

UTOPIAN BULGARIAS: LITERARY PROJECTS AND POLITICS

KIRIL KRASTEV AND YAMBOL AVANT-GARDE

Iva Anastasova, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"
Sirma Danova (Research Supervisor)

The Lebed Journal – the romantic-sentimental fellow

The Lebed (Swan) journal was published in three issues in 1921 and 1922, and in 1922 yet another issue was published, then renamed "Crescendo" directly in issues 2 and 3. If we compare the two, their layout is also different – "Lebed" has a plain and clean design, non-provocative with strange shapes, in contrast to the "climbing" title of the new "Crescendo", for example.

In the first issue of the romantic-sentimental fellow of "Crescendo" there is a kind of manifesto, although it is difficult to call a manifesto a text where we encounter statements such as: *"With the availability of so many journals in our literature, so does ours popped up. It's unlikely to surpass them"*¹. The insecurity such allegations bring is related to the relatively young team. While the manifesto at the end of the first issue was signed by an editorial committee, the names remained unlisted, the second issue suggests this committee consisted of "seven members, of different viewpoints"².

The policy of the journal definitely did not remain transparent even to the editors themselves (*"It represented a mixture of symbolism, romanticism, naturalism, or all three together, or none of them."*³). However, we can point out poetry prevailed in it at the expense of prose. The external layout also radically changed after the first issue, and the *"enthusiastic editors"*⁴ should be held liable for that – as they *"promised a lot, especially in the technical improvement of the journal"*⁵. Can we hold them liable, however, when "Lebed" came out at a time when maintaining a journal, even by established individuals in literature (Geo Milev, for example, also suffered a collapse with the spread of "Vezni", further leading to the suspension of the journal), is laborious and closely related to high financial costs. The filled-with-hope youngsters obviously failed to maintain even the same technical layout of the cover page. In the subsequent issues, the title of the journal, together with the definition of "youth literary-and-art journal", was placed on a purely white background, there were no vignettes or decorations, the content was reduced (from 16 pages in the first and second issues down to 7 pages in the third and final issues in 1921). The convictions and message the journal itself promoted also changed over the years. In the first issue "Lebed" was defined as a "literary-and-art journal", in the next issue of 1921 (kept from that time on) the definition was "youth literary-and-art journal". In fact, "Lebed" insisted – in its inconsistency in content and editorial team – young future "hopes" work on it, "the golden Bulgarian youth"⁶, the future renovators of a country's literature⁷. In the final note, the names of the editorial board, distinguishing themselves from the editorial committee in charge of the first issue of the journal, were now listed in the "Note". Among them were: Zdravka Gancheva, D. Gochev, L. Dimitrov,

¹ Editorial: College 1921: Editorial board "Lebed" // Lebed, No. 1, 1921.

² 1921: "Note" // Lebed, No. 2, 1921.

³ 1921: "Note" // Lebed, No. 2, 1921.

⁴ 1921: "Note" // Lebed, No. 2, 1921.

⁵ 1921: "Note" // Lebed, No. 2, 1921.

⁶ H. 1921: Cultural review // Lebed, № 2, 1921.

⁷ H. 1921: Cultural review // Lebed, № 2, 1921.

N. Kolarov, Iv. Prosenichkov, St. Sultanov, Tanya Stoencheva, Nikolay Chernyaev (Nikola Mavrodinov's pseudonym – listed as a separate name) and several other less familiar names.

In 1922, "Lebed" was again printed on a purely white background, we see it as a "youth journal for literature and culture". It began to slowly move towards reflecting the new, proof of which is the text "Expressionist Exhibition" by St. Chukanov, representing an opinion about the exhibition of modernists gathered by Geo Milev ("this great promoter of the new", 1922). Mostly expressionist, of course, paintings of foreign and Bulgarian artists – "Crucifixion" by J. Albert, "Fear" by Jerzy Kulevich, for example, were displayed. Indicative of Geo Milev's influence on literature and culture at that time was the conclusion of the short review by Chukanov – "*expressionism is true art*" (Chukanov, 1922).

At the end of the issue we already have the names of the editor-in-chief (Nikolay Chernyaev) and the co-editors (G. Bachvarov and St. Chukanov), and the technical layout of the title was in new, round and distorted letters. The issue came out later than planned. The next two issues in 1922 were in the same body. The more interesting element in it is the more theoretically targeted article by L. Dimitrov – "Art". At the end, the editorial committee promised issue #4 of the journal would be released on May 15 of that year, but it was never published. Instead, issue 1 was published again, the year was the same – 1922. The title of the journal is written using a classic font, its definition is as in the first issue of 1921 – a "*literary-and-art journal*", even images were added inside, the editorial committee was also replaced. This was the last breath of the Lebed journal; from then on it would no longer be found under that name. In his memories, Kiril Krastev told the editor-in-chief of the journal – Nikolay Chernyaev, a close friend of his, suggested to the then student Krastev to take over the editorial work of "Lebed". The new editorial team included Krastev, Leo Cohen and T. Draganov, but the first issue was ridiculed by Geo Milev himself because it was more of an inclination towards the sentimental-romantic line, although he admitted there was something dadaistic in the poem "La vie" (Krastev 2019). The first of Kiril Krastev's manifestos "Ingratitude" was published in the first issue.

"Crescendo"

"Crescendo" is a literary and artistic journal. According to Kiril Krastev himself, the journal was described as the most avant-garde journal for its "ultra-modernistic inclination – typical of the time after the First World War" (Krastev 2019). It is the only Bulgarian futuristic journal whose editors did not play it seriously, showing their adventurous attitude (they had read Nietzsche, Metterlink, Wilde, they wore black ties with a vignette painted by Krastev, they were known to everyone from the town and the surrounding area because they played the poem "Zang Tumb Tumb" by Marinetti in the town park of Yambol); yet they stood up against the expressionist father – Geo Milev (Krastev himself was confronted with expressionism, realism and he declared himself a dadaist – he had received all the cultural European periodicals, he wrote with Marinetti himself) because they had identified themselves to be more cosmopolitan than him, although we can not talk about such a phenomenon exactly at that time and right in the town of Yambol – a location not famous for its developed industry in the 20 century, yet it possessed two very important things. One was the "click of ideas" of young enthusiasts who declared/called themselves futurists, and those who took the path of anarchism – these phenomena, according to Hristo Karastoyanov, not only did they influence each other, but they were almost the same thing – by their very nature.

Kiril Krastev was still a student when Nikolay Chernyaev, the editor of "Lebed", contacted him and offered him to take over the editorial committee of the journal. A new editorial team was

called, including Krastev, T. Draganov, Leo Cohen. The aesthetic view of the journal was changed, in the likeness of the "Vezni" – like a white notebook. The first issue of this editorial team was still under the patronage of "Lebed", keeping the sentimental-romantic line Geo Milev had openly mocked. Kiril Krastev wrote a manifesto for the journal – "Ungratefulness", a dadaistic call of modern art urging for a "start over", calling to simplicity and conditional synthesis. The second issue of "Lebed" had already been published under a new name – "Crescendo" (tone amplification). The artist who made the title page – a growing order of the constructivist title (Krastev 2019) – was Krastev's cousin – Mircho Kachulev – a painter expressionist. The journal included Sofia authors, to name a few: Chavdar Mufov, Boyan Danovski, translations of Geo Milev. Mottos of the cubists, texts of futurist architecture, "For the simultaneous poetry" by the Romanian futurist Tristan Tsara; of course, parts of Marinetti's poem "Zang Tumb Tumb": with it "Crescendo" made a breakthrough in the typography of the Bulgarian periodicals, one of the most famous dadaistic poems "Anna Blume" by Kurt Schwitters. For publishing the latter, a scandal broke out between Geo Milev and Kiril Krastev, since Milev, as a representative of the German journal "Der Sturm" (the poem was taken from), did not receive money for the copyright of the work.

The journal did not form a circle or school, because its only theoretician was Krastev himself. Issues 2 and 3-4 (published in paper) were sent to Marinetti himself, along with a letter stating "we fight for futurism" (Krastev 2019), they called Marinetti "The Pope"; in his reply, he sent them manifestos for all the sectors of art – artists, literature, theatre, bruitism (the art of noise), dactyl art (of the sensual sense), etc. Marinetti sent a letter in response, as well as books such as the "Free futuristic speech".

The Crescendo journal was funded only by own means, and that's why it lived so short. Researcher Irina Subotic defined it the following way: "a modest but not insignificant role this Bulgarian journal has in disseminating new and fresh ideas; we appreciate as rebellious and progressive from a modern point of view" (Ibid.). Krastev only disagreed with the fact Subotic defined "Crescendo" to be competitive to "Vezni" and "Plamak" – in his opinion, the small dadaistic journal had not been engaged in a similar mission, although it was fighting for a new common artistic-and-plastic culture.

They define the Yambol avant-garde as a phenomenon with undefined and vague aesthetic positions (Ibid.), but Krastev said the journal did not set itself a purely literary and aesthetic role, but rather a conceptual-philosophical one, preaching the rise of Man and Life and underestimating the role of art by claiming it is self-purposed: "art for the art itself". According to the researcher Elka Dimitrova, Yambol avant-garde was forgotten after 1944, marginalized without any logical explanation, yet it was a phenomenon with huge potential to become of key importance, at least because of the encyclopaedic personality, such as Kiril Krastev, who not only dealt with criticism but maintained many important intercultural connections.

Naturally, we should mention the idol of the Yambol avant-garde trend – Tommaso Marinetti, who first coined and further established the term "futurism" in an Italian environment. He was Italian, born in Egypt, educated in France. He published a manifesto in French on the pages of the "Le Figaro," calling for a new artistic order opposing the institutions of museums, academies, and dictating disobedience and even contempt for women.

Marinetti's fascination with war and his later association with fascism hampered the beginning of futurism; most futurists did not return from the front, yet they left behind numerous inspirations for the subsequent procession of the 20th century "-isms". Marinetti's manifesto, "The Art of Noises", was inspired by the Balkan War, where the Bulgarians won at the Battle of Edirne with the help of a new battle weapon – the plane. Here is the place to mention futurism as we know

it not only in Italy, but in Russia and in Bulgaria as well imposed a certain degree of fascination with the progress of the technologies, the emergence of machines. It is no coincidence the airplane became a symbol of futurism – he worshiped in rhymes and lyrics the speed and the city, forgetting the aesthetics of the past and replacing it with the dynamics, noise and industrial beauty of modern life. Italian futurists wrote a manifesto of a new direction in their art – aero-painting (individual examples can also be seen in our literature). The "Zang Tumb Tumb" poem reproduced the sound and typographical mobilization of war, aircraft, army positions. A year after the manifesto, Marinetti distributed invitation leaflets from the Tower of San Marco calling for the completion of art as we know it, with the destruction of the Venice Biennale, as he saw it as a sclerosed forum from the past, fully incomparable with Modernity, even though Marinetti himself had organized futuristic exhibitions within the Biennale.

Marinetti first came to Bulgaria in 1908, dispatched as a correspondent for the French newspaper "Gil Blas". However, his car broke down and he ended up in the café-restaurant of the Bulgaria hotel, and he described it his memories as follows: "where hundreds of journalists, party leaders, writers and bearded poets along with peasantry wearing traditional leather sandals with a tucked-in top smoked and drank tea." Marinetti bought a horse, but here he also drew a blank because the horse was mobilized by the Headquarters, and finally, the father of Italian futurism found himself in a simple wagon led by two buffalos. Later, while crossing the hills along the Tundzha river, Marinetti would put on the thunder and roar of the Bulgarian aeroplane in *aero-poetic* words (Gospodinov 2012). It is this part called "The Bombing of Adrianopol", written on the front line, that would become the most popular section of the "Zang Tumb Tumb" poem. Marinetti also witnessed the first combat flight of the Bulgarian aviation – the Albatross aeroplane – on October 16, 1912, it made a reconnaissance flight over Edirne. And although it does not throw bombs (in fact, two hand grenades), the aeroplane was a herald of futurism, dispersing leaflet calls with "vertically written verses" from the air, scattered by the hand of the first woman who took part in a battle flight – Raina Kasabova. Thus, the inspiration from the Bulgarian aeroplane is present in the polygraph and the sound-imitating aspect of the poem.

In 1923, Marinetti's letter to Kiril Krastev was received, beginning with the words: "My dear futurist friends". "I am fascinated," the letter signed by Marinetti continued, " I have real futurists, defenders of our movement in you. I was delighted to receive your beautiful Crescendo journal, and I hope I would come to see you in person in the fall." (Ibid.)

In 1931, Marinetti was back in Bulgaria, but Krastev deliberately avoided this meeting because at that time Marinetti had already become Mussolini's poet and his name was associated with the fascist ideology. In his memories of this visit, the father of Italian futurism spoke of Sirak Skitnik, of his impression of Bagryana, Vladimir Vasilev, Nikolay Marangozov and Raynov, who he described as the "Bulgarian futurist minds", he also remembered his conversation with Tsar Boris and his love for locomotives. He bought the painting the "Ball of the Lord" by Mircho Kachulev and exhibited it at the Venice Biennale, where it was sold, and he also met Georges Papazov – a marginalized Bulgarian artist who at the time made exhibitions in Italy and whose name Krastev himself tried to revive in Bulgaria, persuading the Communist government to buy back part of his collection of paintings.

Manifestos

We have already mentioned the Crescendo's first manifesto was published while the journal's name was "Lebed." The "Ungratefulness" (Krastev 1922: 5-7) was the first dadaist manifesto in Bulgaria. "Dada" as a phenomenon was generally related to the denial of the realistic

approach of image, synthesis of perception, pushback from expressionism, naturalism and realism, shown in the manifesto itself as living "on the shore of true Art" (Dimitrova 2014). There is a piety to Chavdar Mufov's work – "Marionettes" was described by Krastev as an exceptional work. Edvin Sugarev talked about a palpable division of "young" and "old", and Geo Milev belonged to it, because he was a representative of the denied expressionism. Nevertheless, Krastev expresses a huge gratitude to Milev as if he considered him the inspiration of the Yambol group, and marked the important influence of the "Vezni" journal, published by Geo, yet at the same time expressed his "Ungratefulness" precisely to the expressionist art. Dadaism was "chosen perhaps also because of its exalted-mad core, because of its anarchist refusal of everything established and because of the rejection of the seriousness itself – including with regard to its own practices" (Sugarev [without a specified year]). Most dadaistic, however, remained the thinking of nonsense as the highest sense. "Dada" was also rooted in the principle of spontaneous art, I would call it simulation-less, because it was based on associations. Furthermore, the Dadaists rejected the artist's higher role because "dada" as an avant-garde stream/trend (and while it denied expressionism, it in fact came too close to it), it gave sense to every person with associative (intuitive) thinking as being able to "create", so an artist was also not one – for example: works were created by several people (a sort of compilation).

The second manifesto – "Showcases" (Krastev 1922: 9-11) – showed much better what Elka Dimitrova called the "interchangeability of concepts" present in the avant-garde texts. In the manifesto, "Dadaism was thought of as universality, and futurism was a thing in particular" (Dimitrova 2009).

The voluminous "BEGINNING OF THE LAST" (Krastev 1922: 12-16) followed in a series of manifestos and it expressed Krastev's idea for the beginning of "Bulgarian futurology". It touched on the relationship between art and philosophy, between art and science, declared art to be synthesis, and reviewed modernist streams.

The most typical for the dada manifesto, however, is undoubtedly the "Manifesto of the Society for the Fight against Poets", and Krastev defined it as a "Dadaist swing" (Krastev 2019), the fishing rod many Bulgarian writers were caught by. The dadaistic joke provoked sharp reactions. Only Konstantin Galabov understood this was a philosophical-ideological joke. Writers Anton Strashimirov and Angel Karaliychev, for example, came up with articles countering the manifesto's claims, and its collaborators were called by critics "coup plotters" and "failed poets". This was the last joint venture of the Yambol avant-garde authors; using it they declared "[in] life one can make it without a poet, but definitely they cannot make it without a carpenter (Ibid.)", denying the artist's electing and their sense of superiority.

REFERENCE:

Gospodinov 2012: Gospodinov, "Crescendo" – the countryside as an avant-garde trend". Bulgarian literary modernism. <https://bgmodernism.com/Nauchni-statii/georgi_g> available on 16.11.2020.

Dimitrova 2014: Dimitrova, E. *Manifestos. Articles. Essays*. Sofia, 2014.

Dimitrova 2009: Dimitrova, E. The manifestos of Bulgarian modernism. // *LiterNet*, 01.02.2009. <<https://litenet.bg/publish/edimitrova/manifestite2.htm>>, available on 15.11.2020.

Krastev 1922: Krastev, K. Ungratefulness. // *Lebed*, issue 1, 1922, 5-7. Bulgarian literary modernism. <http://bgmodernism.com/Lebed_g_III-1922_kn_1>, available on 19.04.2020>.

Krastev 1922: Krastev, K. Showcases. // *CRESCENDO*, № 2, 1922, 9-11. Bulgarian literary modernism. <http://bgmodernism.com/CRESCENDO_1922-kn_2>, available on 19.04.2021.

Krastev 1922: Krastev, K. The beginning of the last. // *CRESCENDO*, № 3-4, 1922, 12-16. Bulgarian literary modernism. <http://bgmodernism.com/CRESCENDO_1922-kn_3-4>, available on 04/04/2021.

Krastev 2019: Krastev, K. *Memories of the cultural life between the two world wars*. Sofia, 2019.

Sugarev [no year specified]: Sugarev, E. Kiril Krastev's Ungratefulness. // *Bulgarian literary modernism*. <http://bgmodernism.com/Nauchni-statii/edvin_4>, available on 16.11.2020.

Chukanov 1922: Chukanov, 1922 "Expressionist Exhibition" // *Lebed*, issue 1, 1922. Bulgarian literary modernism. <<https://bgmodernism.com/Lebed>>, available on 19.04.2021.

Translated by Anastassia Videnova