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**BALKAN HISTORY:
NO LONGER EUROPEAN,
NOT ONLY OTTOMAN, AND NOT YET NATIONAL**

A Case Study on the Historical Novel

Introduction

In the final chapter of *Imagining the Balkans* (1997), while advancing arguments on the concept of the Balkans as an Ottoman legacy, Maria Todorova writes: “Turning to the Ottoman legacy as perception, it has been and is being shaped by generations of historians, poets, writers, journalists and other intellectuals.” In the Bulgarian edition (1999), Todorova adds a paragraph with names of writers to which she was referring– Ivo Andric, Dimitar Talev, Dobrica Chosic, Nikos Kazantzakis, and Anton Donchev. Especially the Bulgarian figures lead us to the role of the historical novel in shaping this legacy.

The historical novel provides many ways of interpreting figurative plots told about the Balkans because of its strange “in-between” character. On one hand, the historical novel has its own “genre” legacy in romantic thought, which from Walter Scott to the present is said to have an impact on national identity. Retrospectively, the genre spreads its modern foundations, elaborating “national” images in times when they were not yet properly manifest. On the other hand, the genre cultivates great history as background – and this great history created “the Balkans”. The historical novel names the Balkans no earlier than the beginning of the nineteenth century along with the notion of different peoples inhabiting them (the range of ethnonyms not yet shaped into nation-states at the time is broad). As a designation, “the Balkans” was employed in a framework of national divisions. This is perhaps clearest proof of the “Europeanization” of “the Balkans”, and probably of their “end”; “if the Balkans are, as I think they are, tantamount to their Ottoman legacy, this [their “Europeanization”] is an advanced stage of the end of the Balkans” (M. Todorova). The aim of this paper will be to comment on Todorova’s claim by analyzing “the Balkans” as “crucified” between the imagination and legacy of the historical novel.

The first step in analyzing the historical novel about the Balkans is paradoxical. Following the paradoxes of the genre, the novels are supposed to be “nationalist” without speaking about the “nation”, “Balkan” without speaking about the Balkans. They should ensure the plot of a “history” which is no longer European, not only Ottoman, and not yet national. The Balkans appear vague in such a fictional perspective, but this makes it an interesting topic of investigation. Pressed between the historical discourse (of “Europe”) and the nationalist impact of the genre, the Balkans seem to disappear from literal meaning and reappear in the figurative. The analysis of this process of appearance/disappearance is a very seductive task that aims to reveal the areas and boundaries of representation in the novels. I will focus on the uses of the terms “Balkans” and “history” in the novels. The historical novels, especially in the Bulgarian examples, make repeated reference to “the Balkan” (in Bulgarian only in the singular form, i.e., the mountain range of *Stara Planina*) without ever using the term “the Balkans”. As a term, “the Balkans” or “Balkan peninsula” is completely absent in Andrić’s *The Days of the Consuls*; its frequent use towards the end of *The Bridge on the Drina* is discussed below.

I will analyze four novels: Ivo Andrić’s *The Bridge on the Drina*¹ (1945) and *The Days of the Consuls*² (1945), Anton Donchev’s *Time of Parting*³ (1964), and Vera Mutafchieva’s *Chronicle of the Time of Unrest* (1965-66). The choice is dictated by the historical time-span of the novels: *The Bridge on the Drina* deals with the 16th-20th century period, *Time of Parting* with the 17th century, *Chronicle of the Time of Unrest* - with the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries and *The Days of the Consuls* - with the beginning of the 19th century. The aim of the paper is not to reconstruct the historical time-span. In such a case “The Bridge on the Drina” would be entirely sufficient. Instead, the paper attempts to highlight the different patterns emerging through the overlapping temporalities of the novels and to compare their modes of speech and figurative representations rather than the narrated events.

The importance of the historical novel rests in its play with a dual time – the time of writing and the time of narrated events meet in figurative representations and often harden into different formulae, such as “time of parting”, “time of unrest” or “time of the consuls”. These “times” also create a sense of space, which cannot coincide with the ethnonymic one. The “time of parting”, for instance, evokes the image of the Rhodopes where a forced change of faith is narrated; the “time of unrest” evokes the image of Rumelia in a story about the *kardjali* and separatist movements; Andrić’s local images of

- 1 Here quoted from: Ivo Andrić. *The Bridge on the Drina*. Trans. by Lovett F. Edwards. Beograd 2000
- 2 Here quoted from: Ivo Andrić. *The Days of the Consuls*. Trans. by Celia Hawkesworth in collaboration with Bogdan Rakic. Beograd 2000
- 3 Here quoted from: Anton Donchev. *Time of Parting*. Trans. by Marguerite Alexieva, New York 1968

Vicherad and Travnik are also well known. The figurative potentiality of these names introduces in an important way the conception of a “region”. These names have also vague, compatible and debatable features, which harden into the strong “bridge” and “crossroads” metaphors that seem to be the accustomed representations of the Balkans.

Bridge, Gate, Crossroads. The Rise and Fall of Ivo Andric

In *Imagining the Balkans* Maria Todorova is critical of the hackneyed use of the “bridge” and “crossroads” as metaphors for the Balkans: “The Balkans ... have always evoked the image of a bridge or a crossroads. The bridge as a metaphor for the region has been so closely linked to the literary oeuvre of Ivo Andric, that one tends to forget that its use both in outside descriptions, as well as in each of the Balkan literatures and everyday speech, borders on the banal”⁴ [...] “the perpetual Balkan refrain of in-betweenness”⁵ [...] “the metaphor of bridge or crossroads has acquired a mantra-like quality that most writers on the region like to evoke as its central attribute.”⁶

We must add the gate to these images, for it appears to be important for the Romanian presentation of luminosity. At the beginning of the 20th century, Raymond Poincare, at the time president of France, stated: “Nous sommes ici aux portes de l’Orient, ou tout est pris a la legere”. This famous phrase, combined with Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s title *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, gave birth to a Romanian parody of the historical novel as genre – Ioan Grosan’s “*One Hundred Years at the Orient’s Gates*” (1992). I am not aware of the use of such a parody, at least not in Bulgarian literature, based on the image of the bridge or crossroads. These clichés do not lose their seriousness. I am tempted to add that one can identify with living on, at or under a bridge, at a gate or at a crossroads if one is a hired guard or soldier, a clochard, a beggar or a vagrant.⁷

Accepting these metaphors, the Balkans also share the mode of sociality active within them.⁸ In fact, the most visible and legitimate subjects in such places

4 Todorova, op. cit, p. 15-16

5 Todorova, op. cit, p. 49

6 Todorova, op. cit, p. 59

7 I am indebted to Dr. D. Lilova for the following comments: “Bridges, gates and crossroads are mythologically meant as border places between the human and the outside world, so there always are gatekeepers such as chthonic monsters (three-headed dogs, hundred-eyed giants, dragons, sphinxes) or female divinities like Hecate with her triple identity as moon-earth-underworld goddess (by the way Hecate was also called Trivia because she presided over all places where three roads meet and was protectress of sorcery and witchcraft). ‘Passing through’ places are steadily related with initiation rituals (*rites de passage*) and I believe there is a whole field of study here in need of research”.

8 Homi Bhabha proclaims the “interstices” a place for symbolic interaction; “unheimlich” as features of the “inbetween spaces” (“The Location of Culture”, 1994): “These “in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and

are the passengers (passing through the bridge, through the gate, through the crossroad) – the great forces, the empires going to and fro, here and there.

In *A Chronicle of the Time of Unrest*, Vera Mutafchieva uses the image of a “crossroads” to define *Rumelia* - “land of the crossroads, the most contested land of the Old world”. The “land of the crossroads” is a plain land (mountains here exist only for temporary hiding). The turmoil of the time of unrest evokes further metaphors to name the parts of the novel and to develop the stages of unrest in the “plain” image of the crossroads – “The Whirlpool”, “The Flood”. They portray the aimless but steady growth of unrest as a “natural phenomenon”.

The other Bulgarian example – Anton Donchev’s *Time of Parting* – evokes an image of the land as “mountain”, which synecdoche is the Rhodopa Mountain. Here, almost nothing but mountain ranges make up the entire region, spread out in four directions:

The wind blew from the south, and we turned our faces to it. And on clear days Mount Ipsarion on the island of Thassos, and the Venetian fort of Kavala, and Mount Athos on the peninsula can be seen from there...

Then the wind blew from the west, and again we turned our faces to it. And to the west, the horizon reaches to the crest of the Pirin mountains with Eltepe, to Predyal, and to the right as far as the Rila Mountains with its summits, and Moussala first of all... Now the wall of fire separated the Rhodope mountains from their sisters Pirin and Rila.

Then the wind blew from the north. And there the eye reaches as far as the Balkan Range, from Mount Vezhen to Mount St Nikola, and the highest to be seen is Yumroukchal...

And the wind did not blow from the east, for there raised the Rhodope summit, Mount Possestra, shielding our backs from the wind.

Later in the novel Donchev deliberately develops the “geopolitical” image of the same dimensions throughout the dream of the tired Father Aligorko. The image is intentionally naïve, and, what is most curious, the East is missing again (as if no wind and no history came from the East):

... I set out to the south and I saw the sea... I saw Candia, too, swarming with bodies, weapons, soil, worms and smoke, and over the swarm I saw a white line and it was white walls...

And I set out to the west and I walked amid a desert, for I did not know these lands, until I saw something shining in gold and brilliance. I saw the king of the Franks eating and drinking. And because I did not know the faces of the men,

contestation, in the act of the defining the idea of the society itself [...] This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridness that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy”. Limited attention to the fragmentation of the great narratives is not sufficient; needed is also “an awareness that the epistemological “limits” of those ethnocentric ideas are also enunciative boundaries of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices”. The boundary becomes a place from which representation begins.

nor their garments, nor their houses, I saw only gilded mantles, goblets, white teeth and white flesh... And also I cried out, none heard me...

Then I set out to the north, and traveled all over the long-suffering Bulgarian land... And still further north, after I had passed a deep white river, and it was the Danube, I saw steppes, and snows, and, somewhere far away, men with beards, dressed in furs, and riding on sleighs. And when I cried to them, my cry reached them through the blizzard...

The metaphor here is not “crossroads” but only “cross”. The cross is achieved through the spatial pattern itself – the cross organizes the four geographical and metaphorical dimensions and collects their plots and figures. The cross evokes also the image of the land crucified, which suggests the torture of the very Rhodopa in the “time of parting”:

Rhodopa is crucified. Her right hand is nailed down by Mehmed Pasha, her left hand is nailed down by Abdy Bey. At her feet on the Aegean coast, the Sultan’s servants are hammering at bridges so that the Sultan’s retinue may pass. Her hair in Philibe is glued to the pillar of the cursed Greek Bishop Gavril. We must not expect aid from anywhere. We can only hold out, as others have held out, or die.

The clear portrait of the “land crucified” transforms the metaphorical mapping from a geographical into a historical one; “Pirin mountain” or “Eltepe”, or the geopolitical “Franks” are replaced by “Mehmed Pasha”, etc. in the domesticated horizon of the “self”. A simple figurative exercise would indicate that crossroads minus roads turns to a cross, and this is the climax of the nationalist impact of the text.

The *Time of Parting*, in fact, rejects the fundamental metaphor of the bridge, and at the same time creates the image of the cross: “Sultan’s servants are hammering at bridges so that the Sultan’s retinue may pass”. In fact, the hatred for roads and bridges forms a tendency and can also be found also in Andric’s “The Bridge on the Drina”, where in the 16th century Radisav, a rebel opposed to the construction of the bridge, states: “You can see for yourself that this building work will be the death of all of us; it will eat us all up... A bridge is no good to the poor and to the rayah, but only for the Turks; we can neither raise armies nor carry on trade...”. On the other hand, in Andric’s novel the bridge does not fascinate the Muslims: “... the older persons who followed the law of Islam were openly indignant... They only prayed to Allah to deliver them from this disaster...”.

In *The Days of the Consuls*, Andric rejects also the metaphor of the crossroads. The French consul Daville and the “young consul” Des Fosses speak about a peculiarity of Bosnia, placing it generously in “Europe”: “I don’t believe there’s a country in the whole of present-day Europe so lacking in roads as Bosnia”, said Daville [...] “Unlike all the other nations in the world, this people has some kind of incomprehensible, perverse hatred of roads, which are actually a sign of progress and prosperity. In this wretched country roads

aren't maintained and they don't last, it's as though they destroyed themselves somehow... These people don't like roads anywhere near them".

How can one imagine a crossroads without the existence of the roads? The dialogue between the two men brings to light the need for roads: "but roads have got to be built through Europe and obviously one can't take account of such backward peoples as the Turks and the Bosnians" (Daville); "Anyone who considers that they must be built, will build them. Which means he needs them. But I am trying to explain to you why, on the other hand, the people here have no desire for roads..." (Des Fosses).

But who is it that needs the crossroads as a metaphor to explain everything in a region with an incomprehensible, perverse hatred of roads. In Andric's novels we can observe the "linguistic" development of the metaphor. A bridge is no good and the hatred of roads reflects the rejection-of-literality-in-reality, which is necessary for the metaphor to evoke its connotative meaning. However, the most crucial problem still remains: which is the subject of representation dissolved in these metaphors. In the two novels, the heterogeneous Balkans (Christians, Muslims, Turks, Bosnians, etc.) have arrived at a consensus that rejects the relevance of "bridge" and "crossroads" as metaphors naming the Balkans. What is more, we reach the blank wall of the discourse synonymy, the equality of terms in the "outside" speech of the West European men and the natives' feeling for the "self": "such backward peoples as the Turks and the Bosnians" (Daville in *The Days of the Consuls*); "... man ...was forced to recognize more clearly... his own backwardness and that of others" (the narrator in *The Bridge on the Drina*).

The "unheimlich" self-representation of the liminal man Cologna in *The Days of the Consuls* is possible only in negative terms; and the very condition of articulating the formula of "in-betweenness" is the existence of the European as a listener. Let's underline the negative terms and grammar, and the images of "in-betweenness":

No one knows what it means to be born and to live on the brink, between two worlds, knowing and understanding both of them, and to be unable to do anything to help explain them to each other and bring them closer. To love and hate both, to hesitate and waver all one's life. To have two homelands, and yet have none. To be everywhere at home and to remain forever a stranger. In short, to live torn on a rack, but as both victim and torturer at once [...] That is the fate of a man from the Levant, for he is "poussiere humaine", human dust, drifting painfully between East and West, belonging to neither and beaten by both. These are people who know many languages, but none is their own, who know two faiths, but are steadfast in neither. These are the victims of the fatal division of humanity into Christians and non-Christians, eternal interpreters and go-betweens, but who carry in themselves much that is hidden and inexpressible; people who know well East and West, their customs and beliefs, but are equally despised and mistrusted by either side. One can apply to them the words written by the great Jellaledin, Jelaleddin Rumi, six centuries ago: "For I cannot know myself. I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Parsee, nor Muslim.

I am neither from the East, nor the West, neither from the land, nor the sea". That is how they are. They are a small, separate humanity... They are the "third world", where all malediction settled as a result of the division of the earth in two worlds.

This remarkable speech is an attempt of self-representation. What is more, this is a self-representation of an ambiguous, indeterminate man – "He [Cologna] was a man of indeterminate age, indeterminate origins, nationality and race, indeterminate beliefs and attitudes and just as indeterminate learning and experience. Altogether, there was not much about the man that could be defined at all clearly" (as if Andric's novel quotes secondarily Todorova's statement: "Balkanism is a discourse about an imputed ambiguity"). In contrast to Homi Bhabha's interstices, this is an interstice, which proves the gap of the discourse, the silence of the positive grammar forms. The man represents himself and his community only in "neither... nor" syntax, in prefixes of "in-" and "un-". He has no other language but the negated European names given to the world. Hence, the speech is extremely European, not only because of the terms but because of the very construction of the "in-between" image. It is successively binary, produced by oppositions, a brilliant example of the Western classic episteme, that could create synonymy between the "opposite" and the "other" but does not leave any space to non-correlative ("other", "ambiguous", "indeterminate") items of representation.

The ambiguous man that "could not be defined at all clearly" has elaborated a discourse that can be surely defined clearly. Des Fosses, the astonished listener, is surprised because he cannot recognize the well-known man Cologna through this speech: "The young man listened, surprised. It was as though he were hearing some third person who had joined in their conversation. There was no longer any trace of empty words and compliments." The speech has transformed the accustomed Eastern communication ("empty words and compliments") into a rhetorically brilliant Western discourse – not Cologna himself, but a "third man" is speaking. This "third man" produces the image of a "third world", "a small, separate humanity". Nevertheless, the "third world" is described in the classic binary discourse of the West. Hence, "in-betweenness" can only be exhausted in desperate oppositions and desperate contaminations – a despair understandable by the West, because it belongs thoroughly to its pattern of representation. Beyond this pattern, no representation can occur; Ivo Andric does not confirm Homi Bhabha's belief in the "enunciative boundaries of other dissonant histories and voices". The representation, in its "self", is unable to reach anything else but silence – "unable to do anything to help explain", "hidden and inexpressible".

The horror of silence is a refrain in *The Days of the Consuls*, and, what is more, Des Fosses (who listens to Cologna's speech) needs "to defend himself from the silence which annihilated and buried everything [...] this insidious, seductive eastern silence, which blurred, softened, tangled and obstructed

all things, giving them double or multiple meanings, or depriving them from meaning altogether, until they were all dragged off somewhere beyond the reach of our eyes and our reason into a deaf nothingness, leaving us blind, dumb and helpless, buried alive and cut off from the world while still in it.”

Whose is that repeated “our” and “us” in the paragraph? Des Fosses is lonely in his room and in the plot – only the narrator’s, i.e. Andric’s voice, can join the characters in order to make the community of “our” and share with the European character the images of the “deaf nothingness”, “buried alive”, and so on. Yet Cologne longs only for one type of representation – that of the meeting with the West (his “in-betweenness” finally forgets thoroughly about the East). The West is quoted and supposed to fulfill the glimmering image of “humanity” in, perhaps, the most famous words, written by Ivo Andric:

“At the end, at the real, final end, all will nevertheless be well and everything will be resolved harmoniously. Despite the fact that here it all looks utterly discordant and hopelessly embroiled. “*Unjour tout sera bien, vila notre esperance*”, as your philosopher put it. And one could not even imagine it any other way. For why should my thought, if it is good and true, be worth less than the same thought conceived in Rome or Paris? Because it was born in this pit called Travnik? And it is possible that this thought should not be noted in any way, not recorded anywhere? No, it is not. Despite the apparent fragmentation and chaos, everything is connected and harmonious. No single human thought or effort of the spirit is lost. We are all on the right road and we shall be surprised when we meet. But we shall meet and understand each other, all of us, wherever we are going now and however much we go astray. That will be a joyous meeting, a glorious, redeeming surprise.”

To be represented in the eyes of the West is the only humanistic “*esperance*” of the character, of the author, and of his Nobel novels. No more Bosnian incomprehensible, perverse hatred of roads – “We are all on the right road” replaces everything, even the echo of the Balkan “crossroads” (a meeting on crossroads is never sure enough). The “road” is considered to be the only one and the right one since the language of representation can be easily recognized as entirely Western and thus far from the “inability to explain” and “inexpressible”; far from the seductive eastern silence, which ... obstructed all things.”

Nowhere in the hundreds of pages of *The Days of the Consuls* had Andric mentioned the word “Balkans” (terms like “eastern” and “oriental” appear in the speech of the Western consuls). But the last chapters of *The Bridge of the Drina* employ a different discourse. The “long duree” has already reached the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century; the narrator uses in his own speech Western qualifications very similar to those of the consuls: “Seventy-four millions!” repeated many of them knowingly as if they could count them on the palm of their hand. For even in this remote little town where life in two-thirds of its forms was still completely oriental, men began to become enslaved by figures and to believe in statistics”. The trouble is not

in the very usage of the term “oriental” but in the fact that it is initiated as an explanatory term commenting the people’s direct everyday speech and gestures. In this context, the use of “Europe” and “European” have become more and more frequent, and the term “Balkans” appears for the first time in parallel with them.

These pages prove to be a kind of a degradation of Andric’s narrative. They sound like a geopolitical summary that has forgotten about the people, the centuries and about everything in general, as if the paragraphs have harshly turned to another reader, to whom the people should be explained by means of comparison: “All that other men, other races, in other times and lands, had achieved and attained in the course of generations, through centuries of effort, at the cost of lives, of renunciations and of sacrifices greater and dearer than life, now lay before them as a chance inheritance and a dangerous gift of fate”.

The slow growth of meaning, the metaphorical surplus of the bridge is suddenly interrupted. The narrative denies life to the metaphor, and instead begins to explain it, and in doing so depreciates the whole previous story: “Quickly and easily they grew reconciled to the idea that the road across the bridge no longer lead to the outside world and that the bridge was no longer what it once had been: the link between East and West. Better to say, most of them never thought about it.” Here, the narrator not only offers a disappointingly facile explanation of the metaphor as “the link between East and West”; what is more, the narrator easily gives the explanation without paying attention to the much more interesting fact that “most of them never thought about it.” With such an explanation, the bridge is done away with long before its literal destruction in the novel.

This impatient and condescending intrusion of “external” comment introduces the term “Balkans” to the novel⁹: “So those years passed... So it came to the autumn of 1912; then 1913 came with the Balkan wars and the Serbian victories [...] the war between Turkey and the four Balkan states had already broken out and followed the well-worn paths across the Balkans”. Confusion with the term, nowadays, lies in the fact that its first appearance overlaps with the time and meaning of the dark term “balkanization”: “Not even in dreams did frontiers change so quickly or go so far away... they bent over the map which showed the future partition of the Balkan Peninsula... and now frontiers which should have been firm and lasting had become fluid and shifting,

9 In the 800 pages of *Chronicle of the Time of Unrest* Vera Mutafchieva mentions the term “Balkan land” only twice, and never in direct speech: “... the convention in Campo Formio that admitted revolutionary France to the Balkan land” and “... these three men [Selim khan, Osman Pazvantoglu, Kara Feisi] embodied the most violent time at the *Balkan land*”. The first expression seems to “quote” the “European” historical discourse itself. The second one offers a qualification and generalization of the omnipresent narrator who is also a prominent researcher in Ottoman history studies.

moving away and lost in the distance.” “Changing frontiers” and “partition of the Balkan peninsula” insistently bring in the context of Andric’s first usage of the term “Balkan” the echoing meaning of the external suffix “-ization”. (And from this point, the “Balkans” and the “bridge” can appear later in the novel in the nationalist discourse of the young student Stikovic.)

Such a self-representation, as it appears in Chapters 16-18 of *The Bridge on the Drina*, is nothing more than a self-confession, articulated like an agreement with the statements of the prosecution.

Story against History

Andric’s failure of narration and representation that occurs in Chapters 16-18 of *The Bridge on the Drina* can be explained in the following way: at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of 20th century history overtakes story on the bridge, runs over story and destroys it, and the story can pull itself together only in order to tell how the bridge has been destroyed.

If the term “failure” is constantly repeated, it means that our reflection presupposes that the story is internally and axiomatically representative for the Balkans, and at a certain moment, is betrayed by Andric’s narration that chooses another (and external) paradigm of representation. Of course, it’s not the case. If we presuppose the existence of “geocultural” agents, they would lie in the fact that history, by habit, is imposed upon the West (Europe) and Story is imposed upon the East.

The term “story” is not to be understood here as an act of story-telling predicated on some (“oriental”) character in a literary plot. Instead, “story”, here, refers to a decision of the narrators to describe the language and events of everyday life, different from the great narratives, with which one is competing. The novels take the great narratives for granted, rigid and external enough, so that the “everyday” formats can reveal their otherness with all the risks of that threatening category. We take the “otherness” of story and history for granted, only because the historical novel cannot exist without this difference. In fact, its task of the historical novel is to transpose the story of everyday life onto the format of great historical narratives – in order to offer an alternative way to “say the truth” at the level of referentiality, but to give expression to the “human” otherwise lost in historical narration.

If, then, the West is an agent of history and the Oriental East an agent of story, the Balkans will impose upon them nothing but connotations scattered beyond any narrative shape or habit. They seem to represent the “interstice” of representation itself, somewhere in the “in-betweenness” of the heavily constructed narrative agents.

In such a perspective, *The Bridge on the Drina* appears to be the great novel of the Balkans that intentionally and deliberately elaborates on its own narrative “failure” – it represents the unequal and uneven, non-fitting edges of story and history. These “interstices” of narration represent the gap where the “dissonant voices”, imagined by Homi Bhabha, are articulated not in a “homogenous” narrative but in broken figures of speech. In Mutafchieva’s *Chronicle of the Time of Unrest*, history assumes a different role. History is “headlined” in relation to the story and the very word, always appearing with a definite article in the Bulgarian text – “the history” –, recurs frequently in the novel. History is an institution permanently subverted by the story. What is more, history is used as the last human great prosopopoeia: “... History just confirmed this widespread opinion”; “if we took history seriously, we should be dead, all of us”; “Selim khan was sublime. Even history, which is fastidious to kings confesses that”; “So Mustafa Bairaktar was riding to Stambul with impulses unclear to history...” History confirms, it does not speak about something, or it gives names or cannot give the proper name, it confesses something, and it gains or loses confidence... Such a successive personification is always subversive to history’s institutional force; “story” and “history” seem to reciprocally comment each other. The “dissonant voice” coming from the gap between story and history here fills the gap between story and history with articulated speech - and measures their incongruent edges with calm irony and warm skepticism.

The “human” is supplemental to history and only this can provide the syntax of everything, which is crowded in the notion of “Rumelia” or the “Balkans”, says Vera Mutafchieva implicitly. The “human” is not supplemental to history, and these are the Balkans, states Ivo Andric implicitly. The “broad” *duree* of the time of unrest and the long *duree* of the bridge are two versions of the compatibility of everyday life with history.

Andric’s bridge is a typical clear form of the “long *duree*”, because all stories pass through it. Story takes long; history appears for a moment in the distance only to pass aside (“There were in the town both Turks and Serbs who swore that they had heard with their own ears the rumbling of “Karageorge’s gun”... Both Turks and Serbs saw the fires clearly and looked at them attentively, although both pretended not to have noticed them... When, soon after the feast of St Elias, the fires disappeared from Panos and the revolt was pushed back from the Uzice district, once again neither the one side nor the other showed their feelings”), or to pass without holding back its signs (“Thus, one summer day after so many years, there once more appeared on the *kapia* a white official notice... The announcement was pasted up below the white plaque with the Turkish inscription, as had at one time been the proclamation of General Filipovic about the occupation”), or to destroy finally the story, the narrative and the bridge.

The bridge's "long *duree*" is reflected in its resistance to change, like life itself: "... the bridge, because of the strange harmony of its forms and the strong and invisible power of its foundations, would emerge from every test unchanged... They entered there into the unconscious philosophy of the town; that life was an incomprehensible marvel, since it was incessantly wasted and spent, yet none the less it lasted and endured "like the bridge on the Drina" (Chapter V); "and remained, when all was over, unchanged and unchangeable" (VI); "After a few days life went on again as before and seemed essentially unchanged" (XI); "the bridge which to every living soul in the town meant a thing as eternal and unalterable as the earth..." (XVI); "their habits had not changed, their ways of life and the forms of mutual relations remained the same...Opposite them, a little to the side, stood the eternal bridge, everlastingly the same" (XVII), etc.

Andric has story and history meet at the "long", but also "narrow" and horizontal *duree* of the bridge, where they collide, and this is the disruption of the bridge. On the contrary, Mutafchieva's "broad *duree*" of the time of unrest has story and history meet in their perpetual possibility to comment each other on the "land at the crossroads, the most contested land of the Old world".

So, throughout the different meetings of story and history, we gain insight into the "phenomenological" difference between the metaphorical clichés "bridge" and "crossroads": a bridge can be interrupted and destroyed, but crossroads could not be disrupted, it could be only left behind. We cannot say which of these versions is more "representative" for the Balkans, and which of them is more desperate.

The Building of the Bulgarian: "Time of Parting", "The Time of Unrest"

It was already mentioned that the two Bulgarian novels – Vera Mutafchieva's *Chronicle of the Time of Unrest* and Anton Donchev's *Time of Parting* - both written in the 1960s - evoke a different constellation of story and history. In *Time of Parting*, the storyline set in the 17th century is nothing more than flesh of a great imagined history. In *Chronicle of the Time of Unrest*, history comments and is being commented by the story set in the 18th century. Besides, it is interesting that the two historical novels contain in different ways the "book of history", the *Slavo-Bulgarian History*, written in 1762 by the monk Paissy. Thus, they develop different fictional patterns of a common memory.

In the time of unrest, the young man Dobri follows the traces of the book he has heard of – he longs for Paissy's *History* because he wants to know whether the great Bulgarian kings in past times really existed. He overcomes many obstacles, but finally finds the text. His search is accompanied by universal skepticism: "Look now. The Greeks have once had a state – today

they have a Patriarchate; the Wallachians have once had a state – today they have voivodes, never mind that the Divan anoints them... And we? We have nothing; it means we have not had ever...” There is no longing for the glorious past, simply because the glorious past has been thoroughly forgotten, which is, by the way, Paissy’s pathos itself (“But some people would not wish to know about their Bulgarian ancestors, and they turn to a foreign culture and a foreign language. ... You unreasonable and foolish men! Why are you ashamed to call yourselves Bulgarians. ... Did the Bulgarians not have their own kingdom and state? So many long years did they reign and they were glorious and famed the world over” – *Slavo-Bulgarian History*, 1762¹⁰). A *Chronicle of the Time of Unrest* in the 1960’s accepts the fact that history at the end of the 18th century has been forgotten, but does not share Paissy’s anger, and this is part of its game between story and history.

On the contrary, Anton Donchev’s *Time of Parting* proclaims history as an everlasting memory of the community. The novel directs such energy against the presumption that history could be forgotten, that fords *en route* through the grounds of Paissy himself. The monk from Hilendar wrote in his *History* from 1762: “... in those times... people neglected to copy books out of ignorance... And today the extensive chronicles that were written about our people and the Bulgarian tzars are no more.” However, in 1668, the time of *Time of Parting*’s plot - three centuries after the fall of the Bulgarian kingdom and one century before Paissy’s writing of the history - the fiction says implicitly that there is no need of writing any future history, because it has never stopped being written. The shepherds know everything about the last fight for Rhodopa, and with names, dates, figures, details and dislocations that seem to be much more “positivistic” than legendary: “About three hundred years ago, at the same time of year, from the tenth day before St Dimiter’s Day to the fourth day after it, the last defenders of Rhodopa met the Turkish troops with the Sultan’s son-in-law, Ibrahim Pasha, at their head, at the rocks of Visyak. For fourteen days the Bulgarians held out... and the Turks attacked on three sides...”

However, the novel cannot state directly something of that kind: “Three hundred years ago, this and this has happened, and in one hundred years Father Paissy’s *Slavo-Bulgarian History* is going to declare incorrectly that these things are forgotten”. Instead, the narration simply inserts the image of Paissy in the figure of Father Aligorko, a character and narrator in the novel. Father Aligorko is a monk from Mount Athos (as Paissy is), he has the popular legendary biography of Paissy who went around spreading the message of his history: “From that day on every winter I [Father Aligorko] stayed in a monastery and copied holy books, and also various other histories in our tongue. And as soon as spring was on the way, I would set out over the lovely, suffer-

10 Paisy Hilendarski. *A Slavo-Bulgarian History*. Trans. By Krasimir Kabakchiev, Sofia, 2000

ing land of Bulgaria, and leave the books in our language with village priests and in the monasteries.” What is more, Father Aligorko learns everything from the common people and especially “from simple ploughmen and hewers”, which is almost an exact quotation of Paissy’s “Bulgarians are simple... and most of them are simple ploughmen, diggers, shepherds.” But the text of the 1960s changes radically the grammatical preposition. In 1762 Paissy declares that he writes his *History* for the simple ploughmen and diggers; in 1668 the fictional character declares that what is written is learned *from* them. The preposition changes also the causality, along with the death of the very need for the *Slavo-Bulgarian History*. In this way, *Time of Parting* creates a macrofabula of a constant collective historical memory, which implies that there is no need for the Bulgarian Revival to begin, due to the simple fact that it has never ended.

With the figurative overlap of Paissy and Father Aligorko the novel introduces a very interesting turn – Father Aligorko leads the people to change their faith and become Muslims, because: “Kill me, but let the folk go down to the villages. Every god is a god of the living, and those who go down into the grave do not praise any god... Glory to Manol and the others, but some must be left alive to tell of their deeds and to honour their memory”... And brother parted with brother, and sons with their fathers. I led the renegades.” This fictional kind of Paissy, who accepted Islam to save living memory, is a very interesting version, which the text does not know how to handle. Soon after parting, the two groups develop a different memory in different places and social behaviors. The Muslim Paissy finally does not entrust the memory and the manuscripts to any living creature, he places them in a chthonic lake and cave in the heart of the Rhodopa Mountain.

In fact, this is just a continuation of the text’s general metaphor – “the mountain remembers” – here taken to its literal extreme. What *History* is in Vera Mutafchieva’s *Chronicle of the Time of Unrest*, is the mountain here in *Time of Parting* – the most successive personification, more “human” than any human sociality: “God forgive me for forgetting the names of Thy holy martyrs... And the mountain remembers them”; “The mountain does not die”; “The mountain is looking at you”. But unlike Mutafchieva’s ability to make story and history comment on each other, here only the mountain can judge, look, send, and remember.

Such a personification cannot notice the competing presence of any other human “story”. The mountain remains high above such terms; neither current history, nor the story is compatible with it, because in fact there are no separate men who can invent separate stories: “”Granny,” said old Galoushko,... What is coming is terrible, but it is not as terrible as all that. And it is not so very important. The mountain does not die.”

In such a perspective, the novel becomes paradoxical, because no “time of parting” can exist, neither religious nor ethnic separation. And the text states this purposefully and clearly by depicting two palimpsests of the mountain which we can provisionally call “anthropological” and “cultural”:

The mountain was not a courtyard, surrounded by a wall, but a Bulgarian stronghold with nine rows of walls. And by spitting upon the cross men withdrew from the first wall, and retreated. And there was one wall less to the heart of the mountain, but another eight walls were left. And by dying at the first wall, Manol and the others had held back the enemy and showed us how to die, but living defenders also had to be left, so that they would go back and defend the remaining eight walls. And if the first wall was called the Holy Cross, the second one was called the Common Tree, the third – the Common Song, the fourth – the Common Raiment, the fifth – the Common Past, the sixth – the Common Tongue. Yet were not the walls not nine, but a hundred? And in the innermost one, behind one hundred shells, was the kernel, from which the Bulgarian Rhodopa sprouted eternally, and, no matter how much she was cut, a Bulgarian tree always sprouted from the kernel.

[...]

With his dagger I began to break up the murals in the church... then, from under my fingers, I saw two new eyes fixed upon me. Under the image of the archangel, there were old paintings. I broke them up, too. A man’s hand appeared, holding a sword... Under the sword a child’s lips smiled. The wall paintings were immortal. No, they were mortal, but they did not want to die... Then suddenly a big piece of the plaster came away... the sun shone down on a piece of white marble, on which a naked woman had been carved. A mysterious smile appeared on her beautiful face, and she held her high breast with both hands. From the nipple of her breast ran milk, and pouring like a stream over the marble panel, it fell into the wide-open mouth of a naked man, kneeling before her. And the man had the legs of a goat, the teeth of a wolf and hairy pointed ears. That was Rhodopa, giving suck to beasts and men, gathered together in one body.

These palimpsest images contain important notions. They belong to one and the same man’s speech (Father Aligoroko), but seem to share many contradictions. The “anthropological” is extremely nationalist (“Bulgarian Rhodopa sprouted eternally”), but it ignores the very plot of the novel –struggle and death while preserving Bulgarian faith and identity. The “cultural” palimpsest version is also contradictory, because it recognizes Rhodopa as a pre-Christian (and metaphorically – pre-cultural) image where just one “and” exists between “beasts and men, gathered together in one body”, and that body could hardly be named “Bulgarian” and to illustrate any “time of parting”. So, through the palimpsest paradoxes the novel throws the validity of its own plot away.

In this way the novel depreciates the very “parting” (and the very plot with it), sending it to the most external image of Rhodopa’s “entity”. Contrary to this, Vera Mutaŕchieva does not declare any “parting” within the “Bulgarian”, but really achieves it, thus pointing out the social foundations of the nation.

In *Chronicle of the Time of Unrest* time is defined as a time that “has made all people equal”, and no “parting” is supposed because of ethnic or religious reasons. On the contrary, the time of unrest gathers people together in novel communities. The time of unrest separates a family community and creates by this separation four different social types – the peasant, the town’s craftsman, the haidut, and the man of letters in the novel (with all their modern and different “brotherhoods”), all of them being Bulgarian. The ethnonym spreads to different social beings that are always considered fundamental for the Bulgarian Revival and the nation-building processes. The time of gathering together separates the pre-modern Bulgarian community, thus providing the “social” version of the nation, which, contrary to Anton Donchev’s “anthropological” and “cultural” versions, contains nothing similar to a mysterious, hidden, and everlasting “entity”.