The following publication presents part of the author’s research carried out under the Advanced Academia Programme of the Centre for Advanced Study Sofia. This programme is supported by the America for Bulgaria Foundation, Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft and the Fritz Thyssen Foundation.
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MIMICRY GAMES, OR THE CREATION OF THE LITERARY CANON AS ART: FICTITIOUS ANTHOLOGIES IN (POST)MODERN BULGARIAN LITERATURE

1. FICTITIOUS ANTHOLOGIES, LITERARY MYSTIFICATION AND THE LITERARY CANON

In 1971, the Polish author Stanislav Lem published his book A Perfect Vacuum (Polish: Doskonała próżnia, not translated into Bulgarian), an anthology of reviews of nonexistent books. The collection presents abstracts and interpretations of 16 imaginary books and – in a typical gesture of literary mise en abyme – one real book: itself. The feeling of narrative vertigo that results from such literary play is among the greatest pleasures of world literature, as expressed prototypically in the works of Jorge Luis Borges, who fills his fictitious libraries with fake encyclopaedias.

Bulgarian literature has its specific share in this tradition of literary mystification, starting with the enormous effort of the Veda Slovena. This anthology was compiled and published in the late 19th century by the Bosnian Serb Stefan Verkovich, but was in fact written by the Bulgarian teacher, Ivan Gologanov, in order to prove the existence of ‘authentic’ Bulgarian folk songs and folklore (Hranova/Kiossev, 2007).1 If its intentions are thus more politically motivated, it nevertheless retains its aesthetic power and fascination, as did the Works of Ossian, the famous literary forgery by the Scottish poet James MacPherson. Or, to name another prominent example from the region, the Königinhof manuscript (Rukopis královédvorský), compiled presumably by Bohemian philologist Václav Hanka in 1817 and intended to prove the existence of ancient Czech culture and literature.2 The aesthetic properties specifically of the Veda Slovena have been highlighted by Bulgaria’s ‘modern conceptualist’, Pencho Slaveykov, who admired the effort by Verkovich and Gologanov, “as it is no trifle to write 100,000 verses in order to deceive the world and yourself” (“защото не е шега да напишеш стотина хиляди стихове с цел да излъжеш света и себе си”, Slaveykov, Balgarska narodna pesen: 89). Slaveykov in consequence appropriated the principle of literary forgery for his own needs, namely to prove the existence not of a literary past, but the possibility of a liter-

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1 For a discussion of its fake character see Hristozova (2012).
2 For the political functioning of such literary-historical forgeries in Central and South-Eastern Europe and Bulgaria specifically, see Mishkova (2011), Trenscényi (2011).
ary present, of a modern Bulgarian literature. His fake anthology *On the Isle of the Blessed* (Na Ostrova na blazenite, 1910) is probably the most famous follow-up to the *Veda Slovena* and retains its vertigo effect to this day, having triggered a number of artistic remakes in the 1990s.

The specific case of the Bulgarian mystifying or fake anthology must be examined within the context of an overall tendency of anthologization, regarded as typical for Bulgarian literature of the late 19th and the 20th centuries (Kurtasheva, 2012; Stavrev, 2003; Tihanov, 1998; Trendafilov, 1998). The fundamental anthological projects of the early epoch were initiated by charismatic poets in individual or collective ‘authorship’ (Dimcho Debelyanov, Geo Milev, Pencho Slaveykov, Teodor Trajanov). All of these anthological projects, while differing in their poetic conception, are characterized by the desire, as well as the necessity, to create and to some extent invent a new literary tradition. In light of this tendency, Vladimir Trendafilov even distinguishes an “anthological mode of existence” in Bulgarian literature (1998: 188). Galin Tihanov interprets this phenomenon as the result of synchronous processes of internal canonization (the constitution of a national literature) and external canonization (the incorporation into world literature; 1998, 150ff).

Bilyana Kurtasheva introduces the idea of an anthological threshold in Bulgarian literature, referring to the point in time in 1910-11 when anthological production exploded (2012). During this time, the genre of the anthology was taking shape, only to be deconstructed at the very moment of its nascence. Svetlozar Igov (2006) characterizes the anthological projects of the era as a specific artistic phenomenon of intrinsic value that characterized Bulgarian literature during the period of its self-discovery. In post-communist Bulgaria, as Ani Burova (2003) has argued, the anthological production of modernity serves as a literary-historical matrix for the processes of aesthetic reorientation that occur between deconstructing/reclaiming a national literary heritage, on the one hand, and integration into the – once again transnational – contexts of post-modernity, on the other. It should be noted in this context that the vertigo effect mentioned earlier led to these anthologies being not only analysed but also re-staged in new mystifying endeavours. Thus the performative potential of the texts is still unbroken.

In line with this sketch of current research, I assume that the astounding popularity of the otherwise somewhat ‘dry’ meta-genre of the anthology in Bulgarian literature is due to the specific dynamics of the creation of a literary canon. The lack – real or imagined – of a national literary heritage, a consequence of centuries of foreign, ‘Ottoman,’ ‘Western’ or ‘Soviet’ domination, led to a characteristic instability of the Bulgarian canon. As a consequence, discussions on its (im-)possibilities flared up regularly in the literary community and ‘foreign’ models were imported in order to ‘fill the gaps’ (see Gesemann, 1989; K’osev, 1998; Lauer, 1989; Tihanov, 1998: 150). The macro-genre of the anthology (and the chrestomathy) as

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3 See as well the contributions in Antov; Dimitrova; Gospodinov (2012), which unfortunately could not be taken into account in detail for the argumentation of this article.
collections of model texts is at the same time effect and agent of such canonization processes; these anthologies reflect an established canon and help to shape and reproduce it (Trendafilov, 1998).

Roughly two types of anthologies can be distinguished: the national anthology, which compiles a best-of selection of samples of national literature, and the translation anthology, which gives the reader a comprehensive overview of a foreign literature (Essmann, 1992; Gulya, 1994). While the former serves to construct or stabilize the internal national canon, the latter functions as an agent for the perpetuation of external canons of world literature (Kurtasheva, 2009). In short, the anthology in its canonical functioning is related to representativeness, authority, trustworthiness. Therefore, in almost all of its characteristics and intentions, the anthology stands in opposition to the issues and assets of mystification, which revolve around playing, deceit, forgery, the destabilization of established patterns of reception, etc. As a result, fake anthologies seem to be both a very efficient instrument for playing with and (de)stabilizing a literary canon, as well as the most exciting one.

Against this background, my study of fictitious anthologies in Bulgarian literature is inspired by the following questions arising from my readings of the ‘original’ On the Isle of the Blessed by Pencho Slaveykov and its ‘copies’ (see Schmidt, 2013):

- Does a specific ‘anthological text’ exist in the Bulgarian literature of the late 19th and 20th century and, if so, how can its emergence and ongoing popularity be explained? Under the term ‘anthological text’, I subsume the intertwining of anthological projects that relate to each other and contribute to an overarching structure of symbolic meaning and aesthetic functioning.

- What can a comparative perspective add to the analysis of such a subsumed ‘anthological text’ of Bulgarian literature in the 20th century? And vice versa: What can the Bulgarian case add to the understanding of literary canon and literary mystification in the field of comparative studies?

- Does post-colonial theory and terminology (still) offer an appropriate theoretical and terminological approach for explaining problems of the construction and deconstruction of the literary canon as a phenomenon of national and aesthetic significance?

2. THE ‘ORIGINAL’: PENCHO SLAVEYKOV’S ON THE ISLE OF THE BLESSED

The enthusiastic reaction of Peyo Yavorov, perhaps Bulgaria’s most notable Symbolist writer and a member of the famous literary circle The Thought (Misal), to the publication of The Isle of the Blessed by Pencho Slaveykov (1965, 267) is well known and often cited:
“I look at ‘The Isle...’ and I get the feeling of something obtained against time and place. I open it and it seems to me that our literature has just begun today. I am caught by the crazy wish to climb on the Eiffel Tower and to show it to the whole of Europe.”

“Гледам ‘На Острова...’ и изпитвам чувство за нещо извършено въпреки времето и мястото. Разгръщам я и ми се струва, че нашата литература почва от днес. Едно лудо желание ме тласка да се кача на ‘Айфел’ и да я покажа оттам на цяла Европа.”

Almost exactly one hundred years after Yarovov’s statement, Europe has still not yet seen The Isle. Despite its prominent status within Bulgarian literature and its great potential for comparative analysis, the text has not yet, at least to my knowledge, been translated into any of the ‘great’ European languages, neither into German, nor into English or French. While the work of other prominent Bulgarian modernist writers such as Peyo Yavorov, Geo Milev or Atanas Dalchev is represented more or less comprehensively in German translation, the translated Slaveykov exists – ironically – mostly in anthological form (Perlen bulgarischer Poesie, 2008; San za shtastie, 2008).

There are reasons, of course, why Pencho Slaveykov and specifically his anthological project are not as present in translation, and thus in the European cultural memory. Unlike its famous predecessor, the Veda Slovena, which has been even more prominent abroad than in Bulgaria itself (Mishkova, 2011: 238), The Isle as a playful intellectual endeavour could not attract the attention of foreign readers and scholars by means of folkloristic exoticism. Furthermore, On the Isle of the Blessed, while among the most interpreted texts of Bulgarian modernist literature, is an ‘impossible’ book, as Orlin Spasov has put it, a book that due to its nature as a conceptual artistic project cannot be read, but only re-written (Spasov, 1994: 149). And hence is not easily integrated into a foreign reading experience. Within the Bulgarian context, a consequence of The Isle as a writerly text in the sense of Roland Barthes (texte scriptible) is the huge amount of commentary that overshadows the original. Slaveykov as an early conceptalist foresaw this development and anticipated it in one of the fake biographies attributed to his invented poets, Spiro Godina, whose book Amaneti had “twenty times more commentary than the text itself” (“двацет пъти повече бележки от самия текст”, Slaveykov, Na ostrova: 35).

While it is thus impossible to summarize in brief the large amount of research done, I will sketch the main characteristics of the anthology and mention some of the most important points that are relevant for my own further argument.

4 All translations, if not indicated otherwise, are mine. They fulfil the pragmatic purpose of serving theoretical analysis and do not take into account the poetic characteristics of the given text, H.S.
5 On the specific popularity of the Isle among the further works of Slaveykov see for example Danova (2012) and Yanakieva (2011, 5).
6 For a comprehensive list of books and scholarly articles until the year 2003, see for example the multimedia list of bibliographical references (Multimeden bibliografski ukazatel), released by the Public Library “Pencho Slaveykov” in Varna. http://www.libvar.bg/publications/s abuseykov/index.html (accessed 8 May 2012).
In his anthology Slaveykov presents 19 poets, including two women, who allegedly represent a foreign literature. The selected works cover the most eminent genres of contemporary poetry, ranging from songs and ballads to sonnets and philosophical aphorism. All of the poetic texts, as well as the biographies of the invented poets, were written by Slaveykov himself. The anthology is provided with a preface that positions Slaveykov as the editor and translator of the volume (this stratum of the text will be referred to as the macro-narrative in the following section). The invented biographies themselves offer, aside from pseudo-bibliographical information, a detailed picture of the imaginary Island, with its landscapes and people, its dwellings and cultural institutions (this stratum will be referred to as the micro-narrative). The research highlights the following main functions of the anthology:

– The Isle constructs a vision of a literary canon that is simultaneously personal and national, individual and collective, a critical assessment of the past and a positive vision of the future (Danova, 2012; Tihanov, 1998);

– The Isle plays with different strata of intertextuality, authorship, originality and imitation, on the level of the individual work as well as aesthetic theory as a whole (Spasov, 1994);

– The Isle is concerned with the relationship between the Self and the Other, as it constructs Bulgarian literature as a foreign literature that is presented in translation. The relationship between ‘real’ Bulgaria and the imagined Isle is modelled in analogy to the normative opposition of Western Europe and ‘the Balkans’. The Isle is thus a reaction to and a reflection of the geopolitical and geopoetic discourses of the time (Alipieva, 2002; Tihanov, 2002). These normative discussions are transferred from a real into an imaginary space.

It is thus tempting to interpret the anthological project and its geopoetics within the overall framework of post-colonialism and its applications to the countries and cultures of the Balkans. The key words of these processes are ‘narrative’ or ‘imaginative colonialism/imperialism’, processes of ‘stigmatization’ and ‘self-stigmatization’ or ‘self-colonizing cultures’, the latter term introduced by Aleksandar K’osev and used in the following sense (1998: 14; emphasis as in the original):

“How can the fact be explained, that in these specific cultures not only is there lacking any kind of resistance against the Foreign (otherwise inevitable in cases of forced colonization [...]!), but that the appropriation of the foreign models is even characterized by an attitude of longing, love, passion?”

“Как може да бъде обяснен фактът, че при тези особени култури не само

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7 Sirma Danova is currently exploring this facet of The Isle within the broader context of Slaveykov’s textual universe from the point of view of auto-textuality. For a theoretical framework of auto-textuality and some applications to Bulgarian literature, see Kolarov (2009).

8 It should be noted that the self-stigmatization tropes of Slaveykov as well as of his fellow modernizers can be interpreted in a less essentialist manner as well, as part of a didactically oriented rhetorical practice, employed in order to stimulate a modernizing vigour among the compatriots. I am indebted to Diana Mishkova for this thought.
The key figures of such theoretical endeavours are historians and intellectuals such as Maria Todorova (1997), Vesna Goldsworthy (1998), and Aleksandr Kiossev (1997, 1998). In the following, I will focus in more detail on one specific aspect of the supposedly post-colonial geopoetics, namely, the Isle as a mimicked translation anthology.

2.1 THE ISLE OF THE BLESSED AS MIMICKED TRANSLATION ANTHOLOGY

Translation is the main filter for the exchange between a national literature and a foreign literature or world literature (Koschmal, 1995). In consequence, translation anthologies in particular ensure the existence of ‘world literature’ (Essmann, 1992; Essmann/Schönig, 1996; Frank, 1994; Frank/Essmann, 1990). Most readers form a picture of a certain foreign literature through translation anthologies. This is specifically the case for Bulgaria, which, due to the compression of its literary evolution in the periods of the National Revival and Post-Renaissance, relies heavily on the import of foreign literary patterns and genres precisely through anthologies. Slaveykov directly contributed to the genre with his translation anthology German Poets. His Nemski poeti, published in 1911, can be seen as the twin anthology to The Isle of the Blessed, two books that conceptually interact with one another (Danova, 2012; Ivanov, 1998; Kurtasheva, 2012).

The fake anthology The Isle is already positioned through its parergonal and para-textual framing – that is, the title, the subtitle, the author’s index, the preface – as a translated work. This poses a logical problem for the empirical author Slaveykov, who compiled the collection from his own works and then ascribed them to the fictitious poets he invented. Some of these works had already been published and thus were known to the public under Slaveykov’s own name. How to explain now that the same texts were appearing once again in an anthology, but this time as works from foreign authors and with Slaveykov as their translator? Slaveykov uses a trick in order to sustain the validity of his construction. He explains to the reader that he cheated in his early publications by illegally ascribing the texts of other, foreign authors to himself. Now he aims to make up for this betrayal by officially stating their authorship and giving them back their original author’s rights (“авторство възстановено”, Slaveykov, Na Ostrova: 7). However, if we leave the innerfictional level of the narrative for a moment, we see that Slaveykov cites – or should we say, plagiarises – himself by re-publishing his own works in

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9 For a critical perspective on the prerogatives of post-colonial theory in their application to ‘the Balkans’ see Mishkova (2007), Tihanov (2013) as well as my own conclusions in part 7 of this article.
a new context, in a new frame. He is playing a vertigo game with his own texts and strategies.

Problems of translation are mentioned throughout the whole compilation, namely in the invented authors’ biographies (that is, on the level of the micro-narrative). Imagined (im)possibilities of translation define the overall structure of the published book and the selection of the distinct texts. To give one example: The poems of Ralin Stubel, an eremite-poet living in solitude in nature, appear to Slaveykov as almost untranslatable (“extraordinarily distressful for translation” / “извънредно мъчни за превод”; Slaveykov, Na Ostrova: 222). Despite this, Slaveykov, as the empiric author and Stubel’s fictitious translator in one person, deems his own renditions good enough to give the reader an authentic impression of Stubel’s poetics, to make him familiar with the poet’s astonishing, almost pictorial vision as a lyrical Turner. Slaveykov continues by saying that the formal subtleties of Stubel’s cycle of poems, Rhapsodies of the Balkans (Rapsodiite na Balkana), surpass his translational talents at the moment and have thus not been included in the current collection. Still, he mentions that he hopes to improve his skills in the future in order to compensate for this deficiency (ibid.). As Stubel’s Rhapsodies of the Balkans stand within Slaveykov’s intertextual – or rather autotextual – universe for Slaveykov’s own epical poem Song of Blood (Karvava pesen), the poet imagines translating himself. In a more abstract sense, he ‘stages’ the inherent problems that the so-called smaller nations or languages encounter vis-à-vis their inscription into a global literary context.

2.2 TRANSLATIONAL PLAGIARISM AS POST-COLONIAL MIMICRY

But Slaveykov also returns to the more general, theoretically and ethically thrilling problem of ‘translational plagiarism’, that is, the appropriation of symbolic capital by means of an unmarked, unauthorized translation. On the macro-level of the narrative, in the preface, Slaveykov accuses himself, as we have seen, of such translational plagiarism. He returns to the topic at the micro-level of his fictional narrative, namely in the invented biography of Velko Meruda, where this activity is referred to more expressively with the term dzhebchilak = ‘pick pocketing’. Slaveykov accuses not only the fictional Meruda of this kind of literary robbery, for allegedly ‘stealing’ some poems from Italian writers, but also his historic opponent Ivan Vazov (Slaveykov, Na Ostrova: 43-44):

“This is a question that might be of interest only to a few; but the interesting point is that even our poetry is capable of controlling foreign poetries and Mr. Vazov, as in many other ways, presents here once again the best material for such a control. If the point would be only to borrow topics and to rework them in a more or less independent manner […], the question of control would be irrelevant, would be only of literary-historical interest. But here we have pure translations, and given that they are hidden we have to do, in other words, with
pure pickpocketing. The loan of topics from a foreign bank for one's own operations is something not only not forbidden, but actively encouraged by our civil and artistic laws, as has been proved by such legislators as Sophocles, Shakespeare, Goethe, Praxiteles, Raphael and in general every artist who has taken in order to return the loan with a huge kickback. [...]  

Maybe the sonnets by Meruda are no originals, but their being non-originals is not the question, rather – as they are nice – they deserve the effort of being translated. The question of originality is literary-historical, bookish, dead, but their beauty is alive."

“То е въпрос, който малцина може да интересува; но интересното е, че дори нашата поезия може да контролира чуждите, и г. Вазов, както в много други неща, и тук дава най-добър материал за такъв контрол. Ако тук работата беше за заемане теми и тяхната малко или много самостоятелна обработка […], то въпроса за контрол би бил съвсем лишен, би бил чисто историко-литературен. Но тук вече имаме чист превод, и скриване това, т.е. чист джебчилък. Заемане теми е заем от чужда банка за свои операции, нещо не само незапъречвано, а и поощрявано от гражданските и художествени закони, както това са доказали законоведци като Софокл, Шекспир, Гете, Праксител, Рафаел и всякой въобще художник, който заема, за да възвърне заетото с грамадни лихви. […]  

Може би и сонетите на Меруда да не са оригинални поне въпрос не е ставало за тяхната неоригиналност - но, мисля, като хубави, струва си трудът за превода им. Въпросът за оригиналност е историко-литературен, книжен, мъртъв, а хубостта им е жива.”

In today’s times of acute financial crisis, when loans are not being returned and when foreign banks are on the verge of collapse, not to mention huge kickbacks being obtained by a very few, this kind of economically grounded intertextuality has an almost nostalgic flair. Literature, one could extrapolate from Slaveykov to our times, remains the only reliable currency of exchange in a European culture shaken by financial crisis. Or we could turn the argument upside down: namely, by claiming that Slaveykov’s metaphor reflects the extent to which literature itself is affected – positively or negatively – by the pervasive logic of the capitalist exchange of goods and services.10

What interests me specifically, though, concerning Slaveykov’s treatment of translational plagiarism and dzhebchilak, is the idea of controlling the Other through imitation. At first glance, the idea of dominating foreign influences by replicating seems bewildering. One could assume that Slaveykov is playing one of his favourite jokes here by adopting in the fictitious biography a position that he elsewhere

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10 For the usage of economic metaphors in literary history see Kiossev (2004).
rejects (Angelov, 2004). I would nevertheless like, at least for a moment, to assume that the given citation is more than incidental and opens up a new horizon for the analysis of the text.

Towards that end, I would like to use Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, understood by him in the overall framework of post-colonial studies as a double-edged strategy or process tying together colonizers and colonized (Bhabha, 1994). Initiated in a top-down fashion, mimicry is used by the colonizing subject as a strategy for assimilating the native(s). Mimicry in this sense does not produce, but merely simulates identity, which results in strategies and operations of disguise and masquerade by the colonized. One might in this context think of the almost legendary description of Bay Ganyu, the famous hero of Aleko Konstantinov’s novel (1895) of the same name (Konstantinov, 1974: 7; 2010: 15, translation Viktor A. Friedman; see as well Beyer, 1999):

“They helped Bai Ganyo slough off his heavy, felt Turkish cloak, he donned a nice Belgian frock coat, and everyone said that Bai Ganyo had become a real European.”

“Помогнаха на бай Ганя да смъкне от плещите си агарянския ямурлук, наметна си той една белгийска мантия — и всички рекоха, че бай Ганьо е вече цял европеец.”

When practiced in a bottom-up manner, mimicry – often unintentionally – may also have a subversive effect, namely when foreign patterns are adopted to such an excessive extent that the underlying power mechanisms of said patterns and norms are exposed. The ‘recipient’ of these foreign elements imitates a norm of behaviour or a genre and thereby subversively dominates the ‘donor’ by emptying these forms of expression and their inherent power structures or by stealing their symbolic capital. The seemingly subtle technologies of genre adoption then prove to be a rather aggressive strategy that aims to gain control over the original (con-) text. Maria Helena Lima has introduced the concept of “generic transculturation” based on her analysis of the Bildungsroman as a genre model for the works of the Antiguan American author Jamaica Kincaid (Lima, 1993: 433). “Generic transculturation” is thus less concerned with the mere rejection or adoption of genre traditions than it is oriented towards the identification of “processes of creative, subversive modification” (“kreativ-subversiver Prozesse der Gattungsmodifikation”, Gymnich/Neumann, 2007: 43).

I argue that Slaveykov’s fictional narrative of the mimicked translation anthology and translational plagiarism fit ideally into the paradigm of ‘self-colonization’, ‘mimicry’ and ‘generic transculturation’. As an effect of top-down mimicry, Slaveykov

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11 An alternative approach would be to look at the *Isle* as a mimicked translation anthology from the theoretical perspective of translational cultures / cultural semiotics. From this point of view, all cultures are, to a lesser or greater extent, results of processes of linguistic and symbolic translation, see for example Lotman (1992). Such an approach could avoid the sometimes irritating ef-
can imagine Bulgarian literature only as a translated literature. The narrative colon-
ization of the subject, in the sense of Vesna Goldsworthy, results in a schizoid split that forces Slaveykov to alienate the Self as the Other through his act of mysti-
fication, of mimicked translation. As an act of bottom-up mimicry, Slaveykov takes
the specific genre of the translation anthology, which from the point of view of post-colonial studies can be seen as an ‘agent’ for the proliferation of a foreign,
mostly Western-determined canon (see Gymnich/Neumann, 2007: 44), and mim-
ics it, transforming it into a national anthology. The dzhebchilak of translational
plagiarism can then be interpreted as a mimicry effect against canonical foreign
infiltration and as a form of post-colonial robbery from the bank of legitimate in-
tertextuality as practiced in – Western-dominated – world literature.

3. COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY I: MODERNIST ANTHOLOGICAL
FICTION IN RUSSIA (VALERY BRYUSOV)

Roughly a decade earlier, in the years 1894–1895, the Russian symbolist Valery
Bryusov published a mystificatory anthology in three volumes called Russian Sym-
bolists (Russkie simvolisty). The young poet, impressed by the new aesthetic trend
of French Symbolism, aimed to prove its existence in Russia as well. In pursuit of
this goal he published his own poems under a bundle of pseudonyms, using both
invented and real names (Schahadat, 2001). In Bryusov’s anthological project, we
encounter further elements familiar from Slaveykov’s Isle, such as the fictitious
publisher, who, in contrast to Slaveykov, remains anonymous, at least at the begin-
ing of the mystification process, which unfolds over time and acquires the char-
acteristics of a literary performance with a beautiful, mystical woman engaging in
correspondence with the editor. Bryusov’s mystification, like Slaveykov’s, met with
contradictory reactions from his contemporaries. It was severely criticized by the
philosopher and literary critic Vladimir Solovyev (1895/1990), who by means of his
scathing review made the young poet famous. Tellingly, and herein lies a further
parallel to the case of Slaveykov, critics accused the poet and cultural impresario
of imitating rather than of creatively adopting the new poetical techniques (ibid.: 145), a poetic policy Bryusov himself ardently defended.

We can witness some similarities and some differences between the anthological
projects of Slaveykov and Bryusov. The Russian poet masks himself as fictitious ed-
itor of the collection, but unlike his Bulgarian fellow modernist he does not present
the whole compilation as a translation anthology. Instead, he includes translations
of French symbolist writers as such into his anthology, mixing them with the faked
‘homegrown’ literary works. So while in both cases the adoption of genre models

fects of post-colonial theory and its (self-)stigmatization terminology (as expressed for example in the Natev remake of the Isle from 1997). I am grateful to Diana Mishkova for pointing this out. As I argue in the concluding part of my paper, though, I still deem some of the concepts of post-colonial theory as especially appropriate for the analysis of what I call anthological fiction in its aesthetic and political significance.
and aesthetic trends from ‘the West’ initiates an act of mystification, Bryusov can already invent a national literary tradition without masking it as a foreign one. Or in terms of post-colonial criticism: the schizophrenic impulse of alienating the self from the imagined Other is not as strong as in the case of Slaveykov and Bulgarian literature.

Perhaps for that reason, the Russian Symbolists did not develop into a key text of Russian postmodernist literature, as has happened with Slaveykov’s Isle for the Bulgarian case. In Russian literary modernism, the mystificatory impulse had also been strong, ranging from Bryusov’s excessive mask-plays (Schahadat, 2011) to Maksimilyan Voloshin’s ‘invention’ of Cherubina de Gabriak (pseudonym of the poet Elizaveta Ivanovna Dmitriyeva). But this tradition of literary forgery, conceptually challenging literary key concepts such as canon and authorship, originality and plagiarism, is not transferred into the late 20th and early 21st centuries along the formal characteristic of genre, but evolves along the lines of its topical narratives. Thus, for example, famous mystified personalities from Russian literature, such as Cherubina de Gabriak or – for the earlier period of the 19th century – Kuzma Prutkov (Nazarenkov, 2006), are endowed with a thrilling digital after-life today in the expanses of Russian internet culture (Gorny, 2009). The deconstruction of the canon in post-modern Russian literature, meanwhile, is achieved in relationship with other literary genres, for example the novel, which is ‘killed’ by the notorious Russian conceptualist writer Vladimir Sorokin through a form of parodistic re-enactment comparable to the efforts of anthological fiction in Bulgaria.

4. THE BULGARIAN ANTHOLOGICAL REMAKES OF THE 1990S

For the Bulgarian context, the period of the 1990s can be interpreted as a “Return to the Isle”, as an essay by Michail Nedelchev (1986) is titled, which initiated – together with prominent readings by other literary critics and poets such as Ani Ilkov (1991) – a renaissance of the modernist heritage, which had been suppressed throughout the period of Soviet determined Socialist realism. Sirma Danova (2012) has documented these discussions in bibliographical detail. With regard to the performative potential of Slaveykov’s anthology as a book that cannot be read but only re-written (Spasov), the critical discourses were accordingly accompanied by remakes of the famous ancestor.

4.1 ON THE ISLAND OF THE BLESSED – FIVE WARS LATER
(ED. A. NATEV)

The anthology On the Isle of the Blessed – Five Wars Later (Na Ostrova na blazhenite – pet voini sled tova) was published by the literary scholar Atanas Natev in 1997. The collection presents poems from ten authors from the second half of the twentieth century (Blaga Dimitrova, Radoy Ralin, Lyubomir Levchev, Stefan...
Canev, Nikolaj Kanchev, Virginiya Zachariyeva, Boyko Lambovski, Mirela Ivanova, Elin Rachnev and Georgi Gospodinov). It copies the external appearance of the Slaveykovian predecessor meticulously. The presented poets thus do not appear as authors but as translators of their own works and each one contributes – once again in correspondence with the original – a pseudo-autobiographical sketch. The authors chose from the masks invented by Slaveykov and tried them on themselves, mixing, as he did, empirical and fictitious facts. Sometimes they chose to represent several characters of the Slaveykovian original at the same time. Boyko Lambovski, aka Boyko Lambada, calls this a “mixing of the bones of the ancestors” / “премятане костите на прадедите” (Na Ostrova – pet voini sled tova, 1997: 55).

The anthology thus on the surface reproduces the distinct elements of the fictional narrative of The Isle, that is the macro-narrative, consisting of the parergonal and the paratextual elements, and the micro-narrative, consisting of the fictitious author-biographies and the poems themselves. On a deeper structural level, however, these elements significantly change their functions. As Ani Burova (2003, no page) has pointed out:

“Something strange is happening though – regardless of its strict remodelling, ‘On the Isle of the Blessed – Five wars later’ is moving away from the original instead of getting nearer. […] Instead of turning into a squared mystification by rewriting Slaveykov, it paradoxically turns into a ‘real’ anthology, into a real selection from really existing literature.”

“Случва се обаче нещо странно – при цялата си стриктност в прена-писването ‘На Острова на блажените – пет войни след това’ сякаш се отделяваша от своя оригинал, вместо да го приближава. […] Вместо да се окаже мистификация на квадрат, пренаписвайки Славейков, тя парадоксално става ‘истинска’ и се оказва реален избор от реална ли-тература.”

The same is true for the translation narrative so important to the Slaveykovian project. While the title of the Natev remake still reproduces the idea of a fictitious anthology of translated texts, the preface does not deal with either of the topics. The same is true of the author biographies, which – in their majority – are concerned with neither the anthological nor the translational narrative. Instead, they engage in defining their own literary-historical position vis-à-vis the communist period and the suppressed literary heritage of modernity.

The anthology in consequence was met with ardent criticism, for example by Dimi- tar Kamburov (1997) or Boyko Penchev (1997). On a more pragmatic level, criticism focussed on the selection process: What authors on what premises had been (not) included into the anthology. More fundamentally, the Natev remake was accused of misunderstanding the intentions of the original. While Slaveykov’s literary hoax had been a witty play questioning and challenging such basic concepts as authorship, plagiarism and literary history, Natev’s Isle would only perpetuate the
ideas of canonicity, authority and representativeness, replacing discredited socialist realist aesthetics with new authorities.

Nevertheless, the narrative vertigo of the original persists in the mask play of the contributing authors. The stratum of intertextual and intercultural references, while not discussed on a theoretical level, remains present in the authors’ biographies, which position themselves vis-à-vis two conflicting periods of Bulgarian literary history – the epoch of modernity and the period of socialist realism. Thus, the Natev Isle offers an interesting study of the changes in the understanding of national literary history from an imagological point of view.

This concerns specifically the geopoetic tension and the topic of self-stigmatization of the Slaveykovian original, which are reactivated in the preface as well as in some of the fictitious autobiographies. Natev postulates for the literature of the transition period the existence of “linguistic diarrhoea” and of “mental congestion” (“словесно разстройство”, “мисловен запек”, Na Ostrova – pet voini sled tova, 1997: 6). He accuses contemporary literary criticism of suffering from a “syndrome of value deficiency” (“синдромът на прилепчивата ценостна недостатиност”, ibid.: 6). And he goes on to say that the label “intellectual” simply ruminates on “foreign models” (“чужди образци”, ibid.: 7) and fits its representatives, the poets, as badly as “a borrowed dinner jacket” (“като смокинг под наем”, ibid.: 8). On the level of the micro-narrative, some of the authors concur. For example, underscores Ralin Radoy aka Ralin Yodar aka descendent of Ralin Stibel, “the [Bulgarian] nation is today as childish as ever, at the same time savvy and stupid, with greedily opened pockets” (“нацията продължава да си бъде недорасла, но хитра, плиткоумна, но с алчно разтворени джобове”, ibid.: 23). And Nikolay Kanchev, aka Amen Rosita aka Stamen Rosita, in his poetic visions wishes to replace the “Isle of the Blessed” with the “continent of the Enlightened” (“за да замести Острова на блажените с Континента на просветлените”, ibid.: 42). Nevertheless, the specific geopoetics of Five Wars Later move from post-colonial to post-communist; the constructed Other is to a lesser extent directed outwards towards an imagined Western ideal and instead looks back in history to an experienced communist Other.

4.2 BULGARIAN CHRESTOMATHY AND BULGARIAN ANTHOLOGY

Two further anthological remakes appear in the mid-1990s, the Bulgarian Chrestomathy (Balgarska chrestomatiya, 1995) and the Bulgarian Anthology. Our Poetry from Gerov Onwards (Balgarska antologiya. Nashata poeziya ot Gerova nasam, 1998), both edited by Plamen Doynov, Georgi Gospodinov, Yordan Eftimov and Boyko Penchev. In literary criticism, both collections are interpreted as one conceptual project (Antov, 2009).

While the Natev anthology reproduced the original of Slaveykov’s Isle in direct correspondence – perhaps failing to grasp its intentions – the Bulgarian Chrestomathy as well as the Bulgarian Anthology aim at other prominent predecessors
within the ‘anthological text’ of Bulgarian literature: *The Bulgarian Chrestomathy*, published by Ivan Vazov and Konstantin Velichkov in 1884, and the *Bulgarian Anthology. Our Poetry from Vazov Onwards*, published by Dimcho Debelyanov and Dimitar Podvarzavchov in 1910, just shortly after the release of the Slaveykovian fake anthology.

Under the historically designed cover of the *Chrestomathy*, the four editors present their own works self-ironically as representative of Bulgarian literature and thus canonical. The genre of the chrestomathy and the historic model of Vazov and Velichkov are, however, combined with the Slaveykovyan method. On the last page of the book is a photo portraying the four authors as the members of the famous literary circle *Thought* (Misal).

*Illustration 1. Post-modern mimicry – the ‘Terrible Four’ of the New Misal circle*

But even more important than this photographic citation is the fact that the ‘Terrible Four’ extract the structural principles of Slaveykov’s *Isle* – that is, self-canonization and auto-textuality – and apply them to the different genre and historical model of the Vazov/Velichkov chrestomathy. The effects are obvious: the *Bulgarian Chrestomathy* is a performative critique of the processes of literary institutionalization and canon construction.

The *Bulgarian Anthology* advances this mission but applies a different principle of adoption. The collection assembles stylizations – or parodies – of about 50 representative poets of the five decades since the 1940s, including the works of the editors themselves. No mystification is intended; authorship of the poetic dedications is clearly stated. In an editorial preamble, the four editors furthermore
formulate precisely how the book should (not) be read, rejecting in particular a one-dimensional interpretation as parody. Thus Yordan Eftimov asserts (Bulgarian Anthology, no page):

“The easiest way to cope with the texts presented here would be to read them as playful, witty, parodist equivalents to works by famous contemporaries. Such a reading is of no interest to us, is tiring to us. It makes the irony petty, miserable and banal.”

“Най-лесният начин за справяне с текстовете, показани тук, е те да бъдат прочетени като игриви, шеговити, пародийни пандани на текстовете на именити съвременници. Такова четене ни е безинтересно, то ни уморява. То прави иронията дребнава, жалка и пошла.”

And Boyko Penchev insists (ibid., emphasis mine, HS):

“We don't think of ourselves as the locomotives of the literary-historical process, who demonstrate how the [literary] devices turn into routine […]. This imagined play with history shall hide the melancholy of understanding that Bulgarian poetry remains always the same – infantile-romantic.”

“Не се мислим за локомотиви на литературно-историческия процес, които демонстрират рутинизирането на похватите […]. Това въображаемо проиграване на историята иде да скрие меланхолията на съзнанието, че българската поезия си остава все същата – инфантилно-романтическа.”

Illustration 2-3: Visual mimicry. Historic stylization of the post-modern anthological remakes
Both book publications were accompanied by reading performances, with the editors taking on the masks of their historical predecessors.

This anthological upheaval on the part of the ‘new Misal’ has met with contradictory reactions. While part of the literary establishment was shocked and scandalized by the mocking of the literary heritage, others praised the assault on the canon. Miglena Nikolchina points out the multiple time vectors: the fake anthologies criticize the 1990s through the optics of the 1910s and vice versa. By including the Vazov/Velichkov Christomathy of 1884 in their remodelling, they still extend the historical canvas, and four distinct epochs of Bulgarian literature are criss-crossed: the post-Renaissance period, the epoch of modernity, the socialist and the post-socialist period (Nikolchina, 1995: 1).

Edvin Sugarev (2000) in consequence claimed that the anthologies were the fatal blow to Bulgarian literary tradition. Plamen Antov concurs with this view, calling them a successful act of “patricide”, which he interprets as “an act of love by the sons” (“Актът на отцеубийството е акт на свръхпозитивна синовна идентификация; той все пак е един същностно любовен акт”; Antov, 2009: no page). Michail Nedelchev praised the liberty with which the ***enfants terribles*** “neutralized their loving admiration for the Bulgarian literary classics […] through an act of parodist self-elevation” (“свобода да неутрализират любовното си преклонение към българската литературна класика от началото на века с пародийно самовъзвеличаване”, Nedelchev, 1995, “Ces uzhasni deca”: 1).

The abundance of metaphors related to love and death is obvious. These metaphors go back to Slaveykov himself, who coined an often-cited aphorism defining the genre of the anthology as an invitation to a marriage (Slaveykov, *Na Ostrova*: 5). The specific interpretation of Bulgarian literature as a genealogical project from fathers, sons and grandsons has already been investigated from a psychoanalytical standpoint (Antov, 2004; Zlatanov, 1995). This genealogical interpretation also happens to be the central topical element that unites all three anthological remakes in their conflicting intentions, including the Natev anthology. What further unites them with the Slaveykovian original is the reframing of existent texts as a machinery for auto-textuality rather than mystification.

The translation narrative, however, which is so important for Slaveykov’s *Isle*, has been moved to the background in all of the anthological projects under discussion. In the Natev remake, the topic of translation is reduced to the paratextual framework and no longer plays a functional role. In the fake *Chrestomathy* and *Anthology* of the ’Terrible Four’, translation also seems to be completely absent. But, taking another look, one could argue that the *Bulgarian Anthology* is indeed not so much a parody, but rather a translation itself, a translation that takes place paradoxically within the borders of one national language, namely a translation of the literary heritage from one idiom into another. But while Slaveykov imagined his own poetry as too complex to be successfully translated, the new *Misal* considered the Bulgarian literary tradi-
tion as too poor to have been worth the try. As Plamen Antov (1999, no page) has put it: “[…] already the possibility of a convincing rewriting [of literary history, HS] kills the poetic past” / “[…] самата възможност за убедително пренаписване убива поетическото минало”. In consequence, Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry as an attempt to control the Other through imitation can be applied here once again, with the Other being no longer post-colonially defined, but post-socialist.

4.3 THE ANTHOLOGICAL TEXT IN BULGARIAN LITERATURE AS MIMICRY GAME

Regardless of the appraisal of the latter two projects, literary critics and scholars are still encountering difficulties in giving a characterization of their genre identification. The Bulgarian Anthology as well as the Bulgarian Chrestomathy by the ‘New Misal’ are neither real mystifications, as they show their masks and identity play, nor pure parodies, as Yordan Eftimov and Boyko Penchev have rightly emphasized. The same is true for the original project by Pencho Slaveykov. According to Sirma Danova the attempt to come to terms with a genre definition of the Isle has generated a wave of terminological inventiveness (2012: 664):

“In more than one text the most popular definitions for ‘On the Isle of the Blessed’ as an ‘anthology’, a ‘mystification’ and a ‘utopia’ are reformulated. Nikola Georgiyev speaks of a ‘demystified mystification’ […] In an article by Bilyana Kurtasheva from the same volume we find the terms ‘pseudo-mystification’ and ‘pseudo-anthology’. […] Often the new definitions rely on the creation of neologisms, combing the established terms with prefixes questioning their essence: ‘de’-, ‘pseudo’-, ‘quasi’-, ‘re’-, ‘anti’- and so on.”


Against this background, it may seem a dubious effort to propose one more definitional approach in a seemingly endless series of terminological invention. What I propose here, however, is to interpret the distinct anthological projects not separately and not by applying more or less stable genre definitions, but to understand them as an intertwined ‘anthological text’, as a kind of literary play, binding together the distinct epochs of Bulgarian literature.

For that goal I will return once again to the term ‘mimicry’, but this time using it in the interpretation of the French intellectual Roger Caillois.13 The sociologist and philoso-

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13 It is, by the way, no coincidence that it was Caillois who translated the works of Borges into
pher, founder – together with Georges Bataille – of the College of Sociology, developed a general theory on games and play. He identified play as an anthropological principle per se and differentiated the four following aspects of playful human interaction:

- agon, or competition
- alea, or chance
- mimicry, or mimesis, or role-playing
- ilinx (Greek for ‘whirlpool’), or vertigo, in the sense of altering perception

Three of the four aspects of Caillois’ categorization can be found in what I attempt to call the ‘anthological text’ in Bulgarian literature.

- A strong impulse of agon / competition, as the anthological projects are always expressive gestures towards the power that defines the canon and polemicise against each other;
- A strong feeling of vertigo, resulting from the constant reframing of the texts, which are sometimes attributed to the author, sometimes to the editor, or – as is the case with Slaveykov – to the translator;
- and, last but not least, mimicry in the sense of role-playing, which according to Caillois has to be clearly differentiated from mystification (Caillois, 2001: 21): “The pleasure lies in being or passing for another. But in [mimicry] games the basic intention is not that of deceiving the spectators. The child who is playing train may well refuse to kiss his father while saying to him that one does not embrace locomotives, but he is not trying to persuade his father that he is a real locomotive […].”

As the genealogical metaphor of ‘sons’ and ‘fathers’, ‘grandsons’ and ‘grandfathers’, of ‘children’ and ‘parents’ is one of the main ingredients of the Bulgarian ‘anthological text’ as a whole, the citation seems to be stunningly appropriate to the discussion of these works.

5. COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY II: ON THE ISLE OF POPMODERNITY (WAWERZINEK, DEGENS)

Orlin Spasov, in his study on the reception of Pencho Slaveykov’s work in German literature of the early 20th century, emphasizes the following ironic paradox: While Slaveykov’s national epic The Bloody Song (Karvava pesen) was almost immediately translated into German and praised by German literary critics, his experimental prose and witty genre transculturation in On the Isle of the Blessed has, to Slaveykov’s own regret, not been met with much attention (Spasov, 1997). According to Spasov, The Bloody Song in its national heroic pathos perfectly met the expectations of the German public of something ‘Balkan.’ The intertextual (self-)
parody and mimicry game of the *Isle*, on the other hand, was too modern – or, in other words, too European – in order to awake broader interest in ‘Europe’ itself. As already mentioned, even today no full translation of the *Isle of the Blessed* into German exists, and existing translations of Slaveykov’s work, as important as they may be, present him as a poet of heroic pathos and a Balkan genius rather than a member of the cosmopolitan modernist circles of the early 19th century. While thus no direct intertextual ties between Slaveykov’s *Isle* and German literature exist, it may be interesting to look for structural analogies in the field of anthological fiction / fictitious anthologies in German literature.

Interestingly, examples of anthological fiction similar to the *Isle* and its post-modern remakes in German literature were published in the years 2010/2011, that is, exactly one hundred years after the “anthological threshold” (Kurtasheva) in Bulgarian literature and the publication of Slaveykov’s fake anthology. These are Marc Degens’ *Our Popmodernity* (Unsere Popmoderne) and Peter Wawerzinek’s *Raids through German Literature. Parodies* (Raubzüge durch die deutsche Literatur. Parodien). As one can see from the title of the latter, the idea of parody or imitation as *dzhebchilak*, as pick-pocketing, is prominently exposed. The blurb gives a precise and characteristic insight into the book’s content and intentions:

“Peter Wawerzinek […], an exceptional figure in literature, a genius at reciting texts, a maniac reader and a poet who has always had a wild reputation, has been indulging in an infamous hobby for almost three decades: He steals the language of his colleagues and from there juggles with their styles.”

“Peter Wawerzinek […], Charakterkopf, Vortragskünstler, besessener Vielleser und von jeher mit dem Ruf des wilden Dichters ausgestattet, frönt seit annähernd drei Jahrzehnten einem lustvoll-anrüchigen Hobby. Er kaut seinen Kollegen die Sprache und wortartistisiert damit in ihrem Stil weiter.”

With 54 parodies from Rilke to Uwe Tellkamp, the temporal and stylistic horizon of Wawerzinek’s work is wide and encompasses roughly 100 years of German literary history, from modernity to post/pop-modernity. The analogy to the Bulgarian fictitious anthologies is at hand: the *dzhebchilak* idea from Slaveykov, the re-reading of one’s own literary tradition through its re-writing, the libidinous attitude towards this playing with the literary canon, as realized in the *Bulgarian Anthology* of the post-modern ‘Terrible Four’. Nevertheless, Wawerzinek’s anthological project is, regardless of its title, no gesture of denial. *The Raids* do not possess a conceptual power comparable to that of *The Isle of the Blessed* or the *Bulgarian Anthology*; they are interpreted as friendly mockery rather than the nail in the coffin of German literature and are largely appreciated by the parodied poets themselves. This, most probably, is due to the fact that the *Raids* do not inscribe themselves in an explicit anthological tradition (although there would have been a promising literary-historical trigger, rooted in the fact that the first German anthology was compiled in 1781 by Friedrich Schiller).
Marc Degens’ anthology *Our Popmodernity* (Unsere Popmoderne) is a collection of mystifications, not primarily of parodies. Throughout the decade of the 2000s, Degens invented a whole range of fictitious authors and regularly published ‘excerpts’ from their work in his literary column in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and the German literary magazine *Volltext* (Full text). The anthology presents a best-of compilation of these mystifications, containing 35 invented texts by 34 fictitious authors from 16 countries. As the title already suggests, in his anthological project Degens reflects on the literary evolution from post-modernity to pop-modernity. The collected texts ‘illustrate’ the emergence of new literary styles that are no longer concerned predominantly with the theoretical challenges of the linguistic and political deconstruction of the grand narratives, but with the changed living conditions in a pop-capitalist media society. To give some examples: The collection presents the scandalous, alleged memoirs of a French prostitute, the socio-critical prose of anti-globalization activists, the pseudo-documentary reports of drug excesses by DJ-writers and techno-poets. The individual texts are each accompanied by a short fictitious biography. With some deliberate exaggeration, one could call *Our Popmodernity* something like the *Isle of the Blessed* of a globalized Europe. As in the case of Slaveykov, the mystified author biographies refer to real-life personalities, especially from the German literary field, and the biographies are thus nearer to literary parody than the invented literary texts themselves. While the anthology itself no longer functions as a mystification in the proper sense – the genesis of the texts is explained in the editorial – the original columns generated a great deal of confusion among readers and booksellers who wanted to buy the brand-new and scandalous works. The publishing house that released Degens’ anthology is, by the way, tellingly named ‘The Villain’, once again reproducing the ‘pick-pocketing’ topic as introduced already by Slaveykov.

While Degens stands in the tradition of Lem’s invented anthology and while his *Popmodernity* shows some similarities to Slaveykov’s modern *Isle of the Blessed*, it is – like Wawerzinek’s endeavour – no conceptual gesture that could be perceived as an assault on a literary tradition or institutionalized field. Rather, it is a joyful mockery, it generates narrative vertigo and it is a performative analysis of the contemporary literary field in Germany in its European contexts.

### 6. CONCLUSIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The existence of a specific ‘anthological text’ in Bulgarian literature of the 20th century:

The Bulgarian anthological projects are more closely intertwined than comparable projects in other national literatures, as the case studies from Russian and German literatures illustrate (Bryusov, Degens, Wawerzinek), as far as my knowledge of this principally unobservable field allows for such a bold generalization. While anthological fiction in the tradition of Borges or Lem primarily mystifies literary texts
(an entertaining paradox in itself), thereby achieving effects of narrative vertigo, the Bulgarian fake anthologies in most cases re-appropriate already existent, ‘empirical’ works. They practice auto-textuality and self-plagiarism rather than mystification in the proper sense. They do not mystify texts/narratives but contexts/meta-narratives.

**Fake Anthologies as Mimicry Games. The Potential of Post-colonial Critique for 20th Bulgarian Literature:**

Research explains the “carnivalesque” nature (see e.g. Antov, 2010: 110) of fictitious anthologies by citing the precarious instability of the Bulgarian national literary canon, a result of centuries of normative domination (‘Ottoman,’ ‘Western-European,’ ‘Russian-Soviet’), of direct political-economical or imagined-narrative (self-)colonization resulting in the import of foreign genre patterns and aesthetic models (Trendafilov, Tihanov). Hence, post-colonial terminology and concepts seem to be an appropriate theoretical framework for analyzing the phenomenon of anthological fiction, as proposed here.

The post-colonial framework of analysis has been subjected to fundamental critique throughout the last years, however. Vesna Goldsworthy, who most prominently contributed to its emergence, came to the self-critical conclusion that post-colonialism, as applied to ‘the Balkans’, might simply be a new, thinly veiled version of Eurocentrism, which demotes ‘minor literatures’ to no more than an illustration of a preconceived Eurocentric scheme. In order to detect the “real Balkan”, which has been lost behind the analysis of its discursive representations, Goldsworthy argues for its “locally oriented redefinition” (“eine mehr am Lokalen orientierte Neudefinition”, Goldsworthy, 2006). Maria Todorova, another figurehead of the concept of Balkanism as developed in the 1990s, assists by stating a problematic split between post-modern fixations on discourse and the danger of a re-appearing essentialism (see Goldsworthy’s cited above recourse to the “real Balkan”). Accordingly she pledges for “conducting more geographically and historically specific studies which would [...] stress the diversity of Balkan structures, trends and events not only vis-à-vis the rest of Europe but also within the intra-Balkan space itself” (Todorova, 2004: 16-17). Diana Mishkova in her study “In Quest of Balkan Occidentalism” (2007) conveys in exemplary form such an endeavour for a historically and ‘locally’ grounded analysis of key concepts of Balkan imagology. She highlights the “fundamental deficiencies” of Balkanism as a follow-up to Edward Said’s Orientalism (“absence of Western colonialism”, inexistence of a “Western Balkanist tradition”) and argues against a “trivializing identification of ‘real’ with ‘literary’ colonization” (Mishkova, 2007: 4). And she goes on to state that the ideological power of the concept ‘Europe’ was not primarily grounded in attempts at control and narrative colonization by the central players, but was rather practiced “one way, from the Balkans towards Europe”
In their essence and intentionality, such “interests and initiatives” were “indiscriminating”.

Galin Tihanov, in his article “Revisiting ‘minor literatures’” (2013), tackles the problem against the background of intellectual history and its epistemological premises. He shows to what extent the discourses of post-colonialism are themselves products of a specific historical epoch and accordingly puts into question their ahistorical applications. Tihanov argues in favour of transnationalism as a more fruitful and less normatively charged conceptual framework for the analysis of intercultural and intertextual analysis in a world where centre(s) and peripheries tend to dissolve with regard to geopolitical, demographic and – especially – medial shifts.

Taking into account the critique in its diverse arguments and intentions, I nevertheless assume that at least parts of the post-colonial theoretical and conceptual apparatus may still give valid insights into the structures and processes of symbolic power and ideological domination. First, on a factual level, the discourses of (self-) stigmatization partly still persist, as is clearly illustrated by the anthological remake On the Isle of the Blessed – Five Wars later by Atanas Natev. This, by the way, may explain why the project is so ardently rejected by certain parts of literary criticism. Second, on a more conceptual level, the premise that in today’s networked societies the dichotomy of centre(s) and peripheries would be completely dismissed, is theoretically questioned (Sassen, 2001) and empirically dismissed (i.e. Kastells [Castells]/Kiselyova, 2000). Third, the tension of post-colonial and post-socialist conditions still fosters specific cultural dynamics and demands for further theoretical reflection (Spivak, 2006; Owczarzak, 2009). This, to my mind, is true for the post-modern, which is at the same the post-socialist, period of Bulgarian literature, which is confronted with multiple normative aesthetic systems at the same time: the legacy of (post-)Renaissance literature in its significance for the Bulgarian national narrative, the marginalized heritage of classical modernism in its intriguing formal aesthetics, and, last but not least, socialist realism to be re-assessed. Here, for example, the concept of mimicry by Homi Bhabha – although himself among the most severely criticized post-colonial thinkers for his enigmatic terminology – proves its efficiency. In its essence, mimicry, as described above, tackles the irresolvable problem of freeing language from its underlying power structures – not by deconstructing, but by imitating them. The ideological function of language in this sense has been the central topic of Bulgarian post-modern literature in the 1990s, as asserts Sirma Danova (2012: 663):

14 To my mind, this argument does not disprove but rather strengthens the inner logic of the paradigm of “narrative (self-)colonization” as represented by Goldsworthy or Kiossev. The centre of power does not even need to enforce its norms externally, because it is attractive enough to stimulate processes of internal adoption. This is even more stressed by Mishkova’s assertion that concerning the Bulgarian image of ‘Europe’ we have to deal with “a sort of ‘double’ peripheral optics” (2007: 6) and the “negative, ‘Balkanized’ Bulgarian […] self-perception that had been imported by foreign intellectuals, whose perspective was not that of the European center but that of the European periphery” (ibid.: 19).
“The decade of the 1990s, the so called period of ‘transition’, fashioned distinct practices for a neutralization of ideological language. To them adhered parodies, ‘para-parodies’, [techniques of, HS] self-exposure, self-deconstruction, self-marginalization and excess. The unavoidable guiltiness of language lies in its awkward efforts to be free from power.”

“The 90’s of the 20th century are known as the ‘period of transition’ which fashioned a distinct practice of neutralizing ideological language. To them are attached parodies, ‘self-parodies’, [techniques of, HS] self-disclosure, self-deconstruction, self-marginalization and excess. The unavoidable guiltiness of language lies in its awkward efforts to be free from power.”

The term of mimicry in its post-colonial meaning allows for interpreting the ‘anthological fiction’ of Bulgarian modernity and post-modernity as mimicry games, as an overall conceptual project concerned with the ideology of language, including its post-socialist aspects and effects.

At the same time, the mimicry concept in the sense of Roger Caillois underscores the genuinely playful and aesthetic value of Bulgarian fictitious anthologies, and contributes to freeing the concept of canonicity from its one-sided focus on normativity and disciplinary action by focusing on its second nature as a form of playful social communication.

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