

**COURSE TITLE:**

**THE CONCEPT OF TIME AND IDENTITY IN THE BULGARIAN LITERARY  
MODERNISM**

**The course is given in English by Assoc. Prof. Ivan Hristov from Institute of Literature,  
Department of New and Contemporary Bulgarian Literature, Bulgarian Academy of  
Sciences. For contacts: *christoff78@abv.bg***

**COURSE CONTENT:**

*Lecture 1: Introduction*

**PART 1: BULGARIAN LITERARY MODERNISM AND THE NATIVE**

*Lecture 2: The “Dragon’s Wedding” Motif and Bulgarian Modernism*

*Lecture 3: Symbolist Guerillas, Realist Rebels: The Image Of The Hajdutin Or The  
Freedom Fighter*

*Lecture 4: The Sagittarius Circle’s Concept of Time and Identity*

**PART 2: BULGARIAN LITERARY MODERNISM AND THE FEMININE**

*Lecture 5: “A Fragile Vase of the Purest Alabaster” – The Feminine Theme in  
Bulgarian Interwar Literature*

*Lecture 6: Bulgarian Literary Modernism – The Native and the Feminine*

**PART 3: BULGARIAN LITERARY MODERNISM AND THE FOREIGN**

*Lecture 7: Ford, Poe and the Jazz Band: Bulgarian-American Cultural Reflections  
between the Two World Wars*

*Lecture 8. Reuben Markham: An American Influence in Bulgarian Modernism*

*Lecture 9: Bulgaria Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – Between Europe and Eurasia*

**PART 4: BULGARIAN LITERARY MODERNISM AND SOCIALIST REALISM**

*Lecture 10: Atanas Dalchev and Socialist Realism: Methodological Discrepancies*

*Lecture 11: Rethinking Bulgarian Literary Modernism – Thirty years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall*

## PART 5: BULGARIAN LITERARY MODERNISM AND BULGARIAN LITERARY POSTMODERNISM

*Lecture 12: Georgi Rupchev and the Great Wasteland*

*Lecture 13: Poetry of the 1980s – Napping, Dreaming, Talking in One's Sleep*

*Lecture 14: Conclusion*

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

*Lecture 1: Introduction*

This course will examine the problem of time and identity through the prism of the literary tradition. The focus of the course will be Bulgarian literary modernism, which will be investigated through a comparative analysis using several concepts important for identity, namely: the native, the feminine, the foreign, socialist realism, and postmodernism. Bulgarian literary modernism will be analyzed not only in its static state, as a specific literary period that covers the time from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the Second World War, but as a dynamic phenomenon. This course will attempt to interpret it not only within the context of its initial appearance, but also in the context of its transformation into a tradition.

## PART 1: BULGARIAN LITERARY MODERNISM AND THE NATIVE

*Lecture 2: The “Dragon’s Wedding” Motif and Bulgarian Modernism*

The lecture traces how the mythological motif of the “Dragon’s Wedding” from the folkloric tradition was interpreted in various ways in the different stages of Bulgarian modernism at the beginning of the twentieth century. Building on the work of Yeleazar Meletinsky, I will explore how modernist thinkers preserve the tale’s mythological core while at the same time transforming it in accordance with new goals. I also will examine how the specific retelling of the myth in each stage of Bulgarian modernism corresponds to a contemporary concept of identity. I will begin with the folklore and individualism of Pencho Slavejkov, passing

through the symbolism of Petko Todorov to the expressionism of Geo Milev. The interpretation of the motif will be examined in light of the cultural context of Bulgarian modernism, highlighting parallels with works of literary criticism as well as to the visual art of that period.

*Lecture 3: Symbolist Guerillas, Realist Rebels: The Image Of The Hajdutin Or The Freedom Fighter*

The image of the hajdutin or the freedom fighter plays an important role both within Bulgarian folklore and the Bulgarian literary tradition. In this lecture, I will discuss the mythological roots of the hajdutin in Bulgarian folklore and its relationship to other mythological figures such as the dragon, the samodiva or nymph, and the hero. I will then turn to the poem *Hadzhi Dimiter*, by Bulgarian poet and revolutionary Hristo Botev, examining how his fusion of the mythical archetype with a historical personage creates a new model of heroism that the poet himself later plays out in his own death. Finally, I will examine Peyo Yavorov, a later poet and hajdutin, whose failure to imitate Botev's self-sacrifice lays the groundwork for a paradoxical modernist return to mythological archetypes more archaic than those used by the romantic Botev.

*Lecture 4: The Sagittarius Circle's Concept of Time and Identity*

This lecture will examine how the concept of time and identity in Bulgarian literary modernism changed during the period between 1920 and 1930. The conditions for as well as the results of this change will also be analyzed. In 1920, the concept of time in Bulgarian literary modernism was still cyclical. In his article, "Native Art," the Bulgarian expressionist Geo Milev proclaimed the postulates of the new art. According to Milev, this art would have to retrace its steps back to mythological man, towards "the primitive man of proto-being – to Adam". Milev called for a representation of a mythical time and mythical space in art, favoring the past. According to Eleazar Meletinsky, "the urge to go beyond the limits of social-historical and temporal-spatial frameworks in order to manifest a pan-human content was one of the signs of the transition from the realism of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. to modernism, and mythology, by virtue of its iconic symbolicness, turned out to be a comfortable language to describe the eternal models of personal and public behavior, of the essential laws in the social and natural cosmos". I will pay particular attention to the influence of Oswald Spengler's book *The Decline of the West* (1923) upon the formation of Bulgarian modernists' concepts of time and identity. According to Spengler, western culture would be replaced by an ascendant

Slavic culture. Modernists from the Sagittarius Circle sought a place for Bulgarian culture within that new upsurge. They gave preference to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the time of the Bulgarian Revival, exchanging cyclical time for historical time. They chose the past as their starting point, yet were oriented towards the future. They demanded that Bulgarian *reality* be expressed in art. From contra-modern, during 1925-27 Bulgarian modernism transformed into a modern project. Concepts about time and space are examined in detail, while the concepts of continuity and tradition, as well as cyclicity and historicity are analyzed within the context of Bulgarian modernists' writings.

## PART 2: BULGARIAN LITERARY MODERNISM AND THE FEMININE

### *Lecture 5: "A Fragile Vase of the Purest Alabaster" – The Feminine Theme in Bulgarian Interwar Literature*

The theme of the feminine became topical in European and hence Bulgarian culture with the outbreak of World War One. The masculine part of the population went to the front and women found themselves able to take of public positions that had previously been considered predominantly masculine. But this led to a series of changes in the public's mentality and to attempts to make sense of this change. The lecture "A Fragile Vase of the Purest Alabaster – The Feminine Theme in Bulgarian Interwar Literature" will focus on this problems, which found a place in the pages of *Iztok* (East) newspaper, the mouthpiece of the Strelets (Sagittarius) Literary Circle. Broadly speaking, the topic will be examined in the following four aspects: Woman and War, Woman and Reform, Woman and Alienation, Woman and Creativity.

### *Lecture 6: Bulgarian Literary Modernism – The Native and the Feminine*

In 1927 two collections of poetry written by women were published: *The Eternal and the Sacred* by Elisaveta Bagryana and *Macedonian Songs* by Magda Petkanova. Similar in composition and theme, the two books were counted by a series of critics as falling in the aesthetic bounds of the *Native Art* movement, which was gathering steam at that time. But while Bagryana's book attempt to establish the figure of the woman in Bulgarian culture, Magda Petkanova's collection tries to resurrect the Bulgarian national ideal of unity that had collapsed after the First World War. One other important difference between the two cases is that while *The Eternal and the Sacred* was canonized and became a model for Bulgarian

female writing, *Macedonian Songs* was marginalized, with only sporadic interest shown to it. In the lecture “Bulgarian Literary Modernism – The Native and the Feminine,” I will make an attempt to trace how the mechanism of canonization and marginalization function; what is it about Petkanova’s poetics that the canon does not approve and rejects like a foreign object. I will also pay attention to precisely how the first professional female writer in Bulgarian literature appears and is canonized.

### PART 3: BULGARIAN LITERARY MODERNISM AND THE FOREIGN

#### *Lecture 7: Ford, Poe and the Jazz Band: Bulgarian-American Cultural Reflections between the Two World Wars*

The phenomenon of America, similar to “the woman question,” became topical after the First World War. The US managed to emerge from the war as a power of global significance. Enormous natural resources spread over enormous territory, powerful technical and scientific revolutions, rapid industrialization and modernization transformed the US over the course of a single century from a European colony to a world leader, which especially after World War I exercised strong economic and cultural influence over the Old Continent. This caused European and Bulgarian intellectuals to attempt to understand this phenomenon. Exactly then for the first time the idea of a United States of Europe appeared. But how did it come about that the US’s significance increased? How did this country transform in a short period of time into a “metaphor of modernity?” This “American miracle” gave cause to the intellectuals from the Sagittarius Circle to analyze the reasons for its appearance and its meaning. This lecture will examine in detail the presence of the American theme in the pages of *Iztok* or *East* newspaper – the mouthpiece of the Sagittarius Circle – exploring this theme in its political, scientific-technical and cultural aspects.

#### *Lecture 8. Reuben Markham: An American Influence in Bulgarian Modernism*

Reuben Henry Markham was born February 21, 1887, in Twelve Mile, Kansas. In 1908 and 1909, he attended Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University in New York City, working on an M.A. in Education and a Divinity degree. Markham was an ordained a Congregational minister and served as a missionary in Bulgaria for the American Missionary Board of Boston beginning in 1912. In this post, he taught school and founded and edited

several periodicals. He became Bulgarian correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor* in 1926 and subsequently served as Balkan correspondent and as correspondent for central and southeastern Europe. For many years, Markham was prominent as a writer, lecturer and author of several books. He had spent much of his life in southeastern Europe and was recognized as one of the most widely known and intimately informed Americans in that part of the world. Markham was a vigorous opponent of tyranny and had distinguished himself on many occasions for such opposition. His books include *Meet Bulgaria*, *Romania Under the Soviet Yoke*, *Tito's Imperial Communism*, *The Wave of the Past*, and *Bulgaria of Today and Tomorrow*, the latter written in Bulgarian. He died December 29, 1949, in Washington, D.C. Markham's life and work, however, are almost unknown in contemporary Bulgaria. One of the reasons for his consignment to oblivion is likely due to his denunciation during the Communist regime. This lecture will explore the work of Reuben Markham in Bulgaria and his contribution to Bulgarian culture. It will pay particular attention to the periodicals in which he participated: socio-educational magazine *Seme* ("Seed"); evangelical newspaper *Zornitsa* ("Morning Star"); *Polet* ("Flight") magazine; the newspaper *Iztok* ("East"); as well as the books *Meet Bulgaria*, and *Bulgaria of Today and Tomorrow*. The other goal of this lecture will be at least the partial rehabilitation of Reuben Markham and his significance within Bulgarian cultural life.

#### *Lecture 9: Bulgaria Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – Between Europe and Eurasia*

After losing the First World War and suffering what is known as the "Second National Catastrophe" the sense of disappointment with Europe was growing ever stronger in Bulgaria. It turned out that the country, which had been a German ally during the war, was incapable of reaching its national ideal. In the period between the two World Wars, a turbulent search for the path to a new national identity raged. The questions were raised: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? On the one hand, Pan-Germanism was revived, on the other hand, Pan-Slavism. Oswald Spengler wrote his work *The Decline of the West* and *The Decline of Europe*. On the one hand, the idea arose for a united states of Europe, while on the other hand, Eurasianism. Bulgaria found itself torn between two worlds – that of the East and the West. During this period, a new opposition also appeared – between capitalism and communism. And while Filippo Tommaso Marinetti invented his visions of the future, Nikolai Berdyaev talked about a return to a New Middle Ages. This lecture will attempt to offer an analysis of these processes in their historical, cultural and literary aspects, caught on the border

between two centuries, between Europe and Eurasia, before Bulgaria definitively took the path of communism.

#### PART 4: BULGARIAN LITERARY MODERNISM AND SOCIALIST REALISM

##### *Lecture 10: Atanas Dalchev and Socialist Realism: Methodological Discrepancies*

Within the framework of the debate between Atanas Dalchev and Hristo Radevski on the nature of children's poetry, this lecture will examine several of the most important aspects of the socialist realist doctrine: In Part One, "The Problem of Reality," I will analyze the theoretical differences between socialist realism as opposed to realism and modernism with respect to understandings of the concept of "reality." In Part Two, "The Problem of the Nature of the Creative Process," the question of the ideological-political preconditions for socialist realism will be examined. Part Three, "The Problem of Tendentiousness," convincingly will show that socialist realism is a form of tendentious art. Part Four, "The Problem of Language," will analyze some of the basic characteristics of the language of totalitarian art. In Part Five, "The Problem of Power," I will persuasively demonstrate that socialist realism is not an aesthetic program, but a political-aesthetic doctrine. I will not only attempt to theorize these problems, but also to trace the actual establishment of totalitarian art in Bulgaria, as well as noting certain anti-totalitarian gestures.

##### *Lecture 11. Rethinking Bulgarian Literary Modernism – Twenty-Five years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall*

For decades under the communist regime in Bulgaria, literary modernism was renounced as a deviation from the "correct" norm of Socialist Realism. Modernist works by some of classic Bulgarian writers were disparaged and neglected, while other modernist writers were directly struck from the canon and forgotten. With the partial liberalization of the regime during the 1960s, some of the Bulgarian modernists, especially those with leftist convictions, were rehabilitated. However, the true rethinking of Bulgarian modernism came shortly before the Transition – during the 1980s. Modernism began to be recognized ever more often as a positive and creative movement, and after 1989, it was acknowledged as one of the most significant phenomena within Bulgarian literature. After 1989, numerous monographs about individual authors and literary circles, as well as whole modernist trends, contributed to a new interpretation of that period and to the objective construction of a heretofore unwritten history of the movement. The present lecture will aim to present and analyze this process of change,

with a particular focus on the question of the local/the global, as well as to examine the specific interrelations between the various modernist and totalitarian ideologies.

## PART 5: BULGARIAN LITERARY MODERNISM AND BULGARIAN LITERARY POSTMODERNISM

### *Lecture 12: Georgi Rupchev and the Great Wasteland*

The lecture “Georgi Rupchev and the Great Wasteland” will attempt to answer the question of why the work of American poet T.S. Eliot and especially his poem “The Waste Land” turned out to be key for the poets of the 1980s. Georgi Rupchev’s poem “The Great Land” will be analyzed with an eye to its secret intertextual relation to Eliot’s “The Waste Land.” We will reach the conclusion that “The Great Land” also achieves that which “The Waste Land” does. It reorients Bulgarian poetry from the outside towards the inside, redirecting it from an external juxtaposition between two epochs towards the deepest metaphysical and cultural-philosophical foundations for the renewal of the tradition. In this sense, reading, citing and translating T.S. Eliot in 1980s Bulgaria took on a rebellious, dissident energy. Thus the poem “The Great Land” holds a powerful political significance – it is a way of escaping from a rational, quasi-realistic, conservative, optimistic and essentially right-leaning literary tradition.

### *Lecture 13: Poetry of the 1980s – Napping, Dreaming, Talking in One’s Sleep*

In his lecture “The Etiology of Hysteria” of 1896, Sigmund Freud spoke about one of the basic functions of psychoanalysis – “uncovering what is hidden.” For him, psychoanalysis is a type of archeology that should reconstruct destroyed buildings, find lost pathways and decipher worn away inscriptions. According to Freud’s theory, when we are awake, that which we take as the outer world enters into our memory, and from there into the unconscious, then into the preconscious before finally turning into action. But when we dream, the opposite process is observed: there is no action, a hidden desire starts in our unconscious, passes through the preconscious and reaches our memory. Here there is no outside world, but there is a dream. The dream’s positioning between the conscious and the unconscious often became an object of interest on the part of literature. Due to its liminal placement, the stylization of dreams in an artistic work helps shift the boundaries between two literary epochs. Both the poetry of the modernisms and the poetry of the postmodernists from the 1980s turns against common sense and the established order in their search for subjective



internal truth, thus giving rise to the stylization of the dream in literary works. By entering the territory of dreams these works take on the necessary dose of subjectivity.

#### *Lecture 14: Conclusion*

This course will apply an inductive method to the phenomenon of Bulgarian literary modernism; this method will aim not to check the validity of already-existing models, but to create a new theory of its own. Various research methods will be employed, including reception studies, comparative approaches, sociological methods and psychoanalysis. A wide range of texts will be analyzed, including literary works, critical articles, archival notes and publications. The path which will be followed will be from the bottom up, from the text to the generalization, from the margins to the center, while the final conclusions will be presented at the end. A diachronic and synchronic cross-section of Bulgarian literary modernism will be made, while many of the questions the course discusses will be raised for the first time and will be examined in a new light.