IV

THE AGE OF MODERNISM AND INDIVIDUALISM (1896-1917)

Although the two decades from 1896 to the end of the First World War are usually characterized as a period of individualism and modernism, this does not mean that literary currents prominent in the preceding period entirely disappeared then or that the first stirrings of new literary movements which reached their highest developments in these years were not detectable before. The fact that just after the liberation authors of stature were few simplifies the task of writing the literary history of that time. In the 1890s, on the other hand, worthwhile writers espousing different doctrines and literary approaches appeared in relative profusion, and it is more difficult to define the period's main thrust. However, most historians would agree that the era's fundamental note was sounded by the men gathered about the critic Dr. Krəstju Krəstev and his journal *Misəl*, which came out from 1892 to 1907. All other groupings may be most conveniently classified by their attitude toward the 'modernists' who then predominated, however briefly, in Bulgarian letters.

Dr. Krəstev and his associates were a different breed from their predecessors. In contrast to the anti-intellectual Stojanov and Vazov, Dr. Krəstev had endured much formal education, and his allies Penčo Slavejkov and Petko Todorov likewise pursued higher studies and even wrote dissertations. This educational gap was sufficient in itself to engender a certain coolness between the representatives of the old and the new in Bulgarian culture. But in addition the *Misəl* circle oriented itself toward the contemporary cultures of western Europe, especially French and German, more consciously than did their predecessors. Instead of automatically traveling to Russia for their university education, numerous writers now went to France and Germany. If Bulgaria was still a backwater, it was now a backwater of western Europe as much as of the Russian Empire.

The post-liberation writers also differed from the modernists in their general assumptions about life. A Vazov, for instance, might bemoan the

shortcomings of Bulgarian life, but fundamentally he was confident of Bulgaria's future. Vazov lived a long and for the most part satisfying life. Writers like Aleko Konstantinov, despite their misfortunes, were also of an optimistic cast of mind. But the advent of modernism was accompanied by spiritual malaise. Slavejkov enjoyed poor physical health most of his life and died relatively young. Petko Todorov also died early after bouts with debilitating illness. More important, Pejo Javorov committed suicide for intimate psychological reasons, and in some of his darker moments Dr. Krəstev contemplated taking his own life too. Furthermore, the work of Javorov and Stojan Mixajlovski is permeated by a metaphysical pessimism almost entirely absent from earlier Bulgarian literature except for the writings of Rajko Žinzifov and to a lesser extent Botev. Mixajlovski and Javorov were not merely grieved by superficial disorders of society, they were convinced that it — and with it all mankind — was radically and incurably corrupt. Surface evils could not possibly be eliminated through tinkering, for they were but the manifestation of a deeper disease which could not be healed. Such a view of society and man was foreign to Vazov and his literary allies.

The beginning of the twentieth century is usually tagged by historians of Bulgarian literature the era of 'individualism', a concept applicable chiefly to the central figure of the time, Penčo Slavejkov. Slavejkov and his associates did indeed promote the development of the individual personality through education, including a broad awareness of the achievements of world culture. Moreover, Slavejkov was the major Bulgarian propagandist for Nietzschean notions of the superman and the primacy of the human will. The '*Misəl* circle' was assuredly individualistic in the sense that it was anti-collectivistic: Dr. Krəstev was an eloquent opponent of Marxism in the 1890s and 1900s. The doctrine of the primacy of the individual espoused by the Krəstev group was carried further by the early symbolists, who sought the highest cultural levels and argued that poetry ought not to be accessible to all. Their poetry was more personal than Slavejkov's; they rejected the notion that literature should have any social function. Thus in many respects the literature of the turn of the century appeared as a reaction to the writing of the preceding period, although authors with a social bent continued to live and work.

Social and political themes suitable for literary treatment existed in abundance during this time of turmoil and dissatisfaction. The monarch, Prince Ferdinand, had little support among the intelligentsia. Stambolov's fall in 1894 initiated a period of political jockeying, creation of new parties and shuffling of cabinets. The Macedonian sore continued to

fester, and in the mid-1890s there emerged a Macedonian revolutionary movement, headed by such men as Goce Delčev, whose aim it was to obtain for Macedonia autonomy of the sort enjoyed by Eastern Rumelia before the Union of 1885. To this end partisan bands operated in Macedonia. They were granted the valuable asset of sanctuary in Bulgaria, but in return the Bulgarian government attempted to control the movement for its own purposes. Tension over Macedonia peaked in 1903 in outbursts like the Ilinden rebellion.

Despite the political instability manifested in the constant seesawing between pro-Russian and pro-Austrian governments, Bulgarian culture took important forward strides during these years. The Institution for Higher Learning in Sofia, which had existed through the 1890s, in 1904 became Sofia University, largely through the efforts of the Bulgarian statesman and scholar Ivan Šišmanov. In 1907 the National Library in the capital was firmly established and the National Theater founded. All three institutions have been instrumental in the nurturing of Bulgarian culture ever since. On the political front, the Turkish revolution of July 1908, which brought the 'young Turks' to power, encouraged Bulgaria and other countries to press for the further loosening of Turkish control. In particular, Bulgaria proclaimed itself an independent kingdom in September of 1908 and Prince Ferdinand assumed the title of Czar. In April of 1909 Turkey recognized Bulgaria's independence, and the Great Powers followed suit. Nevertheless, relations with Turkey remained strained since the Turks held Bulgaria responsible — not without reason — for their Macedonian difficulties.

The Balkan states were agreed on the desirability of driving Turkish power from the peninsula altogether. Encouraged by certain of the Great Powers, in February of 1912 Bulgaria concluded a pact of friendship and aid with Serbia. A secret protocol divided Macedonia between the two countries except for one disputed area, the final decision on which was to be made by the Russian Czar once Macedonia was liberated. In May 1912 Greece and Bulgaria reached partial understanding on military cooperation, again without completely resolving the question of Macedonian partition. The diplomatic preparations having been completed by the signing of a pact between Montenegro and Bulgaria, on 17 September a general mobilization was announced. Notes to Turkey went unanswered, so on 5 October the Balkan allies declared war on her. With Bulgarian troops bearing the brunt of the offensive, in less than a month the Turks were effectively driven from the Balkan peninsula. Peace talks were begun in December, but then the Turks resumed the war after a coup at home.

They were no more successful this time than before, and on 3 April they signed an armistice. Despite dissension over Macedonia between Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia, the Allies concluded a peace treaty with Turkey on 17 May, 1913. By its terms Turkey gave up all its territory on the Balkan peninsula except Albania, for which a special state was formed.

During this time Bulgaria's former allies were making private arrangements. On 24 May, 1913 Greece and Serbia, supported by Montenegro and Rumania, agreed to divide Macedonia between themselves, leaving Bulgaria out entirely. Rumania, dissatisfied with the areas Bulgaria had already yielded, renewed its claims to southern Dobrudža. Seeing nothing to be gained by delay, Bulgaria attacked the Serbs and Greeks in Macedonia on 16 June to trigger what is usually called the Interallied War, or Second Balkan War. This time the opposition was strong, especially since Rumania and Turkey joined the anti-Bulgarian coalition. By the peace treaties of that same summer a defeated Bulgaria turned over almost all of Macedonia to Serbia and Greece, a portion of western Thrace to Greece, southern Dobrudža to Rumania, and eastern Thrace to Turkey.

After these vicissitudes Bulgaria grasped what it thought would be the chance to regain its lost territories by allying itself with the Central Powers in the First World War, though it is true that it hesitated for some time before concluding a formal alliance with Germany on 6 September, 1915. Shortly thereafter Bulgaria declared war on Serbia and retook that portion of Macedonia which it had yielded to Serbia. Southern Macedonia was also recovered from Greece. When Rumania declared war on Austria-Hungary in August of 1916, Bulgaria occupied the whole of Dobrudža. At this point many Bulgarians felt their country had reasserted its legitimate claims and should go no further. But it was not so easy to stop, and in the end Bulgaria went down to defeat along with its allies. A Bulgarian armistice was arranged on 29 September, 1918. The country's internal situation was so uncertain that Czar Ferdinand abdicated his throne on 3 October in favor of his son Boris, the second and last significant czar of modern Bulgaria. A series of cabinet shuffles produced a stable one headed by Aleksandər Stambolijski, leader of the peasant movement in Bulgaria. Stambolijski had no choice but to accept the Treaty of Neuilly of 27 November, 1919, by the terms of which Bulgaria ceded part of Macedonia to Serbia, southern Dobrudža to Rumania, and eventually western Thrace to Greece. Thus at one blow Bulgaria lost approximately ten per cent of her territory and was saddled with war reparations payments in addition. After having fought three wars and lost two of them, after having once again been deprived of lands which the

Bulgarians felt to be rightfully theirs and which had been the cause of the conflicts in the first place, Bulgaria lay physically and psychologically prostrate.

Stojan Mixajlovski (1856-1927), a member of the generation which might have been active by the early 1880s but was not, personifies the transition from the post-liberation period to the era of modernism. A contradictory personality, Mixajlovski stands essentially alone in the history of Bulgarian letters. He was born into a cultured family of Elena: his father had been educated at Moscow University and was considered a leading intellectual of his day. Mixajlovski himself was educated in local schools, in Tərnovo and in Constantinople, where he graduated from the *gymnasium* in 1872. By that same year, though only sixteen, Mixajlovski had printed at least one article in *Čitalište*. During the Russo-Turkish war he was safely esconced in a French university in Aix-en-Provence, from which he graduated in 1879 and where he gained a familiarity with contemporary French poetry. He then worked for a while as a lawyer and a journalist in Bulgaria but soon resumed his studies in France. After 1883 he was employed as a civil servant and in various political capacities until 1892, when he was appointed professor of French at the *Visše učilište* (Higher School) in Sofia. Alternating between politics and the intellectual life, after 1894 he was elected a member of parliament; from 1895 to 1899 he taught comparative literature; from 1900 to 1905 he again participated actively in public life.

After 1905 Mixajlovski, though not yet fifty, ceased to be a factor in creative literature. Instead he gave himself over to journalism, at times descending to inconsequential squabbling. He wrote for the ecclesiastical organ *Cərkoven vestnik* (Church Gazette) and theorized about politics from a conservative viewpoint. He summarized his political opinions in the unfinished *Vəvedenie v filosofijata na novobəlgarskata istorija* (Introduction to the Philosophy of Modern Bulgarian History), written apparently in the mid-1920s but not published until 1940. Here the poet maintained that social changes require much time, for they must be prepared for within people's souls before they can be given legal formulations. The purpose of life is not freedom but "moral and spiritual perfection", which society can promote by maintaining order. Anarchy was the enemy, Mixajlovski thought. Mussolini had shown the way, and a dictator who could "restrain the insane extremist elements in Bulgaria would be a hero of liberty, and by no means a standard-bearer of oppres-

sion". Mixajlovski's doctrines were not always consistent, and in any case they were little noted as he preached them in the newspapers. By the time he died in 1927 he was nearly forgotten.

Mixajlovski was relatively prolific. He published in many periodicals, but he reserved his most important pieces for *Misəl*, with which he was closely associated. He made his literary debut with *Poema na zloto* (Poem of Evil, 1889), a reworking of the Adam and Eve story cast as a cross between a drama and an epic poem. Although he failed to produce a work of universal significance, as he probably hoped to do, some of the chief philosophical concerns of his later writing, such as religion and the problem of evil, appear in it.

The long narrative *Poema na zloto* was followed by a collection of lyrics under the general title *Novissima verba* published in three parts: *Vopli i pripevi* (Wailings and Laments, 1889); *Currente calamo*, 1890; and *Železni struni* (Iron Strings, 1890). In subsequent years there appeared collections of verse on social and philosophical themes: *Satiri* (Satires, 1893); *Filosofičeski i satiričeski soneti* (Philosophical and Satirical Sonnets, 1895); and the narrative poem *Kniga za bəlgarskija narod* (Book of the Bulgarian People, 1897). All through the 1890s Mixajlovski received support from Dr. Krəstev in his capacities as editor of *Misəl* and critic: Krəstev devoted two lengthy essays to him and in 1897 awarded him a prize for *Kniga za bəlgarskija narod.* Mixajlovski's later collections included *Iztočni legendi* (Eastern Legends, 1904). On occasion he contemplated issuing his collected works, but the only collected edition actually attempted (1918) never got past the first volume.

Mixajlovski occupies a unique place in Bulgarian literature because of his curiously mixed attitudes. He shared the political interests of many other writers of his day, and the presence of social and didactic themes in his verse was nothing extraordinary. However, he had an uncommon bent for philosophical speculation, and he was one of the few figures in Bulgarian history who tried to be a 'philosophical' or at least an 'intellectual' poet, although his philosophy was not especially profound. His view of existence was pessimistic and aristocratic. He had no faith in the ordinary run of mankind; on the other hand, though he favored the notion of an intellectual aristocracy, he was not at all sure it could maintain its integrity against mass pressures. When repelled by the deformities of contemporary political life, he moved, not leftward, but to the right, advocating a view essentially Christian, though colored by overemphasis on the corruption of human nature. Mixajlovski's amalgam of disillusion with man and contemporary society combined with

Christianity and political conservatism makes him an unusual phenomenon. He was not the sort to found a school.

Literary men who are by inclination satirists often use fables as vehicles for social criticism. Mixajlovski was among them. In his fables he treats the traditional subjects of the genre in vivid language, though he sometimes makes his message excessively clear. Thus in "Pse i patka" (The Dog and the Duck) the dog points out to his collocutor that he may be able to fly, walk and swim, but he still remains a universal symbol of stupidity. But then after the point has been made, the author adds unjustifiably: "You, young journalists and scribblers, / will you understand what this small fable means?" Mixajlovski's jaundiced view of mankind also found expression in the minor genre of the epigram, an example of which is this quatrain directed against "a certain literary man": "Ivan is always scribbling, preparing / all sorts of works — / but he doesn't produce anything / except for preparations."

The satirical approach applied to more serious matters is fundamental to other poems, many of which were written as sonnets. He displayed his erudition by equipping his poems with epigraphs of an appropriately pessimistic sort, sometimes in Latin or a modern foreign language, including English. Since he was himself one of the keenest students of French literature in the Bulgaria of his day, it is mildly surprising that at times Mixajlovski could be anti-intellectual. Thus in the sonnet "Našite prosvetiteli" (Our Educators) he remarks sarcastically in the final stanza: "These people know what spirit and will are according to Locke, / and if villainy were unknown in this world below, / they would discover it — through their intense wisdom." Mixajlovski objected to scholars because they pretended to be disinterested when in fact they were morally just as depraved as anybody else. He considers the nature of human repute in his poem "Slava" (Glory), bearing the epigraph "Cavenda est gloriae cupiditas." Ask at any gathering who Jenner was, complains the poet, and nobody will be able to identify this benefactor of humanity, whereas anyone will be happy to discuss the mass-murderer Napoleon. And this perverse result is the work of "Glory", that "repulsive harlot, shameless traitress", as the poet calls her in vexed frustration. Mixajlovski's ideal of social equality and a fascination with death as the great unalterable fact of life come together in his poem "Ravenstvo v tlenieto" (Equality in Corruption), oddly prefixed by the epigraph "Odi profanum vulgus!", a sentiment Mixajlovski sincerely shared often enough, though this time he used it pejoratively. The sonnet pictures a former aristocrat buried near a plebeian whose decomposing corpse stinks horribly. To the aristocrat's

complaint that he is offended by having to repose near such a low-born person, the plebeian retorts that now they are the same in their corruption and the worm will devour each with equal relish.

The most extensive exposition of Mixajlovski's bilious view of human foibles and the baseness of society is contained in the *Kniga za bəlgarskija narod.* Here he proffers his Machiavellian ideas on the most effective methods of seizing and retaining political power. The poet placed his poem in a middle eastern setting, but the cynical realist philosophy expounded in it was clearly meant to apply to all societies. In *Kniga za bəlgarskija narod* the wise old pasha, realizing that his days are numbered, summons his nephew so that he may impart to him, his successor, the secrets of rule. The central support of the pasha's regime, it develops, is brute force coupled with deceit. Man is predatory ("Man is like a wolf to every other man") and the sword, the rope and the stake (the sharpened stake upon which malefactors were set to suffer a lingering death) are the foundation stones of governmental authority. There is no middle way between anarchy and enslavement: one of the two extremes must inevitably prevail. Nor can 'honesty' or 'honor' (*čest*) play any role in the governing of a people, for power is invariably best pursued through deceit. Once authority has been gained, it should be maintained through total thought-control, which means that the state has no use for scholars or independent thinkers: "I am looking for people / without their own intellect, with a paralyzed brain, / Turks inclined ... / to content themselves with readymade thoughts / and truths approved by me / and to ask me every morning: 'Today / what is true and what is false?'" Still, the old pasha knows that humans have a way of rebelling against strict controls. The best means of forestalling conspiracies against the regime is to foster corruption and licentiousness among the population: when this is done effectively, the people will fight only for food and drink. Abstract ideals will not appeal to them. Anything can be done to people for whom nothing is sacred. *Kniga za bəlgarskija narod* continues in this vein as Mixajlovski sets forth what he considers to be the bitter truth about society. But because he is an idealistic cynic, and not just a cynic *pur sang*, he is deeply grieved by reality and wishes that it might be different, although at the same time he realizes it never will be.

Mixajlovski did have his optimistic moments. In poems like "Napred" (Forward) he displays a slightly forced optimism as he exhorts his compatriots not to abandon the struggle for the achievement of the ideal society and urges them to see their good projects to fruition. If in Mixajlovski's world the scholar could not claim moral superiority over

the common herd, the poet was different. The brief poem "Mojat 'pasport'" (My 'Passport'), containing chiefly a description of the author's physical appearance, ends with the lines: "and almost no special identifying marks — / except a heart thirsting for justice". In a longer piece, "Orisija" (Fate), dedicated to Penčo Slavejkov, Mixajlovski expresses several characteristic notions: the idea that the poet is the upholder of the ideal in society, coupled with the realization that the forces of evil and apathy arrayed against him are so mighty that he cannot hope to overcome them, or even to preserve his own soul's purity. Mixajlovski combines his sense of the poet's mission with a religious chord in the sonnet "Lama sabachthani!" (Christ's despairing cry from the cross: "Why hast Thou forsaken me!"), where he wearily comments that, since his proffered services have gone unappreciated, he is ready to abandon the struggle. His only hope is in God's protection: "Thus a kite, wounded by the hunter, / expires in some secluded spot, / his eyes directed toward the horizon!" Mixajlovski's fatigue after the extended battle is unmistakable. Mixajlovski was that uncommon breed, a religious nihilist. Some Bulgarian poets have been at least in part religious, some have been philosophical nihilists, but Mixajlovski remains almost the only Bulgarian writer to have combined the two attitudes.

Mixajlovski's colleague Penčo Slavejkov (1866-1912) was the central literary figure of the early twentieth century. He consciously competed with Vazov for recognition as the leading Bulgarian writer and at the time of his greatest influence it seemed to some that he did indeed eclipse his rival. But history has decreed otherwise: if Slavejkov was the central figure of a major epoch, Vazov is the patriarch of Bulgarian literature in its entirety. Slavejkov's reputation has faded since his death partly because his poetry and his philosophy were excessively cerebral, whereas Vazov had the universal appeal necessary to become a national writer.

Petko Slavejkov's son Penčo was born in Trjavna, presumably on 27 April 1866 (the date is not absolutely certain because the record of his baptism was destroyed during the war of liberation). The family eventually included five sons and two daughters, with Penčo the youngest of the sons. He was educated initially at home and in a local grammar school. In 1876 or 1877 the Slavejkovs moved to the central Bulgarian city of Stara Zagora and witnessed its temporary recapture and sacking by the Turks during the Russo-Turkish war. The horror of that time was later reflected in Slavejkov's epic poem *Kərvava pesen* (Song of Blood). After the liberation, thanks to the elder Slavejkov's varying political fortunes, the family wandered from place to place, residing in Plovdiv for

a while in the early 1880s. At this period Penčo Slavejkov first read Heine and also some eastern poets, including Persian ones. These latter studies were the first fruits of an interest in exotic eastern literatures. Aside from studying, Penčo also participated in a school demonstration against some teachers thought unfair, but he was freed from possible punishment for the escapade when one day he contracted a severe chill. This illness made him a semi-invalid for some three years and weakened his health to such an extent that for the rest of his life he could walk only with the aid of a cane, which became his trademark.

In 1888 Slavejkov published his first book, *Momini səlzi* (A Maiden's Tears), a collection of his intimate and not especially mature verse of 1886-1887. He also published translations from Russian and other languages. At the very first of the 1890s Slavejkov printed some of his work in Vazov's *Dennica* because it was almost the only literary periodical in existence, but he immediately joined Dr. Krəstev's *Misəl* upon its founding in 1892 and later became as inseparable from *Misəl* as Krəstev himself (after about 1900 the so-called '*Misəl* circle' was generally understood to consist of Krəstev, Slavejkov, Petko Todorov and Pejo Javorov). Krəstev the critic and editor and Slavejkov the poet and critic, working in tandem, dominated Bulgarian letters for nearly a decade at the start of this century.

It was also in 1892, at the age of twenty-six, that Slavejkov decided to seek higher education in Germany and enrolled at the University of Leipzig, where he remained until 1898. He subsequently propagandized German culture in his native land after reading Nietzsche and absorbing German idealist esthetics from such sources as Johannes Volkelt and Wilhelm Wundt. But he maintained his interest in Slavic culture while in Leipzig: he learned Russian, wrote his dissertation on Heine and the Russian lyric, and conceived a high regard for the Polish national epic, Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*.

Slavejkov wrote several shorter poems, called 'epic songs' (*epičeski pesni*), first published in two separate volumes of 1896 and 1898, then revised and collected in one volume of 1907. Some of these epic songs were based on folk themes, but most of them dealt with international topics and figures, including Shelley, Michelangelo and Beethoven. This mixing of national and international traditions was typical of Slavejkov, who considered it his life's task to raise the Bulgarian nation to an appreciation of the best in world culture, while simultaneously emphasizing the most valuable portions of the national tradition. For this reason Slavejkov followed the course of contemporary Russian and

especially German culture intently, but at the same time employed native folklore motifs extensively in his poetry. He even sought to internationalize the national through the publication in 1904 (in cooperation with the English specialist in Bulgarian literature Henry Bernard) of a collection of Bulgarian folk songs in English for which he wrote an introduction. Slavejkov maintained contact with foreign students of Bulgarian culture such as the German Georg Adam and the Swede Alfred Jensen. It was at least partly thanks to his foreign contacts that Slavejkov became the only Bulgarian ever nominated for a Nobel prize in literature. Unfortunately this occurred only in 1912, and his death destroyed any chance of his winning a modicum of international renown for Bulgarian literature and for himself.

By the time Slavejkov returned to Bulgaria in 1898, the publication of *Epičeski pesni* had already established him as a writer. He could not live solely by writing, but he avoided politics, unlike so many other literary men of his day. He preferred more intellectual occupations. After teaching for a time, he obtained a post as an assistant director of the National Library, which during those years seems to have been largely staffed by writers masquerading as librarians. Slavejkov never married, but he lived in a family circle composed of his mother, a sister and a niece, and from 1903 on he kept up a liaison with Mara Belčeva, the widow of an assassinated cabinet minister and a poetess. It was she who attended him in his last hours. Slavejkov kept in touch with literary circles through evening visits to the Krəstev household and to coffee-houses where the intellectual *élite* congregated. He also loved to travel abroad, frequently for reasons of health. And of course he continued to write: his lyric poetry from the first years of the century was brought together in the collection *Sən za štastie* (The Dream of Happiness, 1906-1907).

The century's relatively calm beginning was followed by a more turbulent period in the last portion of Slavejkov's life. In 1908 he was appointed director of the National Theater. He made a major contribution to this venture even though he retained the position for only a year, never wrote any plays and had rarely had anything to do with the theater before. From the National Theater Slavejkov returned to the National Library as its director. In 1909 he also represented Bulgaria officially at the unveiling of the Gogol' monument in Moscow. In 1910 he protested vigorously against the convening of a Slavic Congress in Bulgaria which he thought an instrument for the advancement of reactionary aims. Such activities as these aroused some political hostility toward him. Just when he had reached the height of his literary and political prestige his old

enemy (and Vazov's ally) Stefan Bobčev was appointed to a high government post and obtained his dismissal from the library in 1911. After this injustice Slavejkov entered voluntary exile, wandering through Switzerland and finally arriving in Italy, where he died on Lake Como on 28 May 1912. His remains were brought from Italy to Bulgaria in 1921 and interred on a hill near Sofia where he had loved to sit and which Dr. Krəstev visited every year on the anniversary of Slavejkov's death as long as he lived.

Slavejkov's literary activities during his last years were quite varied. He published critical works, including a biographical study of Aleko Konstantinov and a major article of 1906 entitled "Bəlgarskata poezija predi i sega" (Bulgarian Poetry Formerly and Now). He continued his labors over *Kərvava pesen*, which he had begun under the inspiration of *Pan Tadeusz* as far back as 1893. Though he first published portions of it in 1896, he was still working on it when he died, and it was left incomplete. He promoted German culture through *Nemski poeti* (German Poets), a collection of translations from leading German writers published in 1911. He also read Slavic authors, including Serbs, Poles and Ukrainians. But his most original contribution to Bulgarian poetry during this period was *Na Ostrova na blaženite* (The Isle of the Blest, 1910). The book's roots extended back to 1892, when, perhaps partially under Mixajlovski's influence, Slavejkov had published in *Misəl* a few poems purporting to be translations from a Persian poet who in fact never existed. In *Na Ostrova na blaženite* Slavejkov elaborated upon this idea by compiling an anthology of poetry by writers with such exotic names as Silva Mara, Stamen Rosita, Tixo Čubra and Ralin Stubel. In addition to giving samples of his 'work' the poet offered a brief biographical and critical appreciation of each author. None of these fictional poets can be directly linked with single actually existing persons, but Slavejkov's commentaries in their entirety amount to an oblique criticism of the conditions under which Bulgarian writers were forced to work at that time.

Penčo Slavejkov was a consciously 'literary' author. In some respects this was a strength, but it was also symptomatic of an unpoetic weakness in him. Slavejkov took accurate stock of Bulgarian literature's deficiencies and set out deliberately to correct them, but his efforts reeked of midnight oil. His poetry was too artificial. This point was made by friend and foe alike at the time. Vazov, contrasting the work of his protégé Kiril Xristov with Slavejkov's in 1903, proclaimed Xristov's verse unquestionably superior to that of the "industrious" Slavejkov, "whose poems, tortured and overdone, unwarmed by the divine fire, repel even a reader

armed with the best will in the world!" Vazov exaggerated for polemical effect, but his words had a core of truth: Slavejkov as a poet was made and not born, despite his poetic heritage. *Kərvava pesen* supplies perhaps the best example of his endeavoring to satisfy a "felt need" of his native culture, in this case for a national poetic epic. The poem's failure is attributable to its over-intellectualization, among other things. One of Slavejkov's admirers, Malčo Nikolov, admitted this in comparing *Pod igoto* with *Kərvava pesen* as literary treatments of the April uprising. "And if *Pod igoto* suffers from an excess of diversity of color and a light, entertaining quality", he wrote, "then *Kərvava pesen* suffers from an excessively great ... and weighty seriousness, an abstract and reflective quality." This "abstract, reflective quality", though most clearly perceptible in the epic genre, pervades his lyric poetry as well, for Slavejkov was too much aware of his aims to write very good poetry.

Slavejkov's literary consciousness is conjoined with a conviction that beauty and the good are all that matter in the world. Consequently, in his view the true poet excludes current political topics from his work. In his article "Bəlgarskata poezija predi i sega" Slavejkov argued that Bulgarian poetry of the earlier period (he limited himself mainly to his father, Karavelov and Botev) was entirely too journalistic: a publicistic purpose was obvious even in Petko Slavejkov's love lyrics, not to mention the verse of Botev and Karavelov. Though this approach was perhaps valid at the time, Slavejkov held, it was no longer so in the modern age, when questions of form had come to the fore. Of all the poets of the past Slavejkov felt most closely akin to Botev — not because of his ideas, which by then impressed only "schoolboys and Bulgarian socialists", but because of the "poetic clothing" of those ideas and the unity between his poetry and his life, that "wondrous madness of a life-poetry". Of the modern poets, Slavejkov discussed Javorov and Todorov sympathetically, Xristov less so, and criticized Vazov, but he concentrated mostly upon himself as a representative of contemporary currents in Bulgarian literature. His ideal, he said, was the "free heart and the free mind". He always expressed the joy of reality though some of his poems might seem melancholy at first glance. He attempted to discover universal human qualities in the individual, and especially in the individual Bulgarian, with all his national peculiarities. By his own analysis, then, Slavejkov's approach combined deep respect for national and individual characteristics with a striving toward the classical ideal of the universal. He attempted a synthesis of the romantic with the classical.

The brief lyric "Molitva" (Prayer), so different in spirit from Botev's

atheistic "Mojata molitva" (My Prayer), may serve to illustrate a point or two about Slavejkov's work. In this poem Slavejkov addresses God as a believer would, seeking His aid because he feels his loyalty to truth weakening. He pleads that the divine flame may be rekindled within him, that his soul may "once again become the temple of truth". Slavejkov's paradoxical inclination to seek joy through pain is expressed cogently in "Skrəb" (Grief), where he asserts that he is sufficiently mature to find consolation in anguish, having attained to a higher wisdom: "Oh sweet grief, my sole joy!" The poet's awareness of his services to Bulgarian culture is expressed in "Pametnik" (Memorial), which recalls Deržavin's and Puškin's poems on the same subject as well as their ultimate model, Horace. Here Slavejkov credits himself fully for his literary accomplishments and predicts the advent of a new generation with "open gaze and clear brow", capable of appreciating the monument he has created in men's hearts. Clearly Slavejkov was not the most modest of men.

Other important universalist themes occur in Slavejkov's *Epičeski pesni.* The image of the towering individualistic genius, derived partly from Nietzsche, is prominent in them. The figure of Prometheus, doomed to eternal torture for his defiance of the gods, is central to one of Slavejkov's best known and most characteristic poems, "Simfonija na beznadežnostta" (Symphony of Hopelessness), with its cosmic ending: "The darkness thickened. The lifeless wasteland / opened wide its jaws and with weary gasp in the night / breathed forth its query eternally mute." The Nietzschean strain is evident in the "Ximni za smərtta na svərxčoveka" (Hymns on the Death of the Superman), done in classical style with choruses, semi-choruses and anonymous voices and set in a Sofia building which first was a pagan temple, next a Christian church, then a mosque, and now is unconsecrated but used for Christian services.

The notion of the stupendous genius belonging to all mankind dominates the epic poem "Cis Moll", dedicated to Beethoven in his deafness. Although deprived of ordinary hearing, Beethoven enjoys a "higher hearing" which brings him in contact with the "furious pulse / of the general life of creation". He has obtained the "promethean flame" from the heavens and kindled it in the hearts of men, and in their hearts he will live immortal. A different type of universal genius is displayed by the hero of "Sərce na sərcata" (Heart of Hearts), Shelley, whose heart escapes the cremating flame because it has been the source of a universal love expressed through art.

Conscious Art is linked with pure beauty, as in the classically inspired "Frina". In this poem the Greek *hetaera* (concubine) Frina is falsely

accused of impiety. The rabble in its wrath wishes to execute her until she calms them by the simple expedient of removing her clothing and appearing before them as a "marble vision": "and her divine forms breathed / the tranquility of beauty proud". The formerly bloodthirsty mob, instantly converted by the power of Frina's beauty, bears her off to the temple of Aphrodite.

These, then, were the abstract ideals — beauty, truth, genius, art — to which Slavejkov, the fountainhead of Bulgarian 'individualism', gave currency in his writing. His poetic talents were inadequate to the task of imbuing Bulgarian culture with classical ideals, but he did what lay within his power. Dr. Krəstev once wrote that Slavejkov was to Bulgarian literature what Puškin had been to Russian literature. His importance now seems to us to be scarcely of these dimensions, but it remains great nevertheless.

Prominent among Slavejkov's literary allies was his companion of many years, Mara Belčeva (1868-1937). Although attracted all her life to art and literature (she shared Slavejkov's Germanic orientation, having studied in Vienna), she did not become seriously interested in writing until her relationship with Slavejkov began in 1903, at which point she was thirty-five. Thereafter she contributed regularly to *Misəl.* Although the major collections of her verse appeared after the First World War (*Na praga stəpki* [Footsteps on the Threshold, 1918], *Soneti* [Sonnets, 1926], *Izbrani pesni* [Selected Songs, 1931]), it seems suitable to speak of her work here because of her connection with Slavejkov.

Mara Belčeva was a lyric poet — none of the poems in *Na praga stəpki* runs to more than some six stanzas — and apparently had no desire to work with larger forms. Her poetry is very feminine, but — perhaps because of her years — not especially concerned with love. Instead her *forte* is the creation of an atmosphere of light melancholy. Cast in a minor key, her lyrics conjure up the memory of past joys and sorrows. The theme of resurrection occurs frequently in her verse. Autumn was her favorite season, for then she could both ruminate upon the fading of the old and anticipate the resurrection of spring. Mara Belčeva was a lyrical, contemplative spirit.

Slavejkov's ally Dr. Krəstju Krəstev (1866-1919) was a key figure in the literary life of his time, functioning as journalist, esthetician, critic, and personal advisor to such major writers as Mixajlovski, Slavejkov, Petko Todorov and Pejo Javorov. Bulgarian literature would be significantly poorer had Krəstev never existed.

A native of Pirot, located in present-day Yugoslavia, Krəstev was

educated in his home town and in Sofia. In 1885 he entered the University of Leipzig to study psychology and esthetics, graduating with a doctorate in 1888. Returning to Bulgaria, he tried his fledgling hand at journalism in the beautiful provincial city of Kazanlək but moved on to the capital in 1890. There he taught German and entered the world of journalism in good earnest with the short-lived magazine *Kritika* (Criticism, 1891). After the failure of this project, in 1892 he founded the journal *Misəl*, which for fifteen years supplied a forum for a sizable portion of the cultural *élite*. *Misəl*'s editor maintained consistently high standards of quality in an attempt to raise Bulgarian literature to European levels of excellence. In the 1890s *Misəl* published a relatively large group of writers, but even after 1900, when it became more exclusively the organ of the '*Misəl* circle', it continued to exert a powerful influence upon Bulgarian culture.

In addition to his editorial work Dr. Krəstev functioned as a professor of philosophy, primarily esthetics, at the Higher School in Sofia, as a practicing literary critic, and as a commentator on the social and political scene. He printed most of his critical articles initially in *Misəl*, gathering them later in separate volumes entitled *Etjudi i kritiki* (Etudes and Critical Studies, 1894), *Literaturni i filosofski studii* (Literary and Philosophical Studies, 1898), and *Mladi i stari* (Young and Old, 1907). The first two collections contained studies on the representatives of a burgeoning Bulgarian literature, such as Mixajlovski, Vlajkov, Slavejkov and Konstantinov, but they also included articles on Shelley, Shakespeare, Swift and other western writers. Although Krəstev's esthetic theories were almost entirely derived from the work of German estheticians, he demonstrated his ability as a practical critic by assessing contemporary writers on their own terms and apprising them of their individual strengths and weaknesses. Many of his judgments have stood the test of time and are cited even now by historians of Bulgarian literature.

Dr. Krəstev considered art an autonomous realm, especially after 1900, and he firmly opposed the Marxists and others who would encase literature in a dogmatic straitjacket. In a series of articles on tendentiousness in literature published in 1903 Krəstev argued that art should not be linked with material human needs and condemned literary works written for the purpose of advancing a social thesis. For Krəstev as for Slavejkov, literature should dwell in the cultural empyrean, above political passions.

Despite his advocacy of disinterested art, however, Krəstev occasionally became embroiled in political controversy. In 1897 he took a public stand in favor of Macedonia's liberation and in 1907 was involved in the matter of the temporary closing of Sofia University by the government,

publishing a book entitled *Našija universitet* (Our University, 1907) in which he criticized the Bulgarian educational system. Dr. Krəstev was always obstreperous. Though a political and literary conservative, he was no apologist for the existing order.

After the publication of *Mladi i stari* in 1907 and *Misəl*'s discontinuation in early 1908 Krəstev's authority at home waned perceptibly. He was dismissed from the university for a time because of his intemperate remarks during the crisis of 1907, he had lost the journal through which he had disseminated his views, and his colleagues Javorov and Slavejkov seemed to be abandoning literature proper for the theater. However, just at this time, as if in compensation, his prestige abroad rose rapidly. He described Bulgarian literature to the outside world in Russian and German periodicals, reporting on its achievements, extolling Slavejkov and denigrating Vazov. But this lasted only a few years. Slavejkov died in 1912. Javorov attempted suicide in 1913 and succeeded on a second try in 1914. And when Petko Todorov died in 1916 Krəstev was isolated because he had linked his fortunes so closely with those of the younger literary generation, which proved unusually deficient in vitality. Consequently he retired to the privacy of his study, writing uncharacteristically expressionistic critical appreciations of his dead colleagues, including Aleko Konstantinov. Toward the end of his life Dr. Krəstev turned his attention to Botev, investigating Botev's heritage in the work of Slavejkov and Todorov and interpreting the radical poet as a spiritual forebear of the younger generation. When he died Krəstev was preparing a critical edition of Botev's poetry in which he made an interesting attempt to determine, on the basis of various redactions of Botev's poems and his own conception of the psychology of literary creation, just who was responsible for variant readings of the poems: the author or the editor of the periodical in which they were first printed. Dr. Krəstev's edition of Botev was published posthumously though it had been left incomplete.

It is difficult to overestimate the value of the service Dr. Krəstev rendered Bulgarian culture by his personal support of contemporary writers. Some considered him cold and reserved, but others — including his old antagonist Kiril Xristov — have witnessed to his readiness to do anything within his power to aid writers in distress. Furthermore, Krəstev more than once set an example of intellectual probity with his outspoken protests against injustice and his willingness to suffer for what he thought right. Finally, by serving as a two-way communications channel between Bulgaria on the one hand and Europe and Russia on the other, he promoted the internationalization of Bulgarian literature

and helped bring Bulgarian culture to the attention of a European public which had theretofore been almost unaware of its existence.

If Dr. Krəstev was akin to Slavejkov in his championing of pure esthetics, his interest in German philosophy and his preaching of the highest cultural values, in other ways he resembled Pejo Javorov. Though relatively untutored by comparison with Slavejkov, Javorov's native poetic gift was indisputably superior to Slavejkov's. His sensitivity to social injustice and his political concern linked him more closely with Krəstev than with Slavejkov, although the latter remained by no means totally aloof from politics. For instance, Krəstev and Javorov both supported the quest for Macedonian independence, although Javorov was much more deeply and actively involved than his mentor; both got in trouble over certain of their activities, Javorov especially in his earlier, socialist days. Certainly Krəstev was at least as close to Javorov as to Slavejkov: each of the poets fitted a different aspect of the critic's spirit.

Pejo Javorov (1878-1914) — the surname Javorov, from the word for sycamore, was chosen for him by Slavejkov — was born Pejo Kračolov on New Year's Day of 1878 in the small town of Čirpan, between Plovdiv and Stara Zagora. After beginning his schooling in Čirpan he moved to Plovdiv but could not continue his studies there because of his own poor health and his father's unfavorable financial situation. Of all the members of the '*Misəl* circle', Javorov thus had by far the least formal education.

Being unable to stay in school, in 1894, at the age of sixteen, Kračolov obtained a position as an apprentice telegraph operator in his home town. His employment was not time-consuming, so he broadened his education by reading Russian and Bulgarian classics such as Puškin, Lermontov, Karavelov, Zaxari Stojanov and Vazov. In 1895 he was promoted to full-fledged telegraph operator; in the fall of that year he visited Sofia for the first time. Not wishing to remain a telegraph operator all his life, he thought of various careers, for example acting (an ambition which he partially fulfilled through his association with the National Theater toward the end of his life) and becoming a partisan in Macedonia. After returning to Čirpan he read extensively in socialist literature and organized a socialist study group. Though in later years he rejected socialism as a general philosophy, many of its tenets continued to color his thinking, and in the early years his poetic tastes were flavored with social concern, for he read Heine and the Russian social poet Semjon Nadson. Populism was reflected in some of his early poems of 1896, but Javorov has never been closely connected with Bulgarian populist

writers in the public mind. All during this time he had to earn his living not as a poet but as a telegraph operator. After several transfers he found himself employed in isolated Anxialo, far from friends and culture, but he profitably spent his time reading the Bible, absorbing impressions of the sea, and in particular composing a brief narrative poem, "Kaliopa".

"Kaliopa" made Javorov's reputation. As an unknown from the provinces he had been submitting his lyrics to *Misəl* since July of 1898: some of them had been published but had not caused any stir. This was partly because Javorov was not always adept at disciplining his literary talent, a service Dr. Krəstev performed for him. After receiving word of the enthusiastic response to "Kaliopa" in the *Misəl* editorial offices, Javorov wrote to Krəstev in January of 1900 that in the course of the preceding year he had submitted many poems to the journal but few had been accepted. This discouraged him, but when he reread the rejected poems he discovered that they were so weak as to be fit only for the discard. In any event, after "Kaliopa" had come out in *Misəl*, Javorov's newfound literary colleagues got him transferred to Sofia so that he would be near at hand. In 1901 he published his first collection of verse, *Stixotvorenija*, which was welcomed by critics so warmly that Dr. Krəstev warned Javorov against taking this sudden praise too seriously.

Just as Javorov had acquired renown as a poet, the political activist within him came to the fore, and at the end of 1901 he left his position to edit the political newspaper *Delo* (The Cause). Political journalism did not satisfy him entirely, so in 1902 he went to Macedonia as a partisan with the outstanding revolutionary Goce Delčev. On his first expedition the spirit proved willing but the flesh weak: illness forced him to return to Sofia. By early 1903, however, he was back at the same Macedonian stand, functioning mostly as a political agitator to awaken in the population a greater recognition of their own misfortunes. For this purpose he moved from village to village printing a hectographed newspaper entitled *Svoboda ili smərt*! (Freedom or Death). The paper was almost wholly his handiwork: he wrote the editorials and filled up blank spaces with agitational poems of appropriate length. All this ended in late April of 1903 when Goce Delčev was tracked down and killed by the Turks. As Javorov had owed his primary loyalty to Delčev, he returned to Sofia by July of 1903, before the abortive Ilinden rebellion in Macedonia in August.

Once Javorov's guerrilla days were done he resolved to produce a literary chronicle of the Macedonian liberation movement. Thus, taking little more than two months at the end of 1903 for the purpose, he wrote a

biography of his old comrade in arms, *Goce Delčev*. Further, in 1905 he began publishing memoirs of his Macedonian experiences in *Misəl*, continuing them through 1907 and then collecting them under the title *Xajduški kopnenija* (Dreams of a Partisan) in 1908. Javorov was a superb stylist even in the Macedonian memoirs, which were written in the early stages of his interest in artistic prose.

Xajduški kopnenija was a worthy literary memorial to a rather brutal historical phenomenon. Javorov's political views as set forth in the memoirs were undoubtedly influenced by Delčev and were therefore quite radical. In the foreword to *Goce Delčev* Javorov exhibits a powerful Russophobia. He is convinced that Russia undertook the war of liberation for self-seeking reasons alone and that furthermore the liberation from outside did more harm than good. Though the liberation would have required more time this way, it should have been achieved through the efforts of the indigenous population, for then a social revolution would have accompanied the political revolution and the power of the church and the bourgeoisie would have been smashed, Javorov held. Of course his theories had little relation to reality, for the Turks had easily suppressed both the April 1876 uprising and the Ilinden rebellion of 1903; Bulgaria proper and later Macedonia were freed from Turkish rule only through major wars involving the expenditure of much blood and treasure by outside states. Another 50 to 100 years might have been required for the Bulgarians to drive the Turks out under their own power.

Though Javorov was little more than a wistful fellow traveller lacking the moral or physical stamina to be a genuine revolutionary, Goce Delčev as the poet pictures him lived solely for the revolution. He was a socialist and an atheist — although he had to play down such views in dealing with the common people — and he possessed that absolute intolerance so necessary for revolutionaries. His intolerance was reportedly manifested very early, for example when as a schoolboy he stabbed and wounded a fellow pupil while attempting to kill him in retaliation for what seemed an act of treason. People of Delčev's caliber scarcely thought about death: it was readily inflicted and readily undergone.

After 1903 Javorov retreated temporarily to his study. He was appointed chief librarian of the National Library in 1904 and traveled abroad in the summer of that year. In 1905 he assumed the editorship of *Misəl* for a time in Dr. Krəstev's absence and in 1906 was officially designated co-editor. Also in 1906 he was dispatched on a cultural visit to Paris by Ivan Šišmanov, who in his capacity as Minister of Education sent several young writers abroad. Javorov never got to Paris, though; instead he

settled in Nancy long enough to compose most of the poems in his subcollection *Prozrenija* (Intuitions).

After coming back to Sofia in April of 1907 Javorov published a collection of poems dating from 1905-1906 under the title *Bezsənici* (Insomnias). At first he took up his old position at the library, but in 1908 he left it to join the newspaper *Ilinden* and work in the Sofia office of a Macedonian revolutionary organization. He was no totally dedicated revolutionary activist, though, and when he needed more money to live on he calmly accepted a position as the *dramaturg* (artistic director) of the National Theater in August of 1908. He performed so well as *dramaturg* that in 1910 he was finally sent all the way to Paris as a reward. In that same year of 1910 which saw the publication of his most important poetic collection — *Podir senkite na oblacite* (Following the Shadows of the Clouds) — he was orienting himself toward the drama. He printed his classic play *V polite na Vitoša* (In the Foothills of Vitoša) in 1911 and *Kogato grəm udari — kak exoto zagləxva* (The Lightning Strikes: The Thunder Dies Away) in 1912. There is reason to believe that, had his personal situation permitted, he might have become so engrossed in the theater after 1912 as to have ceased writing poetry altogether. But such a development proved impossible, for his private world had begun to disintegrate as early as 1910.

Javorov's personal tragedy revolved about two women. The first, whom he loved and who evidently reciprocated his passion in full measure, was Petko Todorov's sister, Mina Todorova. Her family's strong opposition to the match prevented them from marrying, however. Moreover, in 1910 Mina died an agonizing death of tuberculosis in Paris with Javorov at her side. His relationship with Mina Todorova had extensive psychological effects on Javorov. The poet's second affair was intertwined with the first until 1910, but in this instance the woman, the famed Sofia beauty Lora Karavelova, was the pursuer and Javorov for the most part simply accepted or rejected her initiatives. The two had known each other for some time before 1910, but as long as Mina lived Lora could make no headway. Immediately upon learning of her rival's death Lora journeyed to Paris to declare her love to Javorov, who at that point understandably put her off. But she would not be denied forever and eventually had her way. On the eve of his departure for the First Balkan War Javorov, thinking it likely he might never return, married her. Consequently, when he did in fact come back he was bound to an extraordinarily possessive wife. Lora was so jealous that she could not bear her husband's even looking twice at another woman. On the evening of

30 November, 1913, upset over what she considered Javorov's flirtations, Lora entered his room and unexpectedly shot and killed herself before his eyes. The frenzied poet wrote a suicide note and attempted to take his own life too but succeeded only in partially blinding himself. Later he went totally blind. His friends, especially Dr. Krəstev, did everything they could to rehabilitate him, but he hardly appreciated their efforts. His resolve to end his life was reinforced by the appearance of an almost certainly baseless but widely accepted rumor that he had murdered Lora and attempted to make her death appear a suicide. Finally, on 17 October, 1914 Javorov both took poison and shot himself to ensure that his suicide attempt would be successful. It was.

For Javorov literature and life were as closely intertwined as they had been for Botev, although in a different way. For instance, his best play, *V polite na Vitoša*, is largely autobiographical. Aside from *V polite na Vitoša*, a considerable fraction of Javorov's poetic production consists of intimate lyrics in which he bares his soul to the reader. Javorov was subjected to intensive study by his close friend Prof. Mixail Arnaudov, who wrote a classic study on the psychology of literary creation in which he utilized, among other things, materials from extensive interviews with the writer later gathered in the book *Kəm psixografijata na P. K. Javorov* (On the Psychography of P. K. Javorov, 1916). The poet himself was given to analyzing his creative psychology in private letters, especially those written to Dr. Krəstev. In one of the most intriguing of them — a letter of 27 August, 1908, to Krəstev — he declared that few poets had genuinely influenced him because he had never really loved poetry and had never been able to bring himself to read another poet's work in its entirety (in confirmation of this it may be noted that Javorov, unlike Slavejkov, was uninterested in translating foreign poets). Why then did he write poetry? Because "one has to do something in this world", for one thing, and because he achieved catharsis through the writing of verse. Unhappily, a poem ceased to be his as soon as it was written: "and I often think to myself that if only I could remove from people's hands and minds everything I have given them, I should be the happiest of the happy". Although he was not a Christian, Javorov went on to compare himself with Christ, whom he termed a "great symbolist poet" because He gave others His very self through the instrumentality of bread and wine. Javorov viewed his poetic production as something analogous, but simultaneously different in that Javorov gave of himself selfishly: he shared his soul with others because he was somehow compelled to, all the while wishing that he did not have to. It must have been for some such reason that he said

that he "hated poetry", a startling statement to come from one of Bulgaria's best poets.

Javorov's verse confirms much of what he said about his work in his letter to Dr. Krəstev. The poet's emotions are always close to the surface. He rarely knows spiritual peace: he is either ecstatically happy or in the slough of despondency. Perhaps for this reason he did not pay sufficient attention to questions of poetic form. In moments of inspiration he allowed himself great logical jumps and inconsistencies of composition which he either could not or would not eliminate later. He lacked the tact needed as a brake on his writing, and certain of his poems are so chaotic or so embarrassingly personal that he should not have published them. When he is good Javorov can be powerful indeed, but when he is bad he is execrable.

The two chief strains in Javorov's lyrics are the social and the personal. His social poetry, tinted as it is by both populist and Marxist doctrine, is highly valued in present-day Bulgaria. Social themes appeared all through his career, though they were most prominent in the 1890s. As examples one might cite those poems linked with the Macedonian revolutionary movement, such as his *Xajduški pesni* of 1903. A famous poem of his expressing populist views is "Na edin pesimist" (To a Pessimist, 1898). Here the poet concedes that for the moment the people are so enveloped in darkness and ignorance as to be in effect slaves. But he is also convinced that if only the intelligentsia will supply them with the torch of learning the people themselves will "burst their bonds" and without further guidance discover the most direct route to social justice and happiness. Javorov's sense of his own impotence and lack of faith coalesced in a curious way with the belief that the "savior-day" would eventually dawn in "Šte dojdeš ti " (Thou Wilt Come, 1905), a poem which the author evidently considered significant, since he placed it at the conclusion of *Bezsənici*. The poet did not know precisely what the "savior-day" would bring, but he was certain it would arrive. On that day the earth would be somehow transformed and the schizophrenic poet, a "disembodied spirit", would "weep alone over [his] own cold corpse". Thus, though Javorov was sure the new order would be beautiful, he was not at all clear that it would bring happiness to him personally. In the short run Javorov could see little hope either for himself or for entire peoples, for instance the Bulgarians, the Macedonians or even the Armenians, another small nation suffering, like the Macedonians, under Turkish oppression. In "Armenci" (The Armenians, 1900) Javorov depicts that land's plight with compassion but proffers the Armenians no hopeful advice; all they

can do is patronize the taverns to obliterate their woes in inebriation and sing through their tears. Though the poem contains a hint of revolutionary sentiment, the burden of its message is one of pessimistic resignation.

To be sure, Javorov occasionally wrote cheerful poetry. He could compose fine descriptions of nature, as in the optimistic "Prolet" (Spring). He could be optimistic in his love poetry as well. This type of verse is illustrated by "Dve xubavi oči" (Two Beautiful Eyes, 1905), written in honor of Mina Todorova. The poem is constructed like an object and its mirror-image: the second half repeats the first half but with the words in reverse order. Though "Dve xubavi oči" is naively and charmingly erotic, a tragic and unhealthy note is sounded in the love-poem "Na Lora" (To Lora, written on the occasion of an excursion to a monastery with her and others in 1906). Here the themes of love and death intertwine as the poet compares himself to a "wounded bird" and declares that his soul has been "wounded unto death by love". Love is torture for him, his soul is transformed into a "moan", a "cry", something inarticulate but pained. Love is physical, unambiguously sensual, and simultaneously destructive. "Na Lora" of 1906 exhibited a remarkable foreboding of the disaster his love for Lora would later bring upon him.

All in all, Javorov the poet is almost invariably remembered as a writer of blackly pessimistic cast who could discover nothing in the entire universe in which to believe. In this regard he was quite modern. As the critic Malčo Nikolov has pointed out, one may discern connections between Javorov and Nietzsche in their negation of the old absolutes, their disdain for the crowd, their glorification of the poet's own personality; between Javorov and the Polish decadent Stanislaw Przybyszewski in their demonic ambitions and their tendency toward hyperbolization; between Javorov and Maurice Maeterlinck in their sense of man's hopelessness and helplessness, their impotent horror in the face of death, and also in certain technical devices. Javorov's terror at the thought of his eventual dissolution emerges in such poems as "Nošt" (Night) and "Smərtta" (Death). The poet is fascinated by death, which he dreads but which nevertheless enchants him. The individual may expect only Nirvana or chaos after death: when Javorov took his own life after Lora he almost certainly did not believe he would join her in an afterlife, yet he was irresistibly driven to bring his life to a close. Javorov was, then, a paradoxical character who strove unsuccessfully to reconcile opposites: life and death, love and pain, suffering and joy. Suffering and joy are the themes of the overdone "Az stradam" (I Suffer), describing Javorov's

cosmically tortured soul. He searches and suffers, all the while endeavoring to keep from descending into the pit of chaos below him. What precisely he is seeking while suffering he does not know — unless perhaps it is suffering itself. Such poems are typically Javorovian. He was a poet of the metaphysical shadows, who lacked firm faith even in his poetic calling.

Aside from his poetry Javorov wrote extraordinarily lucid prose. His writing in *Xajduški kopnenija* and *Goce Delčev*, since these works were not strictly literary, contributed relatively little to the improvement of Bulgarian artistic prose. The same may be said for Javorov's letters, which were not published during his lifetime, and for his plays, which are not usually thought of as 'prose works'. His numerous critical and journalistic articles have retained little significance for the present day. Thus despite the merit of his prose style, Javorov is known as a poet first, secondarily as a playwright, and not particularly as a prose-writer.

The remaining member of the '*Misəl* circle', Petko Todorov (1879-1916), did write mostly artistic prose — indeed some have claimed that he was as much a poet in soul as most composers of verse. Certainly he rounds the *Misəl* circle out neatly: Dr. Krəstev the critic, Slavejkov the poet, prose-writer and critic, Javorov the poet and playwright, Todorov the prose-writer and playwright.

Todorov was the only one of the group who belonged chronologically entirely to the post-liberation era, having been born on 26 September, 1879 in the mountain town of Elena. He came from an affluent, socially prominent family: his father was a *čorbadžija* who occupied important government posts after the liberation. Thus for a time the elder Todorov was governor of northern Bulgaria, with his headquarters in Ruse; he was offered — but refused — ministerial positions with the central government in 1882 and 1883. The adolescent Todorov rebelled against his family, but at the same time he was indebted to his father for easing his political difficulties through influence and also for giving him an excellent education. An important portion of that education was imparted in Tərnovo, where the family resided in 1894-1895. As early as 1892, at the age of thirteen, Todorov had begun writing verse of a socialist sort which he published in 1894 in a volume entitled *Draski* (Sketches). The fact that he first published at the age of fifteen shows that Todorov was precocious even for Bulgaria, where many writers started early. His juvenile inclinations toward socialism were reinforced by his stay in Tərnovo, which at that point was a hotbed of socialist agitation, since the founder of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Dimitər Blagoev, and some

of his associates lived there then. In 1895 Todorov offered the public more of the same in his *Stixove na skučnata lira* (Verses from a Boring Lyre). The collection was all too aptly titled, for even the socialists could not condone the author's artistic ineptitude, though they approved of his ideology. In 1895-1896 Todorov also made a few attempts at writing short stories.

In 1896 Todorov and his brother were sent to Toulouse, where he absorbed French culture and read widely in world literature and socialist theory. At this time, when he was still well under twenty, politics continued to fascinate him. He delivered a May Day speech in Toulouse in 1897 and also became special Balkan correspondent for *La Dépèche*, a progressive newspaper. Moreover, in 1897 he also took up the Macedonian cause, speaking on its behalf in Ruse and issuing an upsetting proclamation to the local population. He was arrested and brought up for trial in March of 1898. His father's influence, good lawyers and his youth worked in his favor and he was released, though he did not repudiate his ideas. In 1898 he went to Bern, ostensibly to study law. Instead he seems to have spent most of his time circulating among Russian and Polish radicals and conducting extensive correspondence. Upon returning to Bulgaria in the summer of 1899 he continued his socialist activities. Another crisis occurred in September of 1899 when the young writer gave a speech on the subject of the portraits to be hung in the local reading room. He declared that there should be no pictures of crowned heads, who were always reactionaries, and for good measure termed Prince Ferdinand "the Austrian agent in Bulgaria". For this Todorov was brought to trial once more and sentenced to prison; later, through the efforts of his father, then a member of parliament, he was pardoned in a general amnesty of 1901. These legal formalities were carried out in Todorov's absence, though, for he promptly left Bulgaria after his speech and remained abroad until the amnesty. By the time he was pardoned Todorov — still hardly more than twenty — had reconsidered many of his opinions.

Todorov's retreat from socialism began in 1899 and continued in 1900. His radical activity had reached a peak with his speech of September 1899; in that same year he wrote stories critical of contemporary reality, one of which, "Za pravda" (For Justice), appeared in *Misəl* in 1900. But simultaneously new themes started emerging in his work, and it was also in 1899 that he produced the first example of that genre for which he is now famed, the idyll "Pevec" (The Singer). "Pevec" was a product of his involuntary exile in Munich and Berlin, for in the latter city, through

Georg Adam, a German specialist on Bulgarian culture, Todorov was introduced to the literary circle "Die Kommenden". Its guiding spirit, Johannes Schlaf, wrote idylls which now occupy a very modest place in German literature but which markedly influenced Todorov's literary future just as the philosophical idealism and estheticism of "Die Kommenden" affected his more general outlook on life. Under these pressures he started formulating anti-socialist sentiments in his letters of 1900, and in a missive of March 1901 to one of his literary associates he proclaimed that "social situations are temporary and only beauty is eternal" and declared that he was not a "useful writer" but rather opposed social art and defended true religion in the positivistic epoch in which he lived. Moreover "Pevec", the story of a simple shepherd and his emotions on the day when his beloved marries another, attracted Dr. Krəstev's notice. The critic found more to condemn than to praise in the idyll, but he recognized Todorov's potential and in December of 1899 invited him to contribute to *Misəl*. An external observer in 1900 might well have concluded that Todorov had completely gone over to the enemy camp. This was not so, however, for in later years Todorov remained interested in political questions and problems of social justice despite his primarily esthetic orientation.

Todorov did not permit his periods of extended residence in French and German lands to lessen his commitment to Slavdom. Thus in 1901-1902 he studied under the famous Slavist Alexander Brückner in Leipzig, traveling to Czechoslovakia and Poland to gather material for his dissertation *Za otnošenieto na slavjanite kəm bəlgarskata literatura* (On the Attitude of the Slavs Toward Bulgarian Literature). This investigation has been published several times and is still a valuable contribution to the study of the interrelationships among the various Slavic peoples. Todorov then returned to Bulgaria and joined the *Misəl* circle. He produced short stories and idylls; the latter were first collected under the title *Idilii* in 1908. At the same time he remained politically active. He joined the Radical Party and helped direct it for a while; he supported the protest against the Sofia Slavic Congress of 1910. His political views were expressed rather openly in some of his plays.

During much of this time Todorov was employed at the National Library, along with many of his fellow writers. He met the father of Socialist Realism, Maksim Gor'kij, during a vacation on Capri in 1912. Then his health failed prematurely, and after a period of decline he died before his thirty-seventh birthday, in February of 1916, in a small Swiss town. Because of the war his body could not be returned to Bulgaria

immediately, but in 1921 his remains, along with those of Penčo Slavejkov, were disinterred and transferred to his native land. With Todorov's death the last creative writer of the *Misəl* circle passed from the scene.

Though Todorov wrote little verse after his now forgotten juvenile attempts, in spirit he remained a poet. The bulk of his idylls resemble lyric poems in that they attempt to create an emotional atmosphere rather than tell a tale. Like Vazov, Todorov was skilled at describing the patriarchal *milieu* with which he was familiar. He also had a talent for nature description, although he frequently personified nature so that it reflected the state of mind of his ordinarily dreamy, inactive human characters: thus nature is often shown in his work as sunk in thought or lost in reveries. However, Todorov's palette is limited, and his nature descriptions before long become repetitive and boring.

In line with the sentiments quoted from his letter of 1901, in certain early idylls Todorov did attempt to promote the cause of true religion. For instance, in "Učiliština ikona" (The School Icon, 1901) the author recalls the hallowed icon of Sts. Kiril and Metodij in the local school before which the children of an older generation had sung hymns and chants and which was still there as a visible bond between the faithful of all ages. Todorov's religiosity was apparently a passing phenomenon of the period when he was first rejecting socialism, however, for it practically vanished in subsequent years.

Todorov consistently used folk songs and folk motifs in his writing. A very explicit folk motif occurs in the idyll "Nad čerkova" (Above the Church). Two lovers are prevented from marrying because they are distantly related; they die and are buried on opposite sides of a church, separated in death as in life. But then from the man's grave there grows an elm (the name for elm is masculine in Bulgarian) and from the woman's a poplar (the noun is feminine). The trees grow until they are almost able to intertwine their branches, but a storm intervenes to fell the poplar, and the lovers remain forever apart.

Up to now Todorov has probably been overrated, and time will most likely place him clearly below Javorov and Slavejkov on the literary scale, especially where his idylls are concerned. His poetic passages are sometimes quite good, but many of his characters are merely puppet-like mouthpieces for his individualistic ideas drawn from Nietzsche and Slavejkov. He does not delve deep enough into his heroes' psychology. His style is mannered and occasionally precious. He uses so many provincialisms that his prose is difficult for the non-Bulgarian to understand. But his worst shortcoming (and this is paradoxical in view of his

desire to be a consciously artistic writer) is the utter structural chaos prevailing in his idylls. He skitters from subject to subject so disconnectedly that the reader ceases trying to follow him. After finishing one of Todorov's idylls the reader often retains only the vaguest recollection of its content, remembering only that it evoked within him, say, a feeling of dreamy melancholy. Many of Todorov's idylls are simply unreadable. They are ideologically and artistically confused.

The *Misəl* circle, though a carrier of the germs of modernism in Bulgarian literature, did not consist of doctrinal extremists who embraced an apolitical estheticism as a reaction against socially significant literature. It was left for the Bulgarian symbolists to extend certain facets of their older colleagues' approach to their logical conclusions. Of all the *Misəl* circle Javorov is generally considered to have been closest to the symbolists, and numerous symbolist and crypto-symbolist themes and expressions do in fact appear in his poetry. Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to call Javorov a symbolist in any significant sense. Slavejkov, moreover, was totally out of sympathy with the symbolists.

The history of Bulgarian symbolism has never been investigated in detail. Scholars in today's Bulgaria would prefer to ignore it, but it cannot entirely be overlooked since so many major Bulgarian poets were symbolists at some point. Consequently, most current scholarly writing on the Bulgarian symbolists emphasizes the areas in which they deviated from the movement's canons in the direction of realism. The communist attitude toward the symbolists derives from the fact that the latter tended to be mystics, consciously denied the relevance of everyday life to literature, and concentrated too heavily on esthetic problems. But the Bulgarian symbolist movement plainly deserves investigation on its own terms.

Symbolism arrived late in Bulgaria from abroad, but it was still the most consistent artistic school in Bulgarian literature except for the communists. Bulgarian symbolism was strongly affected by such external influences as the French writers Mallarmé and Verlaine, the Germans Dehmel and George, the Pole Przybyszewski, and the Russians Bal'mont, Blok and Brjusov. Its first stirrings date from 1905: in that year the journal *Xudožnik* (Artist) published the poem "Novijat den" (The New Day) by Teodor Trajanov, who later became the country's leading symbolist and one of the few who never betrayed symbolism. In 1907 the symbolists put out an almanac entitled *Južni cvetove* (Southern Flowers, a name reminiscent of the important Russian symbolist collection *Northern Flowers*), edited by Trajanov, Dimo K'orčev and Trifon Kunev

and containing mostly works by them. In 1910 Ivan Radoslavov, later the movement's chief theoretician, propagandist and historian, published a rendering of Baudelaire's *Poèmes en prose*; the year 1912 saw the first volume of symbolist prose, Nikolaj Rajnov's *Bogomilski legendi* (Bogomil Legends). The journal *Naš život* (Our Life), edited by Anton Strašimirov, nurtured symbolism between 1905 and 1912; in 1914 the journal *Zveno* (Link) published the writings of the symbolists and other representatives of the pre-war generation until its existence was terminated by the outbreak of hostilities.

The Bulgarian symbolists liked to theorize about their own rather vague poetry. K'orčev's article of 1907, "Təgite ni" (Our Sadnesses, from *Južni cvetove*), was a central programmatic statement of the early period. In the course of a lengthy discussion ranging over the history of nineteenth-century Russian literature and attempting to coopt such writers as Tolstoj, Turgenev and Tjutčev as spiritual ancestors of symbolism, K'orčev elaborated a mystical doctrine reminiscent of medieval Hesychastic theory. Taking "purely rational concepts" as their point of departure, said K'orčev, the symbolists soon pass the limits of the rational and draw near to the essence of existence.

> Then our entire being is transformed into a great point of light which emits rays ...; we have approached the eternity which is hidden within us and feel happy because we have become immortal; the physical world loses its meaning and significance. ... In these streams of light ... the reason, returned to its parent and father, feels small and falls silent.

After these mystical ruminations the symbolist theoretician argues that art must contain three elements within itself: "God, Silence and Fatherland". Certainly the Hesychasts would have felt comfortable with the first two of these.

In the foreword to his collection of symbolist verse *Videnija na krəstopət* (Visions at the Crossroads, 1914) the poet Ljudmil Stojanov maintained that

> any poetic work, as Oscar Wilde says, is in essence completely useless. It can find its justification only in the degree of that astonishment which it is able to evoke. And this astonishment is inversely proportional to the indifference which Reality inspires. In other words, the closer a given work is to everyday affairs, the fewer elements of poetry it contains and, consequently, it does not deserve a shadow of attention. The specter of Morality and the idol of Truth have no place in art, which lives for itself alone and drinks at founts purer than those of the accepted virtues. In general any attempt at introducing [Truth and Morality] into this enchanted kingdom is ... fruitless and vain.

Contemporary defenders of the traditional approach could only be appalled at Stojanov's assertion that art could be false and immoral if it felt so inclined because it was a law unto itself. The poet's sole duty, according to Stojanov, was to strive for beauty of form and expression.

Stojanov in any case formulated a relatively comprehensible credo, but others could be vaguer. For example, in an "Afterword" appended in 1929 to a new printing of his poetry originally composed between 1905 and 1911, Teodor Trajanov wrote that his collection was "fate", "the romance of a life". The theoretician Ivan Radoslavov developed this notion in his *Bəlgarska literatura (1880-1930)* (Bulgarian Literature [1880-1930]), where symbolism was held to be the goal toward which Bulgarian literature had been aiming for decades. "Trajanov's work", Radoslavov wrote,

> is not literature, no matter how many of the noblest and most beautiful characteristics of literature it may display. It is fate, because each song of his is a gem cast up upon the sand after a raging storm in the ocean of his spirit. Of all his contemporaries and immediate predecessors he alone displays a truly dramatic art, which will ever remain the most perfect thing in poetry.

Critics not in sympathy with the symbolist movement — and there were many — defined the essence of symbolist poetry in simpler terms. Georgi Canev, writing as a leftist critic after the First World War, lashed out against the symbolists in his article "Mərtva poezija" (Dead Poetry, 1923). Composing symbolist verse, Canev sarcastically declared, was hardly taxing intellectually: "All you have to do is discover and add some 'ominous' to 'sorrow' or 'hellish' to 'grief' and a whole flood of tears will flow forth. A flood of deception and falsehood. Because personal grief is lacking and another person's grief cannot be felt." In symbolist poetry everything happens as in a dream, nothing bears any relation to reality, wrote Canev. Some symbolists even descended to what Canev in 1923 took as pornography. Finally, in symbolist verse could be discovered the ultimate horror: mysticism — an entity which in the critic's opinion served as a mere "cover for creative impotence". Though Canev criticized symbolism from the extreme left, he did raise some valid points, especially when he deplored the symbolists' predilection for clichés and their narrow diapason of themes, which made it easier for poetasters to join the movement and lowered the value of the production of the genuine poets within it. The symbolist world, as its detractors claimed, was in fact a homogeneous and even monotonous one, but the most talented symbolists transcended its limitations and nearly all of them contributed to the

refinement of the native poetic language and poetic technique.

The leader of the Bulgarian symbolists during the pre- and post-war phases of its existence was Teodor Trajanov (1882-1945), who came from Pazardžik, a moderately large city near Plovdiv. Like several of his symbolist colleagues, he was formally educated in fields remote from poetry or even literature. He at first studied physics and mathematics at Sofia University, later transferring to a polytechnical institute in Vienna. His Teutonic education made him a transmitter of German culture to Bulgaria, just as Penčo Slavejkov and Dr. Krəstev had been before him. Moreover he was employed by the ministry of foreign affairs as a secretary of legation and spent some time in Austria and Germany, where he developed contacts with writers. In 1921 he returned to Bulgaria and began to participate in literary and intellectual life, editing the symbolist journal *Xiperion*. After the disappearance of the symbolist movement in the early 1930s he continued to be recognized for his achievements, but on the whole he led a quiet life until his death in Sofia in January of 1945. Until recently he was rarely mentioned favorably in Bulgaria since he had always remained a consistent symbolist.

Trajanov's literary career was roughly coterminous with the period of Bulgarian symbolism's existence and may be divided into two distinct portions separated by the First World War. He began publishing at an early age (seventeen) in 1899 in *Smjax* (Laughter); later he contributed to various periodicals, such as *Bəlgarska sbirka*, Simeon Radev's *Xudožnik*, and the almanac *Južni cvetove*. His poetry of the pre-war period was collected in the two volumes *Regina mortua* of 1908 and *Ximni i baladi* (Hymns and Ballads) of 1911. Thereafter Trajanov seems to have fallen silent until 1921, since during much of this time he was in the foreign service. After 1921 he wrote poems of a quite different type which will be discussed in the following chapter.

The poems in *Regina mortua* and *Ximni i baladi*, brought together in 1929 under the general title *Osvobodenijat čovek* (The Liberated Man), are typical symbolist pieces. It is difficult to recall the content of Trajanov's poems, for they are not meant to convey messages. Their prevailing tone is pessimistic and sorrowing: his verse contains frequent references to grief, death, night, parting from a loved one. Trajanov liked to write about the seasons, of which autumn was the most congenial for him, a decadent. To be sure, he also wrote many poems about winter — a season already dead and not in the process of dying, as the autumn — and even on occasion about the spring.

Since Trajanov's writing is very much of a piece, one short poem,

"Smərtta na noštta" (The Death of the Night), may be taken as representative of his general approach:

> The night awakens and listens apprehensively,
> Its heart beats painfully and fearfully,
> It burns reflected in the black lake
> And glitters in parting through its last tears.
> Invisible fingers intertwine lightly
> Funeral flowers with the reeds on the shore,
> Melodies pour forth, reflections wander about,
> A white angel kisses the night in parting.

It is not easy to discuss such a poem as this in any consistent fashion, since the symbolism is often too indefinite to lend itself to interpretation. The "invisible fingers", for example, may be treated in various ways — they are most probably the fingers of some unknown sentient being, but they might also be understood as belonging to the "white angel". The poem contains words and associations which recur over and over again in Trajanov's poetry: death, night, painfully, black lake, last tears, funeral flowers, parting. Trajanov sometimes wrote optimistic poems, but these are but aberrations from his basic outlook, so neatly referred to in the heading for a sub-section of *Regina mortua*, "Above the Sarcophagus of the Spring". Life is unreal, as the subtitle of the second book of *Regina mortua* implies: "Life and Dream". Life is a phantasm; death is nearer to actuality. This is why the poet so frequently speaks of "last" things, writes lyrics like "Pogrebenie" (Burial), and is obsessed with death and dissolution.

Trajanov's marked predilection for the irrational and unanalyzable led him to a species of mysticism, a state of mind with which organized religion has always found it difficult to cope. On the other hand, religious terminology and concepts are prominent in his verse. A short sub-section of *Regina mortua* is headed "Salve Regina!", and the two books of *Ximni i baladi* bear titles of religious provenance: "Prisnodeva" (Virgin) and "Piligrim v černoto" (Pilgrim in Black). Other section headings include: "Hell", "Purgatory", and "Communion". Some individual poems are labeled "hymns", others "prayers". All this is not indicative of the poet's commitment to orthodox Christian doctrine, however, for Trajanov simply rummaged about in whatever religious traditions he found interesting. For him the Christian tradition was most important, but he also drew upon the classical pagan heritage — as in the "Hymns to Astarte" — and eastern belief (cf. the section-heading "Reincarnations"). Trajanov was an eclectic mystic.

Finally, there is evident in Trajanov a trait again characteristic of the symbolists as a whole: his acute sense of the literary tradition from which he sprang and in which he was working. The symbolists made a custom of dedicating books or portions thereof to their writer colleagues, and Trajanov's last collection, *Panteon* (Pantheon, 1934), is mostly a series of poems written to honor great poets of the past, Bulgarian and other. By such devices the symbolists at the least made their reading public more conscious of the native and foreign roots of contemporary culture.

The most remarkable thing about Bulgarian symbolism in the post-war period was the alacrity with which its adherents deserted it. The first important symbolist to abandon the movement was Xristo Jasenov (1889-1925), who had been as fervent a symbolist as any in the immediate prewar period, when symbolism was a dominant literary force. Jasenov had studied art in Sofia and begun writing in 1909. His prewar poems came out in such journals as *Naš život*, *Nabljudatel* (The Observer), and *Zveno*, and the bulk of them were collected in the volume *Ricarski zamək* (The Knight's Castle), the title of which was apparently inspired by a sentence from Kierkegaard, "My grief is a knight's castle." Because of the disruptions caused by the wars *Ricarski zamək* did not appear until 1921, by which time the author had shifted his ideological ground and joined the Bulgarian Communist Party (1919). In a foreword to the book Jasenov explained that, although these youthful poems were no longer characteristic of his outlook, he published the collection anyway because it might be regarded as a "stage in my development" by "those few readers for whom my literary work is still of some interest". After the October Revolution of 1917 Jasenov started producing poetry in the orthodox communist agitational spirit and composing political *feuilletons* for the communist humor magazine *Červen smjax* (Red Laughter), which he helped edit in 1919-1920. After 1920 he practically abandoned literature for politics. During the unsettled years after the September uprising of 1923 he was twice arrested; on the second occasion, in May of 1925, he vanished under mysterious circumstances.

The early Jasenov did not differ noticeably from his symbolist fellows. *Ricarski zamək* is comprised of twelve poems, each with several parts written in different meters (most of the constituent parts are complete in themselves and were originally published separately). One of the chief poems is titled "Madonna", so religious themes do occur in the collection. In the poem "Sebepoklonnik" (Self-Worshipper) they are given an original twist when the individualistic Jasenov proclaims himself a great admirer and even worshipper of his own poetic personality. "I love my

own verse, / radiant and transparent", he declares, and adds that it is "like a stone — / proud and cold and severe". Jasenov also draws parallels between himself and Christ. The poet's egotism is clearly evident in the title poem "Ricarski zamək", where he revels in his own loneliness and inaccessibility, which for him are not burdensome but rather desirable, since they reinforce his feeling of exclusiveness. He "ascends the granite staircase" into his "marble tower" (the images of stone prevalent in this poem and "Sebepoklonnik" symbolize the poet's unyielding desire for independence) where he will be shielded from the "vain noise" of the vulgar crowd and can commune with the sun and the cliffs. Thus at least in theory the early Jasenov sought a titanic, contemplative independence. Obviously such aspirations had to be discarded when he became a communist, and thus by the 1920's his symbolist poetry represented a completed phase of his development. However, this does not alter the fact that he made an important contribution to Bulgarian symbolism in its first stages.

Another enthusiastic early symbolist who later moved far to the left — though the process took him longer — was Ljudmil Stojanov (1888-). Stojanov was born in a village near present-day Blagoevgrad and received his early education in such places as Sliven and Plovdiv. In Plovdiv, he struck up a friendship with the poet Dimčo Debeljanov in 1905. In that same year he moved to Sofia, registered as an auditor in philosophy and pedagogy at the university, and published his first verse cycle, "Zamrəznali cvetja" (Frozen Flowers), in the journal *Xudožnik*. Although his initial poetry was seemingly free of symbolist influence, by 1909-1910 he was a zealous convert to the new fashion and had begun producing the verse which would be collected in 1914 in *Videnija na krəstopət*. In the previously quoted foreword to the collection he announced that he was renouncing all his poetry written before 1909-1910 ("And could it be otherwise for a heart which has had no teacher other than the starry heaven?" he exclaimed) and joining the new current without reserve. And in fact the appearance of *Videnija na krəstopət* was an event in prewar symbolist poetry. A consciously literary artifact, the entire book was dedicated to Teodor Trajanov "as a sign of admiration and cordial friendship" and one sub-section was offered to Dimčo Debeljanov. Most of the subsections were prefaced by a citation from some poet, usually a symbolist (Trajanov, Baudelaire, Blok, Brjusov, Ivanov), although Shakespeare and Puškin were also quoted. The poetry itself exhibited a tinge of classical antiquity which was rather common among the symbolists; other motifs are standard as well: night, grief, death, autumn. "It is

bitter, bitter, in the level wastes / my unknown voice will pass by, / and above my sad solitude / a funeral song will fade away" ("Samota" [Solitude]). To be sure, Stojanov claimed not to care about originality. Instead he said he was most interested in attempting to "restore their original meaning" to certain words. Later critics scolded him for this, maintaining that he went to extremes in employing exotic names and words purely for their hypnotic effect upon the reader, and ignored sense more than most symbolists did.

Though some minor symbolists from the early period, for instance Trifon Kunev (1880-1954), might be mentioned here, it is unquestionably of more interest to pass on to a major poet who was with one part of his being a thoroughgoing symbolist but who at the same time often worked outside the symbolist tradition. Dimčo Debeljanov (1887-1916) left behind only some 115 lyrics, but among them are genuine pearls which have earned him a place of honor in Bulgarian literature. Debeljanov was born in Koprivštica and studied for a time in Plovdiv, where he was evidently very unhappy. Like most Bulgarian intellectuals he soon gravitated to Sofia, where he enrolled as a law student but spent little time studying. Instead he indulged his literary impulses and published for the first time in 1906 in the journal *Savremennost* (Modernity). The symbolist movement being then in its infancy, Debeljanov drew his inspiration from Penčo Slavejkov, to whom he later dedicated an important lyric, and Javorov. Slavejkov's cast of mind fitted Debeljanov's melancholy, reflective nature, and the younger writer discovered certain types of poetic techniques through him as well. Too, there was a striking spiritual affinity between Javorov and Debeljanov; indeed Javorov is said to have predicted that "this young man will surpass us all". There were moments in Debeljanov's short life when Javorov's prophecy seemed uncannily accurate.

In his poetically immature period from 1906 to about 1910 Debeljanov published approximately 70 out of his 115 lyrics, but they gave no hint that he was particularly superior to his run-of-the-mill contemporaries. He supported himself by working at non-literary jobs — as a stenographer and as a reporter, for example — but literature remained his passion. He consorted with young writers of the generation which would produce the Bulgarian literature of the 1920s and 1930s and studied the work of foreign writers, principally symbolists like Brjusov, Blok, Baudelaire and Verlaine.

In his prime mature period, 1911-1915, symbolism was a leading component of Debeljanov's writing, and in 1914 he contributed to the

semi-symbolist *Zveno*. A number of his best lyrics are wholly symbolist in spirit, and others fall largely within that tradition. But then there is a third group of poems untouched by symbolism: personal lyrics treating of his private sorrows and disappointments. The melancholy which lies at the heart of both his symbolist and realist verse is expressed very differently in these two categories of his writing. The symbolist and the realist coexisted on equal terms within him. The critic Georgi Markov, a specialist on Debeljanov's poetry, holds that the verse of his first mature period is a more perfect expression of themes he had been unable to handle properly in the early years. Aside from composing masterful verses on the old subjects, principally the ever present ones of love and nature, during this period he also revised his previous works to bring them up to his mature standards.

The poems of Debeljanov's last period sprang from his war experiences and therefore diverge from his other mature work. Though he could easily have avoided being drafted, the poet volunteered for service and was killed in Greece on 2 October, 1916. His untimely death at the front made him the prime representative of a brilliant Bulgarian literary generation cut down by the war.

Debeljanov's personality was an enigma to his contemporaries, who differed over whether he was a gay sort who enjoyed the company of his fellows or else a withdrawn and tragic individual. His verse makes a similarly ambiguous impression. Though he was by nature a lyric poet who should hymn the more cheerful sides of life, and though he often composed in the affirmative genre of the 'song', much of his poetry was melancholy, haunted by the sorrows of the past and the anticipated misfortunes of the future. The genre of the elegy best suited Debeljanov's personality, for it allowed him to combine lyricism with melancholy.

Debeljanov analyzed the duality of his own character in the well-known "Černa pesen" (Black Song), which begins with the stanza: "I die and am born in light, — / a multifaceted, disjointed soul, / in the daytime I build tirelessly, / at night I destroy without mercy." The very juxtaposition of the words "black" and "song" in the title is indicative of the split within him, since songs are not ordinarily gloomy, and the first stanza expresses well the conflict between the creative artist and the demonic destroyer within him. Perhaps his destructive tendencies led the poet to volunteer for the front, almost in the hope that he would perish there. A major pivot of Debeljanov's creative world was the light-darkness dichotomy: this is evident from the title (BLACK song) and from the assertion that at night he destroys but is "born in light" and creates

during the day. Similar light images occur in the final stanza of the poem "Na zloto" (To Evil), describing the visionary world which the poet shared with the symbolists: "I am borne away in a troubled dream / and see through some bitter spleen, / that I am in some country of light, / God's most luminous son."

Remembrance is important to Debeljanov. In the sonnet "Plovdiv" he recalls his joyless hours in that city when he later revisits it to wander through its streets, "the sole home of my homeless grief" (the juxtaposition of opposed concepts like "home" and "homeless" was typical of him). In this case he is so oppressed by premonitions that he does not even wish to remember the bitterness of his early years there. Deceptive remembrance is central to the beautifully orchestrated lyric piece beginning: "Do you remember, do you remember the quiet court, / the quiet house with the white-blossomed cherry trees?" The lightness of the memory of the house contrasts with the "gloomy prison" of the author's current psychological state. Though he first hopes the contrast may bring him emotional relief, in the second stanza he concludes that the quiet house and court had never been anything more than a "dream", lacking even the solidity of a memory. Sometimes Debeljanov nurtures remembrance as one of the few things which cannot be taken from him. For example, in the elegy "Az iskam da te pomnja vse taka" (I Want to Remember You Ever Thus) Debeljanov seeks to create a picture of his beloved from whom he must part at a time when the darkness is closing in upon them and he "does not believe even in his own faith", as he phrases it in a characteristic paradox. He attempts to fix the image of his beloved in his mind as, leaving him forever, she turns to trudge into the night.

In fact, the poet almost seems to feel truly comfortable with his beloved only at parting: many of his lyrics emphasize his loneliness, especially during the night hours, his preferred time. In "Nošten čas" (Night Hour) he invokes the "lonely, hopeless" night's benediction upon himself; in "Spi gradət" (The City Sleeps) he rejoices in his own sorrow and pain as he walks aimlessly through the city: "The city sleeps in its silent shadows. / The faithful son of faithless night, / I wander, homeless and lonely, / and the rain falls and falls and falls ...". In his war poetry of 1916 Debeljanov achieved a greater sense of human community than before since he no longer felt alone in his misfortunes. In "Edin ubit" (Dead Soldier) he discusses — without enmity — the fate of an enemy soldier who, after experiencing the ordinary joys of life, had come to this forlorn battlefield to die and therewith to cease being an enemy. The pathos of such poems was not anti-war in the usual sense, as the poet appears to have been con-

vinced that the conflict was necessary, but he was fully aware of the suffering which it visited upon both sides. Before he himself was killed he left a final melancholy song, "Sirotna pesen" (Orphan Song), one of the purest gems in the Bulgarian lyric treasury. In "Sirotna pesen" the poet laments the fact that he had lost his mother and never found a wife or true comrades. His existence had been joyless; he had been endowed only with grief; he would depart this life unnoticed and unmourned: "I shall leave this world — / just as I came, homeless, / calm as a song / which brings back a useless memory."

Between them the symbolists and the *Misəl* group boasted a virtual monopoly on the younger poetic talents of the pre-war period. There was, however, one poet aside from Vazov who for the most part escaped them: Kiril Xristov (1875-1944). Xristov was born in Stara Zagora to a wealthy family. He was educated in larger Bulgarian cities, including Tərnovo and Sofia, and read widely in the giants of world poetry, including Byron and Lermontov. In the 1890s he temporarily became a socialist: in 1894-1895 he wrote poems of a suitable slant and published them in the socialist organ *Delo* (The Cause). But he soon abandoned radical doctrine with little regret and quite completely. He did not republish his early verse and in later poems explicitly rejected the social doctrines of his youth. They left few traces in his mature work.

Xristov was a restless soul. In the course of his elementary schooling he wandered all over Bulgaria, and when he grew up he wandered all over Europe. Because of his poor health he could not satisfy his desire to go to sea, but he did live for a time in Trieste and Naples, where he came to love the seafaring life. Later he drifted from one European center to another, then taught for a while in Šumen before coming to a brief rest in Sofia around 1901.

Xristov's poetic talent matured during these early wanderings, and he wrote his best verse in the last years of the nineteenth century. His sojourns in Italy had given him a taste for Italian poetry, especially modern verse of a more erotic type such as that of Gabriele D'Annunzio. At first he was connected with the *Misəl* group: he was a good friend of Aleko Konstantinov's, accepted advice from Penčo Slavejkov, and received critical notice from Dr. Krəstev. He also published in *Misəl.* His first collections of verse appeared around 1900: *Trepeti* (Quivers, 1897), *Večerni senki* (Evening Shadows, 1898), and *Na krəstopət* (At the Crossroads, 1901). In time Xristov's relations with the *Misəl* circle deteriorated. Thus, though Penčo Slavejkov probably helped arouse his interest in Bulgarian folk songs, soon Slavejkov, Krəstev and Javorov were attacking

him for spoiling rather than improving them through his reworkings. They were also repelled by Xristov's blatant egotism. Consequently, Xristov's most important single collection, the *Izbrani stixotvorenija* (Selected Poems) of 1903, appeared with a foreword by Vazov. In 1905 Xristov made things even worse by publishing a verse play entitled *Stəlpotvorenie* (Tower of Babylon). It enraged the *Misəl* circle, and in January of 1906 Javorov published a long article attempting to show that *Stəlpotvorenie* had been plagiarized from a narrative poem of the same title by the obscure Russian poet N. Minskij with infusions from Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra* (in fairness to Xristov it should be noted that he included Minskij's poem in a brief list of works appended to *Stəlpotvorenie*: had he been a conscious deceiver he would never have revealed his sources so lightheartedly). The *Misəl* circle in any case thought Xristov had degenerated into a thoroughly dishonest literary hack. The situation was not improved when Xristov was appointed professor of Bulgarian literature during the 1907 university controversy, especially since he was poorly qualified for the post. For his part, Xristov was always quick to take umbrage at real or fancied insults. The gulf between him and the *Misəl* circle remained.

After 1903 the quality of Xristov's original poetic production declined. This became evident as early as 1904, the year in which he published *Samodivska kitka* (The Wood Sprite's Garland), a collection of reworked folk songs. Indeed all his writing for about forty years after 1903 may with but minimal distortion be regarded as a lengthy footnote to his poetry of the turn of the century. His collections *Ximni na zorata* (Hymns to the Dawn, 1911) and *Slənčogledi* (Sunflowers, 1911) consisted mostly of revised earlier lyrics. He also wrote mystical plays like *Bojan Magesnikət* (Bojan the Magician, published 1907) and *Starijat voin* (The Aged Warrior, published 1913), but they are of only historical interest. To be sure, something new — but also undesirable — entered Xristov's verse during the war years. In a burst of nationalist enthusiasm over the First Balkan War, in 1913 he published *Na nož* (With Fixed Bayonets) and in 1916 *Pobedni pesni* (Songs of Triumph). Here he gave free rein to his chauvinism, which has since become proverbial. In addition, symbolism influenced his verse slightly at this period. On the whole he was well shielded from its attractions through his association with Vazov, who always opposed it unhesitatingly, but certain decadent and symbolist attitudes found voice in his verse nevertheless, and some of his lyrics fall completely within the symbolist tradition. However, these are rarely held against him.

Xristov could be extremely cutting in his epigrams directed against his enemies, but he was quite thin-skinned himself. In 1922, feeling persecuted and insufficiently appreciated by the Bulgarian public, he entered voluntary exile. Until 1930 he lived in Leipzig, then from 1930 to 1938 he worked at the Charles University in Prague as an instructor in Bulgarian. He had declared several times that he would never return to Bulgaria, but in 1938 he did precisely that and received a tumultuous welcome. His lyrics of the last period, for example those in *Vəlnolom* (Breakwater, 1937) and *Posledni požari* (Last Fires, 1944), were of little consequence. Nor was he especially successful with *Čeda na Balkana* (Children of the Balkans, 1930), an epic poem about the First Balkan War. Xristov could become the talk of society once again only by publishing memoirs which were not always fair to his former associates, many of whom were long dead. On the other hand, he occasionally gave credit where credit was due in them and sometimes admitted that he had criticized his friends wrongly. His memoirs were collected in 1943 in the volume *Zatrupana Sofija* (Sofia Covered: the title seemingly refers to the fact that one must rummage in memory in order to come up with a few worthwhile recollections). When he died shortly after the ninth of September, on 7 November, 1944, he had far outlived his day.

For all practical purposes Xristov's place in Bulgarian literature is defined by his poetry up to 1903. His personality was best suited to the genre of the song, in which he could express his fundamentally optimistic outlook, but he worked with the sonnet as well. What melancholia lurked within him emerged in his elegies. He satisfied his liking for history and folklore by writing ballads and reworking folk songs. Finally, the chief vehicle for his personal bile was the satirical epigram, of which he wrote many. He produced in other verse forms as well, but the ones just enumerated were most characteristic of him.

Xristov's outlook was generally affirmative. On the occasions when he expresses sorrow, the reader is conscious that his grief does not run deep. Thus after Petko Slavejkov's death in 1895 Xristov composed a short "Rekviem" (Requiem) in three stanzas in which he concentrated attention mainly on the indignities endured by the poet in his old age. The exquisite lyric "Esenen motiv" (Autumn Motif) deals with the favorite season of the elegiac poets, but the author is relatively cheerful and the poem ends: "And one's soul is borne away / in calm, sweet grief." For Xristov there was nothing painful or oppressive about winter's approach. The poet's true face appears in the energetic "Xej, prolet ide!" (Hey, Spring Is Coming!), with its spirit of gay abandon and its forceful refrain:

"Hey, spring is coming to our native land!" Spring was Xristov's season, not autumn.

Xristov is famed for his nature descriptions, which are always replete with the joy of life, indeed a hedonistic joy of life. In particular, he was one of the few Bulgarian poets to write extensively about the sea. His stays in Trieste, Naples and Burgas on the Black Sea stimulated his affection for the sea; part of its poetic legacy were his splendid "Morski soneti" (Sea Sonnets), describing the water in its various aspects at different times. For Xristov the sea is usually friendly, a bringer of inner serenity: "The sailor is going home after roistering — / he finds peace for his stormy soul in the sleep / of the boat that dozes by the shore" ("Utro" [Morning]). Then the poet also celebrated the beauties of inland regions, for instance the mountains surrounding the Rila Monastery, so rich in its historic and patriotic associations. In this area he emulated his mentor Vazov, who frequently sang of Bulgaria's natural beauties for patriotic reasons. The patriotism which was present in his early work, such as the ballads "Obsadata na Solun" (The Siege of Salonika) and "Bojat pri Čermen" (The Battle of Čermen), where he commemorated the feats of ancient Bulgarian arms, became predominant in his chauvinistic war poetry and later on in certain of his attempts at the epic.

In the final accounting patriotic themes are the extension of social attitudes, and Kiril Xristov is remembered, not for his social consciousness, but his insufferable egotism. Personal — especially erotic — themes are very common with him. The poet described himself precisely in a stanza from "Skitnik" (The Wanderer). Drawn by the lure of the sea, the wanderer "left — and left forever / for unknown regions and lands, — / but everywhere he found gay companions, / but everywhere he found wine and girls". In "Ximn" (Hymn), a species of poetic and philosophical credo, Xristov declared that he no longer cared about "rational life, glory, ideals", the notions he had promoted during his socialist period. Now he was perpetually inebriated ("I am drunk with my youth"); he took as his motto: "Women and wine! Wine and women!" He wanted to live his life as a sensualist who eschewed commitments to anything or anybody. Much of his poetry is erotic, and not just in the polite sense, but as verse openly preaching unrestrained sensuality. Occasionally his approach was relatively pure, as in "Pərvata celuvka" (First Kiss), where the poet claims that the first kiss bestows "might on the one who gives it / and powerlessness on the one who receives it". In a later, untitled verse ("Majka za ljubov te e rodila") Xristov seeks permission to cover his beloved's face with "fiery kisses" but promises her nothing: his heart, he

says, is like a bird which flits from bush to bush, leaving in each the memory of a wondrous song with which alone the bush must content itself in the future. "Černite oči" (Dark Eyes), written in quasi-ballad form, describes a hero who, driven by the force of his passion, is prepared to murder his rival if need be to gain the right to join his lips to those of his beloved.

Poems like these would seem to indicate that Xristov could take or leave any particular woman without compunction, but even he was at times puzzled by the uncanny power which love for a woman can exert over a man. In one of his elegies he speaks of a woman's "ringing laughter" as "poison" and says jealousy has sprung up in his heart like a "poison poppy". The two lovers in this poem balance above an abyss symbolizing love's destructive powers. The darker side of Xristov's eroticism, merely hinted at in this elegy, comes out in such poems as the decadent "Autopsija" (Autopsy). The persona is a woman dead in her prime who now stretches naked under a medical student's dissecting knife. She urges the scientist to cut deeply into her breast, heart and loins in order there to discover the secrets of her former miserable existence. The more horrible aspects of the tender passion were not usually emphasized in Xristov's writing, though, and he is usually considered the bard of a lusty and if anything thoughtless eroticism.

Xristov's sometime protector, Ivan Vazov, continued to play a dominant role in the literary life of the first two decades of the twentieth century, although he no longer enjoyed the almost exclusive eminence which had been his in the 1880s and early 1890s. He and his literary approach came under attack at the time, but he was still revered by most segments of society.

Following a not very remarkable tenure as Minister of Education from 1897 to the beginning of 1899, Vazov was content to withdraw from public service to his house in the capital and live in a small family circle, engaging in literary and intellectual pursuits. It was also at about this period that he formed a close friendship with Ivan Šišmanov, who later became something of a Boswell to him and supported him loyally until his death. His two decades in the twentieth century were productive years; toward the end he partially realized a plan to publish a complete edition of his works with the issuance of eight volumes between 1911 and 1918. During the series of wars beginning in 1912 Vazov wrote patriotic verse to brace the morale of Bulgarian soldiers at the front. However, once such areas as Macedonia and Dobrudža had been regained by Bulgaria, he favored peace. In the end he shared the shame of a country humiliated by its enemies and former allies.

As his life drew to a close, reminiscence became more and more important in Vazov's work. In his last years, as in his very first, he wrote more poetry than prose. In the twilight of his life all manner of honors were heaped upon him: his friends considered nominating him for the Nobel Prize; schools, streets, libraries and institutions were named for him; in 1920 the fiftieth anniversary of his literary activity was extensively celebrated. Even the government contributed to the jubilee by granting him 100,000 *leva* and exempting him from property and income taxes. A fund to support the publication of his collected works in twenty-eight volumes was begun, a ceremony for him was staged at the National Theater, a collection of articles and other contributions in his honor was printed. In short, Vazov's fiftieth jubilee was marked in a style in which no other writer's anniversary has been commemorated before or since. His death about a year later, on 22 September, 1921, was mourned by the entire country. His funeral procession, which included members of the government, writers and scholars, was headed by Czar Boris. He was buried near the Aleksandər Nevski cathedral, and in recent years a statue of him has been placed in a prominent spot not far from his grave. Monuments to Vazov and to Paisij Xilendarski, the man who capped and the man who initiated the Bulgarian Renaissance, now appropriately adorn the center of Bulgaria's capital.

Vazov attained his greatest fame as a novelist on the strength of his first novel, *Pod igoto*, and each new novel he published afterwards was inferior to its predecessor. After painting a broad portrait of Bulgarian society from the liberation through the Union of 1885 in *Nova zemja*, he brought the story down to the 1890s in the third book of what may be considered a historical trilogy, *Kazalarskata carica* (The Czarina of Kazalar). In this work the author hangs his story upon a slight plot involving the amatory affairs of two young ladies, though in fact he was trying to describe society of the 1890s as a whole, not concoct an intricate plot. Dr. Krəstev proclaimed the novel beneath critical contempt, but it sold well when first published. Time has confirmed the critic's judgment, however, and it is now little read. Even less read than *Kazalarskata carica* were Vazov's later short novels, set in the distant historical past: *Ivan Aleksandər* and *Svetoslav Terter* (both 1907). These works deal with events at the end of the thirteenth and the middle of the fourteenth centuries respectively.

Vazov was much concerned with the history of medieval Bulgaria, especially during the first ten years of this century. His travel sketches have a way of becoming meditations on Bulgaria's past historical glories.

He had a gift for nature description, and his travel sketches set standards for this genre in Bulgarian literature. But Vazov did not write nature descriptions merely to quiet his lyrical urge. It was patriotism which led him to praise the natural beauties of his homeland and utilize historic sites as stimuli for ruminations upon Bulgaria's past glories. Unhappily, destruction and years of neglect had done their work so well that little more than pedestals and pieces of walls remained of the medieval structures in such cities as Pliska and Tərnovo, but Vazov's imagination fed upon even this scanty fare. For example, in a piece written in 1900 about Tərnovo, Vazov contemplates the remnants of the city's medieval fortress and recalls with pride how once upon a time Bulgarian power had extended from that spot over an area almost double that granted Bulgaria by the Treaty of San Stefano. "This grandeur has vanished without trace today", Vazov writes. "And a quiet pain embraces the soul, which is filled to overflowing with grandiose and mysterious visions but which stands before the ugly reality of desolation and death. But nevertheless I cast insatiable glances at the bare summit, for I expect that there will appear to me there the shade of some Czar with his golden helmet." Vazov also remarks upon how appropriate it would have been to return to this "improbable, impossible city" (Tərnovo hangs precariously on rugged steeps above a river) its pride of place, to make it the capital of liberated Bulgaria. It was precisely this capacity for never losing sight of his country's historical aspirations and heritage which helped make Vazov the national poet he is today.

Vazov's prose writings between 1900 and 1920 included ordinary sketches and short stories as well as travelogues and novels. He published numerous sketches in the periodical press, bringing them together in such volumes as *Videno i čuto* (Things Seen and Heard, 1901), *Pəstər svjat* (A Varicolored World, 1902), and *Utro v Banki* (Morning in Banki, 1905). Some of his short stories were simply nature descriptions. Others, descendants of the satirical items in *Draski i šarki* of 1895, contained innocuous slaps at abuses prevalent in the society of post-liberation Bulgaria. In these years Vazov particularly disdained people who shifted with the political winds for personal advantage, or those who prided themselves on never having voted and thus neglected their civic duty. A large fraction of his brief prose works were stories based upon reminiscence or else straightforward memoirs of historic events Vazov had witnessed or important people he had known. He had not always mingled with the great alone, however. For instance the pleasant sketch "Daskalite" (Teachers) from *Videno i čuto* is comprised of disjointed recollections of

the teachers whom Vazov had known during his school days: their teaching methods, their small mannerisms, the general atmosphere of the schools at that time. With a few exceptions — such as Joakim Gruev and Xristo Botev's father — none of them left a mark on history, but Vazov has memorialized them in vignettes which convey a vivid sense of the epoch's texture. In other memoirs Vazov recorded his impressions of certain great personalities, including Ljuben Karavelov and Stefan Stambolov, who dominated the period of his youth. Vazov himself remarked that he preferred to employ a genuine occurrence as the kernel of a fictional piece rather than rely exclusively on his fancy. It is therefore not astonishing that he produced such memoirs as these.

Vazov's poetic production in the early part of the century began with the collection *Skitniški pesni* (A Wanderer's Songs, 1899), followed by *Pod našeto nebe* (Under Our Skies) in 1900. Many of the poems in these volumes were fully as patriotic and historical as what he was then doing in prose. After a period given over largely to the writing of plays, and following the outbreak of the First Balkan War, buoyed by the general enthusiasm and spurred by letters from admirers, Vazov turned out a quantity of prematurely optimistic verse published in *Pod grəma na pobedite* (In the Thunder of Victories, 1914). Here he described battlefields and the quiet heroism of the Bulgarian soldier: if a monument to Bulgarian arms were ever raised, he wrote in "Pametnik na bəlgarskata mošt", it should include a statue not of some fanciful Mars, but rather of a simple Bulgarian peasant. He also challenged people like the French Turkophile Pierre Loti, who condemned the Balkan allies' attack on the Turks, the most virtuous of peoples. Bulgaria's victories of the First Balkan War were promptly undone by the defeats of the Second, but after the beginning of the First World War and Bulgaria's occupation of Macedonia, the poet published his *Pesni za Makedonija* (Songs of Macedonia, 1916), in which he hailed the liberation of that land. But Bulgaria eventually relinquished its territorial gains once more and Vazov, disillusioned with politics, turned to the composition of lyric poetry. The verse in the volumes *Novi ekove* (New Echoes, 1917), *Kakvo pee planinata* (What Song Does the Mountain Sing, 1917) and *Ljuleka mi zamirisa* (I Caught a Scent of Lilac, 1919) for the most part dealt with personal themes, for instance the poet's attempt to define his own role in society and his place in Bulgarian history and to analyze his feelings at the approach of life's end. He also wrote topical poetry, but not in such quantity as before.

In addition to their purely literary activities, Vazov and his allies —

primarily Stefan Bobčev, Simeon Radev and Kiril Xristov — carried on a running dispute with the *Misəl* circle. Very possibly the deepest cause of the dispute was simple personal animosity between Vazov and Krəstev, if one may judge by the latter's remark in a letter of 1903 that he published "nothing about Vazov the *writer* simply because the *man* is repellent and repulsive to me: many years ago I had the misfortune to learn of some of the ugliest features of his personality, of which only about a dozen people are aware. From that time on he has been repulsive to me and he will remain so!!!" Precisely what Dr. Krəstev had in mind may never be known, but evidently he felt he had good reason to dislike Vazov. In any case, whatever its initial causes may have been, the quarrel between the two soon developed ramifications far beyond the merely personal.

In his early years Dr. Krəstev had admired Vazov: his first critical article (1887-1888) discussed Vazov's poetry very favorably, although it contained the seeds of his later strictures on the national poet. During the 1890s he reviewed Vazov's works and contributed to his journal *Dennica.* But *Dennica* failed at the time when *Misəl* began its long and successful career. The fact that his own journals never enjoyed anything approaching *Misəl*'s success must have grated on Vazov. And then the electoral campaign of 1894, when both ran for the national parliament from Kazanlək and Vazov was elected, widened the breach between them. Their relations were further strained by the publication in *Draski i šarki* (1895) of Vazov's satirical sketch "Dr. Džan-Džan", which, though labeled a fantasy, was clearly directed against Krəstev. The hero, Dr. Džan-Džan, after having been overeducated in Europe, returns to Bulgaria expecting to astound his fellow countrymen with his erudition. To his dismay, he is greeted by contemptuous silence rather than applause. Wishing desperately to attract attention, he contemplates organizing a hoax to cause people to think him dead, so that he may enjoy the "posthumous" praise heaped upon his head. When upon further reflection he realizes the scheme will fail, he abandons it. Vazov was so pleased at the success of his assault on what he considered Krəstev's "egotism" that in later years he referred privately to the critic as "Dr. Džan-Džan".

For its part, the *Misəl* circle believed that Vazov was no longer a literary force, that he had contributed much to the development of Bulgarian literature when it was in its infancy but that now the Bulgarian palate required stronger stuff. Dr. Krəstev never thought Vazov's work devoid of literary significance: he consistently proclaimed the excellence of Vazov the poet and approved of certain of his prose writings, especially *Pod igoto,* but he thought his later novels and stories and especially his

plays to be nearly worthless. Slavejkov, however, condemned even Vazov's poetry in 1906. Vazov, he said, composed in a language which was "understandable, light and pretty" because it was "smooth and contentless, written by the hand of a lively man under the dictation of a heart extruding love and anger. Everything is ... mushy, so that even toothless gums can handle it." The thesis of Krəstev's critical collection of 1907, *Mladi i stari,* was that Slavejkov and his colleagues were the wave of the future which had already left the older generation far behind. Krəstev sustained his vendetta in his writings for the foreign press also, as when in 1912 he paid Vazov the following left-handed compliment in a Russian journal: "That which [Vazov] lacks in poetic or artistic depth is more or less compensated for by the literary historical significance of his works." In his last years Krəstev, in the course of his university lectures, denigrated Vazov's reputation so forcefully that some of his students reportedly refused to listen to him.

Vazov and some of his colleagues spread the idea that Vazov was the offended party in this controversy. In his poem "Poet" (1902), dedicated to Vazov, Kiril Xristov attacked the Krəstev camp: "It's very painful when I see / hordes of mentors descending upon the chosen one." In fact, however, Vazov was ordinarily at least as intemperate as his opponents. We have already noted his using the foreword to Xristov's collected poems of 1903 to assault Slavejkov. "What a difference", he exclaimed then, "between this genuine poet and poets of the type of, say, Penčo Slavejkov, otherwise so industrious, whose distorted and overdone songs, unwarmed by the divine fire, repel even the reader armed with the best will in the world." In 1905 Vazov once more utilized *belles lettres* as a polemical weapon. In the story "Japonski silueti" (Japanese Silhouettes, included in *Utro v Banki*), while pretending to be describing Japanese literary life, Vazov derided the *Misəl* camp. He gave special attention to Dr. Krəstev, pictured as the critic Xara-Karasuta-Xi-Jamacura. According to Vazov, this critic, a virtual dictator on the Japanese literary scene, based all his evaluations upon his likes and dislikes: he praised his personal friends and damned his personal enemies. Indeed Vazov followed this line consistently in his polemics with Krəstev, stating it explicitly in an interview of early 1906, in which he claimed that Dr. Krəstev had already become "legendary" in Bulgaria for his personal approach to criticism. During these years Vazov several times — and quite unscrupulously — published anonymous articles defending himself and casting aspersions on Slavejkov and Krəstev. In 1907 one of Vazov's supporters, Simeon Radev, published a small book attacking Krəstev as a

critic. After *Misəl* ceased publication in early 1908, moreover, Krəstev's reputation did decline while Vazov's rose, and with the deaths of Slavejkov, Javorov and Todorov between 1912 and 1916 Krəstev was increasingly isolated. By the period of the wars, when personal hostilities could be more easily forgotten in view of national calamities, the two tried but failed to reach an understanding. To be sure, after Krəstev's death in 1919 Vazov wrote a short poem entitled "Proška" (Forgiveness) in which he pardoned all those who had earlier heaped contumely on his head, and in 1921 he contributed at least indirectly to covering the cost of transferring Slavejkov's and Todorov's remains from abroad to Bulgaria. But by that time he had prevailed and could afford to be magnanimous.

The Vazov-Krəstev controversy on the highest level had dealt with the question of the artist's special function as an individualistic hero in history, one whose lofty responsibility to the people demanded that he be thoroughly conversant with world culture. The *Misəl* group, who looked on the artist as a superior being, consisted mostly of intellectuals with a modernist coloration, linked to symbolism and decadence. The Vazov circle, on the other hand, was mistrustful of intellectualism, symbolism or even relatively wholesome modernism, and believed that literature should be immediately accessible to the common man and inculcate the traditional personal and social virtues. The Vazovites also tended to be more nationalistic than the *Misəl* group.

The social and psychological satire so prominent in Vazov's shorter prose works was the foundation of the writings of an unusual figure in Bulgarian literature, Georgi Stamatov (1869-1942), whose most significant literary production appeared in the early part of this century. Stamatov was born in Russia to a Bulgarian *émigré* employed there as a civil servant who returned to Bulgaria in 1879 and was appointed Minister of Justice. Stamatov himself moved to Bulgaria in 1882 to enter a military academy, but after graduation he decided against pursuing a military career and instead betook himself to Geneva to study law. Following obliquely in his father's footsteps, he worked as a judge for many years in the provinces and in the capital, eventually becoming an appellate court judge. Although Stamatov thus was born to a family deeply involved in government and he himself functioned in governmental capacities, he always felt alienated from the bureaucracy and sought to dissociate himself from it intellectually as far as possible. In like manner, though not a total atheist, he detested the clergy and never attended church. He reportedly took pains to avoid important people and once refused to shake hands with an old friend after the latter had been ele-

vated to a high post. He was proud that as a judge he had never imposed a death sentence. Indeed he once declined to serve on a panel of judges when it seemed the only sentence they could impose was death. This philosophy made it difficult for him to kill off even his fictional characters. As a result, few suicides occur in his pages, despite their generally pessimistic tone. Again, he was a zealous antifeminist, but he contracted an unhappy marriage and in his later years on two separate occasions fell passionately in love with younger women. Thus in literature as in life Stamatov was a personality of numerous contradictions.

Stamatov's first publication was a poem of 1890 printed in Vazov's *Dennica*; his initial story appeared in *Misəl* in 1894. Never attempting anything very lengthy, he contributed short stories and sketches to journals like *Misəl*, *Bəlgarska sbirka* and *Novo vreme* (New Time), collecting them periodically in volumes with such titles as *Izbrani očerci i razkazi* (Selected Sketches and Stories, 1905), *Skici* (Sketches, 1915), and *Razkazi* (Stories, two volumes, 1929-1930). Stamatov displays a well-defined literary profile. He was a bitter man, and his works fall almost entirely in the tradition of Bulgarian satire — the biting type represented by Mixajlovski rather than the comparatively good-natured sort produced by an Aleko Konstantinov. His range, though, was narrower than Mixajlovski's.

Being addicted to literary naturalism, Stamatov tended to emphasize the weaknesses of human nature (the critic Vladimir Vasilev aptly characterized him as a writer of "belletristic epigrams"). His attitude is that of the enraged satirist — he was immensely discontented that people failed to meet an ideal standard, although it is likely that had he ever attempted to define such a standard he would have mistrusted it just as much as the reality he described. He was no ideologist with a patented set of beliefs: his personality was too negative for that. He could discover in his fictional characters — usually members of the urban intelligentsia — no unselfish traits. All was physiological and this-worldly, he held. Man's every action is based on egotism and physical instinct, particularly the impulse to survival, the sexual drive and, on a more civilized level, the urge toward comfort. However self-sacrificing a man's actions may appear outwardly, when analyzed fully they will always turn out to be self-seeking. The only partial exception to this generalization was man's creative impulse, for this could be unselfish and manifested a spark of divinity within him. But in general Stamatov felt obliged to expose the base motives behind men's actions: in literature as in life he judged others. Somehow he seems to have believed that he was free from corruption himself and therefore justified in condemning his unlovely heroes

outright. Because of this and also his lack of literary sensitivity, Stamatov did not leave his reader in any doubt as to the proper attitude to be adopted toward his characters. As the contemporary critic Simeon Sultanov has put it, Stamatov functions as a prompter for his characters, but a bad one who speaks too loudly, so that we hear him before the character has a chance to repeat the words. Still, despite their weaknesses Stamatov's stories may be read with interest for their engrossing if shallow interpretations of the darker sides of the human psychology.

Stamatov cared little for the beauties of nature, being concerned solely with man and his gruesome handiwork. In one sketch, "Našata zemja" (Our Land), begun with a sarcastically orchestrated hymn parodying Vazov's style ("Paradise! Divine land! Promised land of mankind!"), he describes the hell into which man has transformed his earthly paradise, what with his prisons, barracks, churches, fine clothes and newspapers with ironic names like *Freedom* or *Peace*. There is a total contrast between the country's natural beauties and the misery or hypocrisy of those who inhabit it.

Aside from social relationships in the large, Stamatov's jaundiced eye often surveyed personal relationships between individuals. In his view these were almost invariably founded upon deceit, including self-deceit. In the sardonically titled "Idilija" (Idyll) he pictures a young man and woman who in their freshness should be thoroughgoing idealists but instead are worried only about their futures. The young man dreams of an opportunity to study in Paris with an allowance of 400 *leva* a month. His sister is in a happy fog because she has received a formal proposal from lieutenant colonel Nikušev. It is not important that she hardly knows her suitor, for what she wants is a marriage with a person properly connected socially. "If someone had asked her what he was like? young? old? intelligent? stupid? good? bad? she would have answered merely: he is lieutenant colonel Nikušev." That was all she knew and all she cared to know.

Stamatov provides a detailed analysis of the marital relationship in his successful story "Za edno kətče na dušata" (About a Small Corner of the Soul). The husband, being persuaded that everyone must conceal a portion of his personality even from those nearest to him, commits the error of recording his private thoughts in notebooks which he keeps hidden from his wife under lock and key. When she learns of their existence, devoured by curiosity and blinded by the delusion that husband and wife should be completely frank with each other, she will not rest until she gains access to them. When she does despite her husband's

prohibition, she is horrified to discover how basely he has acted on occasion in the past and how cynically he looks at life. He writes, for instance, that he did not marry because of any immense passion or even desire to achieve a biological form of immortality: rather he married his wife instead of some other woman purely by chance. Furthermore, chance was buttressed by the most basic sensual attraction: since she would allow him to possess her physically only in marriage, he acceded to her requirement and married her. What he wanted was her body, for spiritually they had little in common. When the wife reads such frank statements as these in the notebooks she feels that there can be no possibility of further communication between them now that she has viewed her husband's soul in all its nudity, though she continues to conceal her own spiritual corruption from herself. Their marriage is destroyed.

Stamatov did not believe that education would eliminate mankind's woes, for educated people remained human beings, subject to the entire gamut of human frailty. In the sketch "V xrama na naukata" (In the Temple of Scholarship) he depicts the halls of the university as crammed with present and future careerists: the future lawyers interested only in obtaining more money, the future doctors who decline to work in the provinces, the future men of God who dream of the beautiful young women to be in their spiritual charge, the girl students who plot to trap a husband so as to ensure themselves a comfortable existence, the professors who brook no disagreement with their opinions and coast along on the same lectures for years. No disinterested commitment to scholarship for its own sake may be discovered in this "temple". All are actuated by selfishness. And if this was true of those at the apex of the pyramid, how much more was it true of those lower down on the educational scale!

One last Bulgarian prose-writer from this period worth detailed comment is Anton Strašimirov (1872-1937). Born in the Black Sea port of Varna, he was orphaned at twelve and did not have a very pleasant childhood. He dropped out of school very early and started wandering about the country, supporting himself through a heterogeneous assortment of jobs: he worked in hotels and inns, in the tobacco fields, in a monastery and as a typesetter. After completing the third year of the *gymnasium* he toured the eastern part of Bulgaria on foot. Later he was employed as a government official and as a teacher in various villages. He also made his literary debut at about this time, printing poems in 1889 in the journal *Iskra* (Spark, published in Šumen). In subsequent years he contributed to such journals as *Misəl*, *Bəlgarska sbirka*, *Novo vreme* and *Bəlgarski pregled* and gradually acquired a reputation. In the middle of the 1890s he

studied literature, political economy and geography at the University of Bern while continuing to write.

Strašimirov's wanderlust did not abate, and so he was soon back in Bulgaria teaching, first in Vidin and then in Kazanlək, which at the time was quite a provincial cultural center. Eventually he gravitated to Sofia, where he lived in poverty as a free-lance writer and took up political causes, including the Macedonian revolutionary movement. He was also active in intellectual journalism, founding the journal *Naš život* in 1901 along with Stojan Mixajlovski and Kiril Xristov. *Naš život* came out rather irregularly for more than ten years. Of all the journals with which he had anything to do, his name remains most closely connected with this one.

Ever eager for activity and novelty, Strašimirov volunteered for service in the First Balkan War and worked as a correspondent during the First World War. After the upheavals of 1923 he became even more entangled in politics. One of his brothers, a communist, was killed in 1924. Between 1923 and 1926 he contributed to communist publications, but thereafter he diverged from the party, transferring his allegiance to such organs as *Literaturen glas* (Literary Voice, a prominent literary weekly). During the 1930s he wrote, lectured, and pursued amateur interests in ethnography and the history of his native land. One fruit of this latter enthusiasm was *Diktatorət* (The Dictator, on Stambolov, 1935). He died in 1937.

Strašimirov was an erratic author, and few of his writings are still of interest, but the fact that he produced a great deal and shifted readily with the prevailing intellectual winds makes him an intriguing figure for the literary historian. He began as something of a populist, he encouraged the symbolist movement in its early stages in his journal *Naš život*, a few years later he became a prime representative of modernism; he was a fellow traveller when the communists were influential in the 1920s, later breaking with them when this appeared the thing to do, and finally he was comparatively apolitical in the 1930s. A perusal of his works from beginning to end would give the reader a substantial idea of each epoch through which Strašimirov lived.

If we exclude Strašimirov's early attempts at poetry, his first important volume was the collection of short stories *Smjax i səlzi* (Laughter and Tears, 1897). Written in the best populist tradition, the pieces in *Smjax i səlzi* described the rural misery the author had observed during his youthful wanderings. Between 1895 and 1903 Strašimirov was also keenly interested in problems of criminality and abnormal psychology (the Russian modernist Leonid Andreev exerted a malign influence upon

him in this area). The story "Ubiec" (The Murderer, 1896) depicts the reactions of a young man to the discovery that his father once committed murder to acquire the money and property which he, the son, will one day inherit. Unable to bear up under this revelation, he leaves home and eventually dies of sunstroke; his father, for all his money and power, is powerless to save him. The story "V grada na mərtvite" (In the City of the Dead) exhibits Andreev's influence in its choice of subject — love between brother and sister who are unaware of their blood relationship.

In addition to short stories Strašimirov wrote novels and occasionally novelettes, planning several novel cycles which were somehow never completed. Certain of his early novelettes, such as *Esenni dni* (Autumn Days, 1902), were set in the countryside, but others — for instance *Smutno vreme* (A Troubled Time, 1899) — described the urban *milieu.* The psychology of the masses in an urban environment intrigued him for a time, so that in 1919 he published *Bez pət* (Without Direction), the initial novel of an intended series of five chronicling city life to bear the overall title *Visjašt most* (The Hanging Bridge). In this instance he got as far as the second novel, *Bena* (1921), before abandoning the project. War experiences were the subject of the 'novel-chronicle' *Vixər* (The Whirlwind, 1922). However, his best-known novel dealt with the uprising of September 1923. Called *Xoro* (Round-Dance, 1926), the book is difficult to follow because it is written in the mannered style which was one of the author's besetting sins. Moreover — much to the discomfiture of Bulgarian critics today — it lacks communist characters. Still, *Xoro* was one of the signal works written about the September events. In 1929, continuing to elaborate upon political and revolutionary themes, Strašimirov published the first volume of the novel *Robi* (Slaves), which described the Macedonian revolutionary movement. The second volume of *Robi* came out in 1930, but the work as a whole was left unfinished for both political and personal reasons.

If his numerous novels were not especially outstanding, Strašimirov did make a notable contribution to the development of the modern theater in Bulgaria. Two of his plays, *Vampir* (The Vampire, 1901) and *Svekərva* (The Mother-in-Law, 1906), are now considered among his best work. After *Svekərva* won first prize in a dramatic competition marking the opening of the National Theater in Sofia in 1907, Strašimirov launched an assault against the corruption of high government officials and important persons generally in plays such as *Kəšta* (The House, 1908) and *Pred Vlaxernskite vrata* (Before the Blachernae Gates, 1908 — Blachernae is a quarter of Constantinople) but then transferred his

allegiance to modernistic themes in plays like *Reveka* (Rebecca, 1908), *Sveti Ivan Rilski* (St. Ivan Rilski, 1911), and *Kəm slənceto* (Toward the Sun, 1917), where the characters tend to be maniacs or mystics and the influence of such decadents as Maeterlinck, Nietzsche and Przybyszewski is evident.

The theater, we recall, had in the pre-liberation years served to instruct the general public and arouse revolutionary sentiment. Bulgarian authors had begun to write plays then: they may not have been very artistic, but at least they were native. In the years following the liberation, on the other hand, dramatic activity slackened, for no one followed Dobri Vojnikov in taking the theater as his special province. Vazov was almost the only important writer of the 1880s, and no more than a portion of his production was intended for the stage. From time to time theatrical performances were given in Sofia; plays were put on in such lesser provincial cities as Varna, Ruse and Lom; but the greatest theatrical center of the early post-liberation period was Plovdiv, which boasted a building pretentiously termed the "Luxemburg International Theater". Plays were first staged there in 1881. During the years 1883-1885 there existed a "Rumelian Theatrical Troupe", which was dismantled along with Eastern Rumelia itself after the Union of 1885. Aside from Vojnikov's group, the most important theatrical troupe extant before the founding of Sofia's National Theater was *Səlza i smjax* (Tears and Laughter). Begun in the capital in 1892, *Səlza i smjax* formed the backbone of the fledgling Bulgarian theater in the years bracketing the turn of the century, staging both whatever native plays then existed and what it could handle from the international repertoire.

The Bulgarian stage struck out upon an independent path only after the National Theater's founding. Begun under the direction of Ilija Milarov, who had headed *Səlza i smjax* since 1903, in 1908-1909 the theater's fortunes were entrusted to Penčo Slavejkov, the one responsible for organizing it and formulating the principles upon which it later operated. Among the directors in subsequent years were Božan Angelov (1909-1911) and Anton Strašimirov's brother, Dimitər Strašimirov (1916-1918). The post of *dramaturg* (artistic director) was held by Javorov from 1908 to 1912. As few Bulgarians had any experience in staging plays, the theater imported its early stage directors (*režis'ori*) from abroad (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Russia), which was not the most ideal of situations. This and other difficulties were early singled out by Penčo Slavejkov in his article "Nacionalen teatər" (National Theater), written around the time he left the directorship. Slavejkov commented

on the thinness of the native repertory. Begun by Vojnikov and Drumev, the national tradition had passed into Vazov's keeping, but to Slavejkov's mind this was scant improvement, since his plays lacked even "ordinary common sense". Since there were so few Bulgarian plays, Slavejkov wanted foreign plays to be well translated into Bulgarian. The stage director, he continued, should be a strong personality. Even if he were otherwise suitable, though, a foreign stage director could not be expected to see that the theater discharged one of its prime responsibilities, that of setting a standard for spoken literary Bulgarian. Finally, the theater should be autonomous; if it were subsidized at all the government should be permitted no more than a veto power over it. All these suggestions of Slavejkov's were sensible and could be supported even by those who did not sympathize with his ultimate vision of the National Theater as a "higher cultural institution, like a temple in which one performs a liturgy with the Bulgarian language and through it manifests in artistic forms and images our creative might and our consciousness of life". The National Theater never became anything so exalted as this, but from its founding to the present it has served as the spiritual home for the entire Bulgarian theater.

The years during which the National Theater was getting its start witnessed a renascence of native Bulgarian playwriting. Vazov was again the most important playwright over this period. He had responded to the demand for new plays during his Plovdiv years with such minor efforts as *Mixalaki Čorbadži* (1882) and *Ruska* (1883), but he began to write seriously for the theater only in the 1890s. In 1894 he adapted his novelette "Nemili-nedragi" for the stage under the title *Xəšove* (the name for Bulgarian revolutionaries living in Rumania). The play is done in several loosely connected scenes picturing the lot of the impoverished revolutionaries, the conflicts between them and the wealthy Bulgarian *émigrés* settled in Rumania who contributed to the revolutionary cause only grudgingly, the delirious welcome given visiting Russian soldiers by the Bulgarians. Though *Xəšove* was a throwback to the patriotic works of Vazov's early period and in its naiveté can be fully appreciated by native Bulgarians alone, it is yet a staple of the repertory.

In the early 1900s Vazov's plays were of a piece with his short stories containing satirical attacks on the blatant careerism so prevalent in Bulgarian society. The comedies *Vestnikar li?* (Is He a Journalist?, 1900) and *Službogonci* (Jobseekers, 1903) are typical products of the period. In *Službogonci*, for instance, the hero Baltov, a government minister, spends all his time fending off petitioners who would like to avoid work by

obtaining a government sinecure. At the end he is notified of his dismissal from his post and is immensely relieved to be freed from wearisome supplicants.

After the opening of the National Theater Vazov intensified his theatrical efforts, writing five plays in six years. To be sure, three of them were simple adaptations of prose works of his. *Pod igoto* and *Kazalarskata carica* were based upon the novels of the same name and described events of the recent past, but the remaining plays reflected his preoccupation with medieval history: *Kəm propast* (Toward the Precipice, adapted from the novel *Ivan Aleksandər*), *Borislav* (1909) and *Ivajlo* (1913). *Borislav* is set in the years around 1237 and *Ivajlo* pictures the peasant revolutionary and usurper of the later 1270s. Vazov's brand of patriotic historical drama apparently suited the public's taste: between 1907 and 1912 his plays were presented a total of 154 times, so that he was by far the most popular playwright at the National Theater. His nearest rival was Shakespeare, with 66 performances.

Though other playwrights could not compete with Vazov in popular appeal, the work of some of them was plainly more inventive than were his conventional historical dramas. Petko Todorov was most prominent among the more original playwrights, for his plays utilizing folklore motifs mingled the fantastic with the realistic in intriguing ways. Todorov's first important play was *Zidari* (The Builders, written in 1899, published in 1902). Taking the old popular tradition that a large structure's stability could be guaranteed by the cruel expedient of walling up a human sacrifice within it, Todorov devised a complex plot in which love rivalries lead to the enticing of a beautiful girl to the construction site of a church so that she may be murdered and immured there and the building successfully completed. The church is indeed finished on schedule, but the local population then avoids it studiously because of the tragedy associated with it, and the man most directly responsible for the girl's death commits suicide. *Zidari* was followed by several other plays employing folk motifs: *Samodiva* (The Woodsprite, 1903), *Straxil strašen xajdutin* (Straxil the Terrible Xajdutin, 1903), *Nevjasta Borjana* (Young Wife Borjana, 1907), and *Zmejova svatba* (Zmej's Wedding, 1910). *Zmejova svatba* is of particular interest as an experiment in interweaving the fantastic with the realistic. The heroine Cena feels oppressed by her parents and isolated from her fellow peasants. Village gossip has it that she is drawn to Zmej, a folk personage who specializes in abducting young women through enchantments and who has reportedly been seen riding a green horse in the vicinity of Cena's house. At the end of the

first act, when Cena is alone, she is approached by Zmej, who seems a very ordinary person. Zmej persuades Cena to accompany him to his home in a forest cave. In the second act Cena, after spending the night in Zmej's cave, is uncertain about remaining with him and prepares to leave. Zmej even gives her directions for returning home, but at the last moment, much to Zmej's astonishment, she changes her mind and resolves to join her life to his. But their idyll is destroyed when all the villagers appear before the cave to demand the girl's return and disregard Cena's declaration that she wishes to remain with Zmej voluntarily. One of her brothers attacks Zmej with a knife and unintentionally stabs Cena fatally when she intervenes to protect him. At the end Zmej drives the crowd away from his cave with curses and retires to mourn over the corpse of his beloved.

Although modelled on a fantastic folk personage, Zmej in Todorov's play boasts few preternatural powers. Aside from his odd habit of living in a cave, he seems like any commonplace young man, and not a particularly aggressive one at that. The villagers do not fear him. A brief passage in which Todorov describes how Cena's heart throbs with terror at the thought that perhaps her lover has done away with girls in the past is unsuccessful, for the reader can hardly believe such a thing of the good-hearted Zmej. In sum, the psychology of the play's characters is almost entirely realistic even if its setting is semi-fantastic.

Aside from the folklore dramas for which he is famed, Petko Todorov wrote one social drama, *Pərvite* (The First, first published 1907, reworked 1912). *Pərvite* paints in stark tones the conflict between the common people, who seek equality and justice, and the village *čorbadžii* who wield economic and political power. Intellectual leadership is provided to the popular forces by the teacher Dimitər. The future is presaged by Milka, the daughter of the main *čorbadžija*, when she leaves her family to join her lot with Dimitər's. As the play ends the ruling class realizes that the period of its hegemony is drawing to a close. Dimitər and his allies are the "first" of those who will eventually construct a new order. In emphasizing the class conflict here Todorov harked back to his first play, *Zidari*, and thus apparently was reverting to his youthful interests, but the wars and his illness prevented possible further development in this direction.

Social conflicts as well as family and personal tensions underlie Anton Strašimirov's best dramas and Javorov's two plays. Strašimirov's *Vampir* was set amid what the author considered the stifling moral darkness of life in rural Bulgaria. The cast of characters includes the attractive girl Vela, her overbearing mother Malama, Želju (the mayor's

son, who is having an affair with Vela), and Malama's stable-man, the coarse and repellent Dinko. Malama, who hates Želju and his entire family, prevents Vela from marrying him by forcing her to become Dinko's wife, but Vela and Želju nevertheless continue their relationship. Dinko, aware of his wife's infidelity, disappears. Before long the rumor spreads that he has been killed; bones supposedly his are found and buried. In fact, though, Dinko is quite alive. He reappears with a group of bandits, kills Želju, would do the same to Malama except that she is too strong for him, and kidnaps Vela, who ends by losing her mind. Although its plot was overdone, *Vampir* still impressed viewers as a concentrate of the tragedies which might occur in the unenlightened rural *milieu*. These tragedies arose from such emotions as Malama's unreasoning hatred of Želju which led her to compel her own daughter to marry a servant, the selfish jealousy of Dinko, and Želju's vanity. The play has scarcely any attractive characters, and the *milieu* taken as a whole is utterly repulsive.

The second play by Strašimirov to have survived in the repertory is *Svekərva*. In general atmosphere the play is similar to *Vampir*, except that the action takes place in the city. In a preface Strašimirov remarked on the power which women, and especially mothers-in-law, had theretofore exercised in the Bulgarian family, offering the work in support of his view that Bulgarian society had long been a matriarchal one, though this was no longer true, he thought. In *Svekərva* the mother-in-law almost manages to destroy her son's marriage through her constant meddling. But since she is not at bottom a tyrant, when she realizes the damage she has wrought she takes steps to right the situation. All concerned come to see that the mother-in-law has overstepped the limits of her power and the play ends happily. *Svekərva* is now ranked as one of the best Bulgarian comedies of morals.

Although certain of Strašimirov's and Todorov's plays were outstanding, genuine pride of place as a playwright in this period belongs to Pejo Javorov, with his two works *V polite na Vitoša* (1911) and *Kogato grəm udari — kak exoto zagləxva* (1912). Javorov was a disciple — though not an imitator — of Anton Čexov and Henrik Ibsen. Both his plays revolve around tragedies which were simultaneously personal and universal.

V polite na Vitoša exhibits a striking interplay of literary catharsis and clairvoyance. The poet had begun work on it by November of 1910, for in that month he wrote to Dr. Krəstev and Penčo Slavejkov that he was laboring over a piece which had emerged "from the secret places of

[his] soul, ... worked out to the last detail". He wrote feverishly, as if in a nightmare, every night from ten until four or five in the morning, never ridding himself of the feeling that someone was dictating the whole thing to him.

The play's plot and characters display numerous points of contact with Javorov's own career. The heroine's name is Mila, practically the same as Mina (Todorova). The hero, Xristoforov, is an idealist active in politics who at one point in the past has been a socialist, as Javorov was, and who is greatly concerned with the problem of forming a national culture in a small country. Xristoforov has his political and journalistic activities to occupy him, but Mila's life is totally filled by her love for him. As she says to him at one point, "while you were talking, I felt ... like a thirsty man who is bending over a stream and drinking but even so is still burning with thirst". Again, though Mila dreads death, she tells her lover early in the play that if he should die before her she would then love death because it would possess him. Tragedy is all too liable to ensue where such powerful passions are engaged, and in fact, when Mila's brother objects to any match between her and Xristoforov (the two men are at political loggerheads), she runs from the house and — whether intentionally or not is unclear — throws herself under a streetcar. In the last act Xristoforov is in a euphoric mood until he is informed of his beloved's mortal injury. Rushing to her bedside, he tries desperately but unsuccessfully to communicate with her as she nears the end. Finally, to the accompaniment of melodramatic thunder from a storm, he commits suicide at her bedside so that she will not fear to follow him. The next instant she expires, as the sun breaks through the clouds.

V polite na Vitoša is effectively constructed and written in some of Javorov's tightest prose. The plot line is clear and the characters believable once the reader grants the possibility of such devouring passion as that exhibited by Mila and Xristoforov in fiction and Lora and Javorov in real life. Social and political commentary is present in suitable proportions and Javorov's tact does not ordinarily desert him, though the finale is a sad exception to this statement.

The conclusion of *V polite na Vitoša* foreshadowed with astonishing accuracy the end of Javorov's affair with Lora. In March of 1912 Javorov wrote Dr. Krəstev a letter criticizing an attempt by the critic Bojan Penev to equate him with Xristoforov. It was true, Javorov said, that they had much in common, but he (Javorov) had survived the tragedy of his beloved's death whereas Xristoforov had not. "I have buried [Xristoforov]", Javorov went on with pathetic optimism, "together with the

man I have buried within myself. Now I am quite different, strong, ready for the fight, in order to demonstrate that I can achieve something." In 1914 he took his own life.

The lesser, though later, of Javorov's two plays, *Kogato grəm udari*, was begun under the direct inspiration of Čexov's *Djadja Vanja* (Uncle Vanja), for Javorov first conceived the notion of writing a family drama after reviewing the Russian play in 1908. Originally to have been titled *Pod starija dəb* (Under the Old Oak), the piece was to have chronicled the destruction of an apparently normal, happy family through the exposure of a dread secret suppressed for some twenty years. The hideous secret of Javorov's play is that a young officer named Vitanov, when forced to seek temporary refuge in the house of his friend Popovič for political reasons, seduced his wife Bistra and gave her a son, Danail, after she had long been unable to conceive by her husband. Popovič has considered Danail his own for twenty years at the point when the play begins with Vitanov's return from Russian exile. The gradual disclosure of the secret of Danail's birth, accomplished in the best tradition of the psychological drama, causes the Popovič family to disintegrate. Javorov added to *Kogato grəm udari* a separately titled epilogue, *Kak exoto zagləxva.* Here Bistra, Danail, his wife Olga, Vitanov and a lieutenant named Drumev, a childhood friend of Danail's, gather at the grave of Popovič, who has died a lonely death. Drumev unexpectedly declares his passion for Olga and she yields to him. Thus the original situation which had engendered the Popovič family tragedy is repeated almost exactly. The echo is a reprise of the thunderclap.

At the heart of both parts of *Kogato grəm udari* as well as of *V polite na Vitoša* lies an obsessive sexual passion, the psychological ramifications of which Javorov worked out in dramatic action. Through these plays Javorov established his reputation as the most skilful psychological dramatist in Bulgarian literature.

In the period from roughly 1900 to 1913, with such playwrights as Vazov, Strašimirov, Todorov and Javorov producing actively, Bulgarian drama attained a pinnacle which has never been matched since.