his stay in Paris in 1910 after his beloved Mina's death.

An interesting case is the translation of the poem "L'Homme" by Louise Ackermann, published by the journal *Misal* in 1907. When Yavorov discovered the poem in an anthology of French poets, he was struck by the similarities he discovered with his own "Song of Man" and decided to alter the Bulgarian translation of the French poem as much as possible in order to emphasize the differences. He also translated Lenau's "Winter Night" based on Boyan Penev's prose version and nine poems by Goethe based on critic Mihail Arnaudov's literal translation.

To sum up, Yavorov is a modernist whose poetry cannot be reduced to a single label. His verse abounds in images and ideas which show close affinity with the aesthetics of romanticism and symbolism, yet its range and variety transcend those movements. He remains an idiosyncratic poet both in European and Bulgarian terms. Discussing Yavorov's relationship with the European literary tradition, Mihail Arnaudov defines him as a Bulgarian classic who embodies a synthesis between Ivan Vazov and Pencho Slaveikov. Says Arnaudov, "Whereas Pencho Slaveikov drank juice from foreign fruits and could never stand firmly on native soil, however hard he tried, Yavorov is a truly national poet immersed in European art and aesthetics." The poet himself was well aware of the dialectic of "foreign-national": "The only way we could attract external attention is by creating authentic, original, Bulgarian art. Anything that does not carry the stamp of the Bulgarian soul, however brilliant it may be, will be of little value to the outside world." To Yavorov literature should be a negation of convention and routine, and the true artist is one who is capable of achieving a harmony between the inner and the outer.

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