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NATION BETWEEN TRAGEDY AND IDYLL

This essay analyses how national ideologies use the basic opposition of modernity, i.e., the opposition between *nature* and *culture*. I will discuss two main modes of usage: the *tragic* and *idyllic*. The aim of the paper is to shed light on their structural dimensions and their complex *double bind*, which exemplifies the structural nexus of modernity.

Antiquity as a Figure of Political Universality

Mythological and historical figures of Antiquity play a paradigmatic role in every European national project and modern European culture as a whole. Ancient Greece (and Ancient Rome) is viewed to be an authentic territory for the incarnation of the Spirit. In this way it reflects a universal phantasm – or phantasm for universality – of every European nation. More generally speaking, all European cultural and political history – from the medieval theologico-political project of the Sacred Roman Empire, to the Renaissance and classicism, and on to the myths of the Third Rome and Third Reich – represents an attempt to reincarnate this phantasm, to *repeat* the ideal universality of antiquity.

From this point of view the national project of Bulgaria, the neighbour of Greece, turns out to be a complex task. On one hand, the rejection of mimetic competition with the Greek national project is impossible because it would lead to assimilation. On the other hand, if Bulgarian national ideology rejects the figures of classical Antiquity appropriated by Greek nationalism, this would undermine the very ‘ontological’ foundation of the nation. In other words, the access to the archetypal source of European universality, particularized in modern national projects, would be denied. Attempts to find legitimacy for Bulgarian national identity thus encounter an initial obstacle, which does not permit access to the ‘roots’ of European universality. This paradox seems impossible to solve, and efforts to legitimise the identity of the Bulgarian nation seem impossible along the path of other European nations.

When approaching the ways, in which Bulgarian nationalism seeks to solve this basic paradox, one should note first that the ideal image of Greece is not homogeneous or without internal inconsistencies. Next to the Hegelian image of Greece as the native soil of Spirit, exists another, darker, more mysterious and menacing image. This foreboding image is that of the *Other Greece*, which romanticism opposed to classicism (an opposition, which later will be personified by Nietzsche in the figures of Apollo and Dionysos). This other face is the *Orient* of Greece, which Hölderlin sees in his hymn *Der Ister*. The *Other Greece* is not simply the figure, which romanticism opposed to classicism. It is the image of Greece, which *German* romanticism discovered in opposition to *French* and *Italian* classicism¹. It is not by chance, of course, that the German national project was bound from its very beginning to the ‘discovery’ or, better, invention of the *Other Greece*. Its initial goal was to elaborate a *unique* model of universality. Mimetic imitation of universality is first and foremost structural. Efforts to create a national German identity could not mimic the classical image of Antiquity. For, in doing so, it would subordinate itself to the model of the ‘primary’ mimesis, i.e., the *French* classicism of the absolute monarchy. A prescription for the uniqueness of universal could be found early in Winckelmann’s paradoxical formulation: “The only way for us to become great, yes, inimitable, if it is possible, is the imitation of the Greeks.” (Winckelmann 1986). In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, it was this assertion that moved Schlegel, Hölderlin, Schelling and Hegel to create the myth of an *Other Greece*, the dark Greece of the mysteries and the orgies, of the archaic rituals and sacrifices, as opposed to the ‘Italian’ and ‘French’ Greece of measure and beauty, reason and polis, of *logos* and *nomos*. Romantic nationalism creates an image of the national community in accordance with this model of the other Greece. It fosters the image of a sacred and tragic community, which is opposed to the image of classical Greece during the age of absolutism and that of Rome of the political theology of the Sacred Roman Empire.

Universality without Antiquity, or the Political Idyll of the Bulgarian National Project

Bulgarian national ideology elaborates a peculiar version of this romantic model. The image of the Bulgarian nation and its origins remains unaffected by sacrificial and orgiastic imagery, usually associated with the founding moment of the national community and the tragic or messianic vision of the nation. The original lack of ‘universality’ or an archetypal order of political representation in Bulgarian nationalism leads to a complex mode of self-identification, whose logic I define as *idyllic* in contrast with the tragic. In Bulgaria, the latter is referred to as *Byzantianism* – a term, belonging to the

1 The *Other Greece* as a myth of German romanticism is at the center of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s remarkable philosophical work (Lacoue-Labarthe 1986, 1990 and 1998).

most influential Bulgarian modernist historian, Petar Mutafchiev (Mutafchiev 1931). This term describes a tradition with its roots in the period of the National Revival and romanticism. Introduction of this notion relates to attempts to liberate Bulgarianness from the clutch of the mimetic model, in which it could not overcome the status of a distorted copy of the Greek prototype. Not surprisingly, in the Bulgarian context ‘Greek’ meant first an aggressive and assimilatory contemporary national project, which reflects, through the merciless logic of metonymy – and homonymy –, an ‘archetypal’ descendant of the Greek arch-text. In this idyllic image we can discover the structural matrix of the Enlightenment version of the myth of the Golden Age, which Hans-Robert Jauss defined as the ‘hidden myths of Enlightenment’ (Jauss 1989).

The Bulgarian national project is based on the fiction of a lost paradise, of an idyllic state of ‘natural’, organic and pre-political community. This state of lost beatitude still retains its source – the virgin materiality of Bulgarianness, of the Bulgarian Soul, about which poets and theorists from Hristo Botev to Ianko Ianev have written. One of the main ideological figures of the Enlightenment acquires particular importance during the epoch of the ‘National Revival’, a figure, which represents a transformation of the myth for the Golden Age – the figure of the noble savage. Dessislava Lilova, in her NEXUS research *The Shared Balkan Past in Bulgarian Historiography before the Liberation*, documents with many concrete examples the massive presence of this Enlightenment figure in the cultural landscape of the period. The importance of the noble savage in Bulgaria functions as a compensatory device for identification. It neutralises the stigmatisation of ‘underdeveloped’ and ‘uncivilised’ in opposition to the civilised but corrupted Greeks, the main rival of the Bulgarian cultural revival. Greek nationalism maintains an axiomatic belief in its cultural superiority as *messianic* justification for its attempt to hellenize the Christian population of the Ottoman empire: the Greeks, ‘owners’ of ancient culture and masters of the political *anthropotechnique*², are endowed with the mission to tear out their illiterate neighbours from their idyllic, animalistic lives and to intern them into the regime of political life. We can readily understand the structural predetermination of the idyllic myth and the figure of the noble savage from the outset of the Bulgarian national project with recourse to the Girardian model of mimetic desire (Girard 1979). First, many Bulgarian national ideologists, the majority of whom were formed in the Hellenic cultural tradition (Ivan Seliminski, Konstantin Fotinov, Petar Beron, Vasil Aprilov) realize they cannot compete with the Greek project on its own terms, namely the cultural-political world of representation. Of course, Paissy Hilen-darski’s influential *История славяноболгарская (Slavic-Bulgarian History, 1762)* formulates a narrative about the glorious medieval Bulgarian kingdom, which ruled over Greece. It is not surprising, however, that this fiction seems

2 I use the notion of *anthropotechnique* with reference to Peter Sloterdijk’s discussion of humanism (Sloterdijk 1999).

insufficiently convincing for the Bulgarian elite with its Greek background. Instead, the Bulgarian intellectual elite seeks to establish a new regime of signification that praises what is most discredited in the Greek model of national self-representation: the Bulgarian as a ‘noble savage’, who is capable of an idyllic communitarian life amongst the people.

The Peasant as a Figure of the Bulgarian Political Idyll

The idyllic fiction becomes a crucial ideological trope of the Bulgarian National Revival, which finds its embodiment in the *peasant*: naïve, primeval, and morally preserved. In this context the peasant should not be conceived as a social figure. It rather corresponds to the archetypal figure of ‘plastic’ political ideology – the figure of the *worker* (developed from Plato to Heidegger and Jünger). At the same time, in contrast to the worker the peasant remains a figure of organic pre-political life. The idyllic Bulgarian ‘peasant’ reflects a character found in an animalistic utopia or pastoral myth. Of course, this myth is not just the ideological representation of some natural substance; it is also the *creation* of cultural agents – educated philologists, poets and philosophers. In the same way poet-philologists, working in the highly urbanized center of the Hellenic culture – Alexandria, ‘invented’ nature – i.e., the ‘idyllic’ nature (as a cultural construct and consequently, cultural value), so too was the image of the virgin peasant formed. Sophronii Vrachanski and Georgi S. Rakovski, Liuben Karavelov and Hristo Botev, ‘national psychologists’ and national philosophers such as Konstantin Petkanov, Naiden Sheitanov, Ianko Ianev, Marxist sociologists such as Ivan Hadzhiyski, and the new generation of conservative thinkers such as Toncho Zhechev all contributed to the creation of this ‘idyllic myth’. Ivan Hadzhiyski even daringly called it ‘the primeval Bulgarian’. Hadzhiyski undertook a *sociological* study of the *primeval* (sic!) Bulgarian peasant, who lived up to the eve of modernity: as if in the Bulgarian lands the paleolithic period lasted up to the twentieth century.

The Idyllic Double Bind

The construction of the idyllic-political figure of the peasant in the framework of the Bulgarian national ideology is, as I attempted to show, *structurally* inevitable. The paradoxical use of the pastoral myth with ideological intent has the same structure of the *double bind*, which could be found already in Greek tragedy. Tragedy unavoidably produces a fiction of the formless, which represents a radical caesura in the structure of signification, which function is to make possible the fiction of the originary political representation. Similarly, the Bulgarian national project creates the fiction of an appearance *ex nihilo* in order to signify the primary virgin matter. Not by chance the fictive *primal signifiers*, the cultural agents, and the Bulgarian Oedipus are all figures that

signify the transition from formless pre-political animalism to the political form of representation. Such are the favourite legendary figures of the Bulgarian Enlightenment and national romanticism and also later of Bulgarian modernism and anti-modernism – *Boyan the Magician*, the werewolf, and St. Ivan Rilski, the most important Bulgarian saint, who as a hermit from the desert communicates with the wild animals. Paradoxically, it is the person who maintains an intimate relation with the beasts, this hybrid figure of human and animalistic in bare pre-political life or *the hero of resistance against culture, who turns out to be the Bulgarian cultural hero*.

The Bulgarian Oedipus is a Werewolf.

There are good arguments to include the famous ideological figure of the *haidouk*, imposed by Bulgarian romanticism (Georgi S. Rakovski, Liuben Karavelov, Hristo Botev), in the same paradigm. This figure represents the tragic-sacrificial transformation of the pastoral myth. The pastoral image of woods and the Balkan mountains, related to an interest in the folk art of the epoch, gradually acquires a tragic aura. Karavelov's poem *You are beautiful, my woods* is exemplary in that perspective but without doubt the most illustrious expression of this transition is found in the famous 'mythical' scene in Botev's poem *Hadzhi Dimitar*, where wild beasts care for the hero injured in battle.

The transformation of idyllic into tragic myth, or rather the disclosure of the primary interrelation of the two, can be conceived as a deep, universal narrative inscribed in emerging modern Bulgarian literature. For example, in Zaharii Stoianov's *Записки по българските въстания (Notes on the Bulgarian Revolts, vol. I-III, 1884 - 1892)* – one of the paradigmatic texts of Bulgarian literature – this transition is personified in the central autobiographical figure. The protagonist's point of departure is the 'animalistic' life of a shepherd, which constitutes a sphere excluded from cultural-political signification. The narrative, however, draws him into the sphere of political representation. At the same time, the linear structure of the transition is doubled in the entire text of the *Notes* with the oscillation between two poles – doubt and indecisiveness that make from that amusing and chaotic text excellent exemplification of the profound structure of the political. Thus, the *Notes* embody a grey zone between the idyllic and the tragic-sacrificial, pre-political and political, animalistic and representational and at the same time of the difficult constitution of the borders between the described poles that are constantly reversible and exposed to the tendencies of de-formation. I could give as an eloquent example the fact told in the *Notes* that during the time of the revolutionary mobilisation, Philip Totiu, one of the national-romantic symbols of the (self)sacrificial, tragic resistance, a heteronym of Hadzhi Dimitar and the Karadzha praised by Botev, devotes himself to nothing other than preparation

of a robbery of a hospice. In other words, he remains bound to the romantic vision of the 'free' brigand's existence devoid of political character.

Conversely, an emblematic case of regression from political to animalistic (and in that case it is not about the *domesticated*-idyllic version, the 'cultural' version of the animalistic but namely about the bestial, *wild* animalistic) is found in Stoianov's account of the so-called *Blood-signed letter*, with which Todor Kableshkov, a leader of the revolutionary conspiracy, declares the start of the 'April insurrection' of 1876.³ The *blood-signed letter* sparked a well-known historical and ideological debate concerning whether it is written with the blood of the rebels or of a killed Turkish soldier. The question of factual truth is not central here. Instead, what concerns us is that the political myth reveals unconscious structures of the political. Regardless whose blood is used to write the letter and whether blood was used at all, the figure of the *blood-signed letter* reflects the importance of the sacrificial tragic logic. In the blood-signed letter we witness the fictional construction of the orgiastic ecstasy of uncontrollable blood violence. Yet as I have tried to show in my study of the *double bind* inscribed in Georges Bataille's thought on community (Manchev 2003), the *excess* is already inscribed in the representational order. Sacrifice is a spectacle. Self-sacrifice is inscribed into the sacrificial tragic logic no less than sacrifice itself; indeed, it is its logical end. Even if the *blood-signed letter* was written with Bulgarian blood, it already is inscribed in the order of sacrificial signification.

Toncho Zhechev's *Odysseus Myth* between Tragedy and Idyll

In this 'longue durée' perspective, the writings of cultural historian Toncho Zhechev are of particular interest. Zhechev was a central ideological figure over the last two decades in Bulgaria. Across the political spectrum, his work is contentious. Zhechev's vision of community is found best in his famous essay *Митът за Одуцей* (*Odysseus Myth*, 1984). In the *Odysseus Myth*, Zhechev argues that Odysseus reflects a legitimizing figure in the Bulgarian national tradition. This conservative text provoked sharp reaction from representatives of Bulgarian structuralism, mostly literary scholars. Zhechev's text was undoubtedly related to the ideological crisis of the epoch, whose symptoms were Liudmila Zhivkova's cultural politics and the imposition of the *Thracian myth*. As in other communist countries of the time, the conscious attempt to reactivate old communitarian national myths sought to compensate and counteract the legitimacy crisis of the communist regimes and their imposed social models. The so-called Thracian myth represents an attempt to rethink the origins of the Bulgarian nation. At first glance, it championed a tendency

3 I take this example as a typological case and cultural myth rather than simply as a textual scene, regardless of the fact that the case owes to great extent its mythological halo precisely to that scenic representation in Stoianov's *Notes*.

towards de-europeanization, which is seen also in the symptomatic political opening towards countries from the Non-Aligned Movement and predominantly the Far East). But in fact, it aimed, more or less consciously, to reconstruct Bulgarian national identity as central to European identity. Bulgarian (or Thraco-Bulgarian) culture was to be portrayed as a fostering ground for the whole of European civilization. Ancient Thrace was the homeland of Dionysos, and Bulgaria was to become the legitimate historical heir of Dionysian culture, that *Other* of Greece or the *other Greece* itself.

In this context, Zhechev's choice of Odysseus is natural and, in a sense, unavoidable. Paradoxically perhaps, Zhechev solicits support from one of the West's archetypal figures to resist the western *eidōs*. In Odysseus, he personifies his nostalgic call to the autochthonic, to the *land* in the Heideggerian sense. How can we explain this paradox? Are not Thracian gods and heroes – Dionysos and Orpheus, for instance – more suitable for a national ideology? It is worth noting that in *The Conversation Continues*, Tzvetan Stoianov, a friend of Zhechev's and significant intellectual of the period, already made use of Dionysos. In his remarkable dialogue, Stoianov speaks about the Dionysian complex of the Bulgarians, but in a negative way. Stoianov's critical discussion of the Dionysian myth in Bulgaria complicated matters for Zhechev. Nevertheless, Dionysos remains an ideal figure for national exotic use – he is the god with a chthonic aureole, who opposes *eidōs* as a formative power. Dionysos is the god of excess and formlessness, who personifies the resistance of matter. Hypnotically attracted by regressive imagery of the formless, such as warmth, blood and womb, Zhechev still tries to resist with the all his ideological energy the *ek-stasis* or transgression of boundaries. The new hero should not question the stability of existing borders, in other words, the body of the motherland.

Against this backdrop, Zhechev must impose a limit on the economy of the sacrificial, with all its ecstatic, pathetic, sacrificial excesses. It must be attenuated or domesticated in its regional being. In Zhechev's writings, we find neither Hristo Botev's, nor Heidegger's excess. Yet while not mimicking Heidegger's gestures of *opening* or *unveiling*, Zhechev's choice of Odysseus as hero has Heideggerian implications. Zhechev does not view Odysseus as the archetypal hero of voyage, of wandering through the archipelago, e.g. Odysseus as nomad. Instead, Zhechev thinks of him as of an archetypal figure of return: Ithaca, according to his own words, is more important than Troy. This privileging of the epistroph – of return over departure, is also typical for the late Heidegger. If we recall Hegel's phrase from *The History of Philosophy*, according to which man is at home in Spirit, he feels in Spirit as in a homeland, we could say that Odysseus represents the archi-type of the European subject.⁴

4 Similarly, Levinas interprets Odysseus as a paradigmatic example of the Occidental

Zhechev's choice of Odysseus is also motivated by structural reasons. First, Odysseus is not simply the archetypal figure of the adventurer. Four crucial characteristics of man can be found in Odysseus. Apart from the Adventurer, Odysseus is also identified with the Worker, the Warrior and the Husband – three figures which legitimate not only the national but also the political in general. Common to all three figures is *productivity*. From this point of view, the Adventurer can be seen as subordinate to the Warrior – he is an incarnation of its productive side and bearer of the Warrior's value: Odysseus is the *surviving* Warrior, unlike most of the heroes from the Trojan pantheon, and his adventures are the trajectory of survival. The Warrior is the figure who attains transcendental sacrality, to the extent the war is considered to be from antiquity until the 20th century as an extra-ordinary world, as opposed to the profane order of peace. In war we discover the *double bind* of sacrificial violence. On the one hand, war is a space of limitless excess related to the order of the divine; and, on the other hand, it forms in its bloody orgy the body of the community. The idea of this normative, initiating role of orgy is implied in Freud and Girard as well as in Roger Caillois and Alfred Baeumler. This normative role allows *war* to be taken as a supreme instrument in the ideology of the state, as its *bloody* and *fiery* baptism.

The Warrior is thus he, who returns from transcendence. Contact with divine violence is a baptism for the subject of the *plastic art* of politics. It is its constitutive condition. Undoubtedly, this is one of the preconditions for Zhechev to identify the return of Odysseus as creative act, as *creation*: “The return of Odysseus is creative and not completely predetermined. Even when the prophet Tiresius predicts the journey of Odysseus to Ithaka, he leaves for him the freedom of movement and many ‘ifs’, which must be decided with wisdom and freedom” (Zhechev 276). Here, the return is a final moment in a transition, which inverts the messianic transition of Christ: it ends with the incarnation of the transcendent in the immanent and not with the resurrection and closing of the transcendent divinity. In this sense, the sacred community is the carrier of a particular and not a universal sacrality.

At the same time, *return-as-creation* is related to the return to matter subjected to form. It presupposes that one must discard the Warrior's armour and don the everyday wear of the Worker. It signifies a return to the banality of productive labour. In the tradition of the Bulgarian national-idyllic ideology, Zhechev interprets the Worker as a Peasant. Odysseus is first of all a peasant-farmer. Zhechev quotes a scene from the *Odyssey*, in which – Odysseus is excited at the sight of a ripened field. Here, Zhechev's myth is not simply pastoral, idyllic or bucolic but also *georgic*. It transcends the idyllic archetype of the Bulgarian national ideology, in which the sublime, the aesthetic and the tragic-idyllic space of the mountain and the woods, the space of the shep-

subject, or of the subject as Occident (Levinas 1999).

herd-rebel, the *haidouk*, is opposed to the profane space of the slave-peasant-farmer. Zhechev's idyll is *an idyll of the idyll* and in that it is – at least at first sight – opposed to the tragic-messianic threads woven in the texture of Bulgarian national-idyllic myth. The return of Odysseus, as a return to the soil and labour, is creation. The circle of his life's journey takes him out of the state of animalistic primacy, of the fusion with the immanence of the *land*, only to return to this *world* as a transcendent scene of creative labour. The apparent pastoral bestiality (which we discover in the description of love, where initially human love is made identical to the animal one) vanishes in the cultural-political, humanistic *anthropotechnique: the return creates the human* (i.e. the escape from immanence in the transcendence of adventure and the return from it to the immanence): “But only the human is condemned to love after breaking the natural bond and even in absence of any natural bond or necessity. Generated from the urge and reared in the womb, the human need of love begins *its odyssey* already as *a need of the soul and the spirit and elevates itself to divine heights in order to transform the urge and the womb*. Many people *remain on the natural and animalistic level of love*. And when they succeed to preserve their nature as in the old patriarchal life there is *order and purity, simple morality and soul, but not spirit*. Others with a weak desire and unmoved by the passion of the soul are born directly as angels – but cold and without gender. Alien to sin and holiness, they appear *as if they came directly from Heaven without having passed through the blazes of life*. Here too, *the problem of Odysseus is not existent*.” (Zhechev 279-280. Italics mine, B.M.) Consequently, the Return *makes* the Spirit, i.e. the human. The *idyllic origin* is not a primary value in itself but only a valuable object of return, a place for the solution of a “problem”, which Odysseus confronts. The morals of the *idyllic topos* turn out to be insufficient for a definition of the human. This remains true, despite the fact that Zhechev retains the idyllic as a key concept in the ideological opposition of exotic idyllic culture to the inauthentic culture of modernity. In the *Odysseus Myth*, Zhechev writes, for instance, that “the Bulgarian peasant hides the treasures of the people's moral culture of this Eol's island” (Zhechev 265). Morality reflects a stage in the elevation of the Spirit – a substantial determinant of the human, but not the *very* Spirit. The human for Zhechev is in the first place Spirit, and not the organic life of man, which is linked to nature and one's body. Departure from this idyllic origin is necessary for the *becoming* of man. In more general terms, where there is no Spirit as becoming, i.e. as the development of human *substance*, we cannot speak of identity, of the subject – individual or collective, i.e. community. Zhechev formulates these ideas while discussing the socialisation of love. And this is not accidental. Odysseus' identity as a husband is not just a ‘natural’ function of man, but it also has a *political* function. Odysseus the husband is also someone who generates, creates. The fertilising power of Odysseus as a creator-husband is inseparable from his identity as a farmer with generative powers, who according to Zhechev longs to ‘possess’ the fat field

of the Cyclops. Toncho Zhechev's idyllic vision reveals the fictional nature of its idyllic exoticism in a universal ideological-political structure that subordinates that idyll to the transcendent imperative of political anthropotechnique. Zhechev's idyllic myth is *humanistic* and not *animalistic*. Its idyllic imagery and pastoral stage are invoked to mute the messianic-tragic logic of *rupture* through idyllic bonding. Hence, Zhechev's conservative vision remains within the bounds of the Bulgarian national project and is structurally determined by its coherent ideological deployment: in its depths it does not even contradict the messianic visions of Bulgarian modernism and the Bulgarian avant-garde. Just as tragic heroes arrive to defend the motherland from the Dionyssian madness (according to Alfred Baeumler, one of the important figures of the so-called Conservative Revolution), so too is Odysseus an anti-Dionyssian hero, who embodies temperance⁵ and rationality (we could continue the interpretation of Zhechev's ideologeme, relating its two key components reason and measure to its ancient Greek matrices: *logos* and *nomos*). Odysseus is the hero of the cultural-political order, who is called on to fight the chthonic bestial monstrosity no less than Oedipus: "In a sense all Odysseus' feats can be understood and conceived as the human struggle for measure, and as war against the extraordinary, the monstrous, hypertrophied in one or another way, against the inhuman in the human, against the Cyclops and the Cyclopean in us. ... All the episodes of the poem can be seen as Odysseus' titanic struggle for propagation and the establishment of human measure, as a victory or tragic defeat of cultivated temperance in the chaos and disgrace of the world, as a struggle against excess and savage extremism, and against the spoiling of those powers in man, which he knows not yet how to cultivate. ... Those without temperance self-mastery, an understanding of play, or the capacity to restrain one's extraordinary power, are unworthy and detestable for the Gods. They do not deserve their own return and never will achieve it." (Zhechev 300-301).

In his proximity to the land, Odysseus is a farmer and shepherd, who does not remain trapped in pre-cultural immanence: he is *shepherd of being* in Heidegger's sense, he *trans-cends* immanence. The pastoral-idyllic existence – the existence of the peasant retro-utopia – found in Zhechev's regressive myth is no less a political-cultural construct than Heidegger's pastoral figure

5 The Bulgarian word 'умереност' [temperance] combines 'ум' [reason] and 'мяра' [measure]. Zhechev plays with this etymological potential of the word. See the key chapter "Odyssey as an Apology of the Temperance": "Two ingredients are related in a beautiful and inseparable way in temperance – Reason and Measure. Indeed, they are joined in a such way that the last consonant of the first word – M – is the first of the second one, and nothing could ever break their alliance. In that way the Bulgarian language found an ideal expression, a perfect form to mirror the nature and the soul of the people, the ancient ideal for himself." (Zhechev 301). One thing is certain: the Bulgarian people are already identified with Odysseus who travels towards himself. There could not be a clearer answer why Zhechev prefers the figure of Odysseus over Dionysos as legitimising figure of his idyllic national-humanistic myth. Odysseus is antipode of Dionysos in that he is an 'improved', dynamic version of Apollo.

of being. Zhechev's idyll is not opposed to culture; it is opposed to *false* culture. Furthermore, Zhechev's idyllic myth is a depiction of authentic culture, whereas "the loose mythology of the present" is a symptom of cultural decline (Zhechev 283). This is the symptomatic lexical register of a phrase from *Смъртта на лебеда* [*The Death of the Swan*]: "Indeed, there is a contemporary frenzy, the barbarism predicted by Vico is coming!" (Zhechev 152). The coming of what Vico calls a "third barbarism" is a constant theme in Zhechev (see also the *Odysseus Myth* 263). The *lack of human self-restraint* and *bestialisation* of man are symptoms of regress, and are related to the transgressive character of the animal. In Zhechev, idyllic nature, related to "village mud" (Zhechev 264) and the village as an uneven *idyllic polis* or place where the universal values of the human community and culture are realized, is opposed to animal bestiality. Zhechev's particular version of this opposition between nature and culture is a consequence of the idyllic *double bind*. His project offers a political anthropotechnique for preservation of the natural, or, better, of the *natural-human*. In other words, Zhechev seeks to protect *the human as a culture* by opposing the human to the *culture as inhuman*.

Odysseus against Death: Tragedy and/or Idyll

In conclusion, Odysseus is not simply a figure of the resistance against the *eidōs* of the universal; he represents resistance against the 'false pretender' of universality. As such, Odysseus signifies the return to authentic immanence – to the native that embodies universality. This immanence involves creative, *transcending* labour – the *poiesis*, which forms 'the universal values.' The journey, as well as the war – are *labour* – labour on man, on the *de-monstration*, or the *de-monstrification* of the human (i.e. Odysseus from the very beginning of his wandering is an agent of the humanization and the anthropotechnique). The idyllic character of the heroic, cultural-political, and consequently messianic myth about Odysseus is hidden in its end: Odysseus himself does not turn out to be a monster, in contrast to Oedipus – *more monstrous than man*⁶. In other words, in Zhechev's Odysseus we discover a pastoral *double bind*, different from the tragic *double bind* of Oedipus: this is the *double bind* of the movement. We could formulate it in the following way: if the end is identical to the starting point, if it is qualitatively the same, then the movement, the union of departure and return has a completely tautological nature, as it is hinted also by the rejection of time and historicity in Zhechev.

Odysseus is returning not to the openness, but to the idyllic womb-tomb. Inside the imperative of the creative figuration and the immanentisation of the

6 Or, according to the edition of Sir Richard Jebb 'Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man.' (*Antigone*, verses 332-333), although the better translation of the Greek *deinos* is *monstrous*).

sacred, which sets Odysseus in motion as a political hero, sleeps the worm of a regressive logic, which aims at the return to the womb, the womb as supreme non-place, as a supreme natural-idyllic, counter-political topos, a place of intimacy before subjectivity, before the coming out and the exposition to the open, without which the political being remains unthinkable. The return of Odysseus is a return to the known, which for Zhechev constitutes death. Undoubtedly, the figure of the death-as-the known is an attempt to domesticate the ecstatic messianic sacrificiality, it is an idyllic domestication of death: “The most remote, risky and dangerous and glorious human journey will be not to the Golden Fleece, to the Island of the Blessed, to the Golden Age, or to the New World, but to the victory over death, the amazing tour that will connect birth and death in an eternal life, to the perichoresis, in which God becomes human, in order to allow to the human to become God” (Zhechev 259). Thus, through the individualistic and essentially modern utopia for the achievement of immortality, Zhechev implies a utopia for community, related to the overcoming of the founding sacrificial violence.

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