

## Humanism in/and Romanticism: Reception of the Image of Giordano Bruno in Bulgarian Literature

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## Хуманизъм и романтизъм: Рецепция на образа на Джордано Бруно в българската литература

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**Abstract:** Developed primarily as a modern literature during the 19th and 20th centuries, Bulgarian literature seems to have been influenced by West European and Slavic Romanticism, thus remaining almost unreceptive to earlier stages of Western culture such as the Italian Renaissance. Nevertheless, elements of the Renaissance and humanist culture, sedimented in the Western tradition, were transferred to Bulgarian literature, mediated by a strongly Romantic interpretation. We will attempt to demonstrate the entanglement of Humanism and Romanticism in Bulgarian modern literature, analyzing the reception of the figure of Giordano Bruno in two literary works – the poem *The Drunkard* (1900) by the almost unknown Bulgarian author Slavcho Kesyakov and the historical-biographical novel *Giordano Bruno: Lights from the Pyre* (1966) by the Bulgarian philosopher Slavi Boyanov. In these two texts the figure of Bruno will appear in the guise of the typical Romantic hero, an image which, in its historical context, was summoned to reaffirm the sought-for Modernity of Bulgarian literature. The argument unfolds retracing the sources, used by the Bulgarian authors in their representation of the controversial figure of Giordano Bruno. All these sources will prove to be marked by the stamp of Western and Slavic Romanticism with their interest in ideas like the strength and liberty of the human spirit and the spirit's relation to the universal, the ideal, and the eternal.

**Keywords:** Italian humanism, Giordano Bruno, Bulgarian reception, Bulgarian literature.

**Резюме:** Развила се предимно като модерна литература през XIX и XX век, българската литература е била повлияна главно от Западноевропейския и Славянския романтизъм, като по този начин сякаш остава почти невъзприемчива към по-ранните етапи на Западната култура, свързани с Ренесанса. Въпреки това моменти от ренесансовата и хуманистичната култура, утаени в Западната традиция, се пренасят в българската литература с посредничеството на силно романтизирана интерпретация. В настоящата статия ще опитаме да покажем преплитането на хуманизма и Романтизма в българската модерна литература, като анализираме рецепцията на образа на Джордано Бруно главно в две литературни произведения – поемата „Пияница“ (1900) на почти неизвестния български автор Славчо Кесяков и историко-биографичния роман „Джордано Бруно: Светлини от кладата“ (1966) на българския философ Слави Боянов. В тези два текста фигурата на Бруно се появява в образа на типичния романтически герой, образ, който в своя исторически контекст е употребен за утвърждаване на

търсената Модерност на българската литература. Като проследим източниците, използвани от българските автори при представянето на противоречивата фигура на Джордано Бруно, установяваме, че те са белязани от печата на Западния и Славянския романтизъм с техния интерес към идеи като силата и свободата на човешкия дух и отношението на духа към универсалното, идеалното и вечното.

**Ключови думи:** италиански хуманизъм, Джордано Бруно, рецепция в България, българска литература.

The historical development of Bulgarian culture is usually represented as marked by one substantial lack or a hiatus – this lack regards the so-called process of modernization. The early stages of Modernity in Western Europe have never been present in Bulgarian cultural history due to reasons we may call historical, political, or even geopolitical. By the time of the early modernization in Europe, the state of Bulgaria practically ceased to exist. This political and administrative interruption exercised its disastrous effects on Bulgarian culture, since in Medieval Bulgaria culture had always been under governmental protection. The sudden loss of this protection caused also the almost immediate dissolution of many forms of cultural life in Bulgaria. Thus, in Bulgarian cultural history, the period between the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> and the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century could be designated as “the dark ages” for a much better reason than the previous one, the period of the Middle Ages in the proper sense.

The beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought back the impulse for modernization, leading to a period traditionally designated as the Bulgarian National Revival, when the ideals of Modern Western culture, already enriched by the thought of the European Enlightenment, started to penetrate the Bulgarian cultural territory. At least this is what Eurocentric grand narrative tells us today, causing a certain kind of “periphery complex”. Consequently, the very core of the processes of modernization in Bulgaria was marked by the attempt to compensate four centuries of cultural stagnation.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the National Liberation of 1878, the situation in Bulgarian cultural life could be described as an eclectic mixture of ideas that could be traced back to different historical periods in European culture – Renaissance, Enlightenment, Romanticism, industrial Modernity. In this period, Modern Bulgarian literature and Modern philosophy started to emerge. The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in particular, its last decades, was the period when the first translations of canonical texts of the European Renaissance literature appeared, initially mediated by other Slavic languages, mainly Russian, but also Polish or Serbian (other mediator languages were Greek, German, French, the last two gaining popularity after the Liberation in 1878).

This is the cultural background on which elements from the Renaissance and humanist literary and philosophical tradition first entered the Bulgarian context. The eclectic features of the latter, combined with the actual political objectives of the epoch, conditioned the paths and filters through which Renaissance was about to be received by and transformed in the Bulgarian situation.

After this preliminary observation on the characteristics of the Bulgarian cultural history, we can proceed to the problem of reception of the Renaissance, and to the figure of Giordano Bruno in particular. Until a very recent moment, namely, until 2016, not a single translation of a text by Bruno existed in Bulgaria. Bruno didn't, and still doesn't find a place in the academic curriculum in history of philosophy, disappearing somewhere in the void between the curriculum in Medieval philosophy and the one in Early Modern philosophy. After publishing the first Bulgarian translation of one of Bruno's Italian dialogues in 2016 (this was the *Cena delle ceneri* (*The Ash Wednesday supper*); see Bruno 2016), at a conference at the Sofia University in February 2017, the book's translator, the philosophy professor Vladimir Gradev, didn't hesitate to affirm the fact that Bruno has been always completely unknown in Bulgaria and has practically no philosophical reception at all. By 2017, this is to a certain extent true. Subsequently, further three of Bruno's Italian works have been translated – two philosophical dialogues, *De l'infinito, universo e mondi* (*On the Infinite, Universe, and Worlds*, Bruno 2018), and *De la causa, principio et uno* (*Cause, Principle, and Unity*, Bruno 2020), as well as one of Bruno's comedies, *Candelaio* (*The Candle Bearer*, Bruno 2019). The philosophical dialogues are accompanied by introductions of the translators, and an essay by Nuccio Ordine (2018), one of the leading Italian scholars in Bruno, is included in the edition of *On the Infinite*.

However, the initial assumption that there is practically no reception of the figure of Giordano Bruno in Bulgarian context, proved to be not completely true. Apart from discovering some less known historical-philosophical publications on Bruno, we found out that there are two works in Bulgarian literature – a long poem and a novel – that concern, in a more or less direct way the person of Bruno. The examination of these literary works showed that an actual reception of Giordano Bruno in Bulgaria exists, however not a reception of his philosophy in Bulgarian studies in history of philosophy, but a literary one. This means that Giordano Bruno appears much more frequently in fictional or literary texts than in philosophical or historical-philosophical texts. And even the few historical-philosophical essays and studies (in the strict sense) that concern Bruno inevitably involve a literary element. Sometimes in a more journalistic, and sometimes in a more lyrical manner, all texts on Bruno, written or translated in Bulgarian, involve a description of the scene of his death. In the literary tradition (even though we are speaking here of non-canonical and rather marginal literary texts) Bruno assumed the figure of an emblem – the emblem of the restless human spirit, passionately devoted to an “ideal” with no concrete shape, the abstract Ideal (with a capital I), thus generating the somewhat vague feeling of striving and impulse towards eternity and infinity, discerned in Western Romanticism as one of the primal characteristics of human heart. We might even claim that the image of the Italian humanist Bruno acquired in its Bulgarian edition the guise of the Romantic hero that was typical for the Western 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This tendency caused a problem for Bulgarian history of philosophy, namely, the fact that, once transformed into a two-dimensional icon with no particular relation to actual historical-philosophical process, Bruno lost all chances to enter any academic curriculum – the philosophical one as well as the literary one. In the context of the

late-19<sup>th</sup>-century Bulgarian culture Bruno's image started to assume two opposite features – the fame of a great 'knight of the human spirit' and the notoriety of a poor philosopher, and an even weaker physicist and astronomer. What is especially interesting in this process of image-building is that it took part in the development of Bulgarian modern literature, rather than in the philosophical historiography. The first cultural agents whose attention was attracted by the figure of Bruno were among the pioneers of modern literature, and at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Bulgaria, this meant a current in aesthetics and literature that professed the ideas of late European Romanticism. In this environment Bruno's name was mentioned for the first time.

The two earliest materials on Bruno in Bulgarian language were published in one of the first modern literary periodicals in Bulgaria, the famous journal *Misal (Thought)* with the subtitle *A journal for science, literature, and criticism*. This periodical was extremely important during last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1892–1907), serving today as an emblem of Modern literature and of generally Modern worldview.

Here we find the earliest publications about Bruno in Bulgarian language, translated respectively from English and German. The earliest published material dates to the year 1893. Dividing it between the issues 4/5 of September and 7 of November, the *Thought* journal published an essay with the title "Giordano Bruno", that actually represented a chapter of a larger *History of Philosophy* by the English philosopher and literary critic George Henry Lewes (see Lewes 1893). The name of the translator from English is Stoyan Belev. In fact, the full title of Lewes' book is *A Biographical History of Philosophy in Two Volumes* (published in the United Kingdom in the years 1845–1846), a title that speaks for itself with regard to the profile of the book and the prism through which it represents history of philosophy (Lewes 1845). It develops a Romantic type of historiography, focusing separately on the achievements of the 'great minds', whose greatness is explained biographically, as expression of personal genius. The picture is completed by Lewes' picturesque and almost novelistic style of story-telling that adds a fictitious dimension to every biographical portrait. This attitude towards historiography, as well as the idea of the 'Genius', must have appealed to the editors of the *Thought*.

The *Thought* was a journal of mixed content, edited by some of the most renowned men of letters of that time, whose names were closely linked to the modernist and progressist tendencies in Bulgarian poetry and criticism (see Tihanov 1998). However, the key-figure and soul of the journal was its editor in chief – Krastyo Krastev, a highly educated person with a doctoral degree in aesthetics from the University of Leipzig. Perceiving himself as an educator of the nation, as an enlightener, he used the journal to advance his own ideas on art and philosophy, striving to form in his readers a taste in art and culture, that harmonizes with his rather Romantic conceptions. It is thus likely to suppose that in Bruno's case too, it was he who decided what to be published, what image of Giordano Bruno he wished to build in the developing field of Bulgarian cultural memory after 1878.

What is the image of Bruno, that George Henry Lewes provided to the Bulgarian audience? The text begins – remarkably – with the end of the biography, namely with the scene of the pyre. Bruno appears as the typical Romantic hero, a "passionate

Italian” (Lewes 1893: 341), an enemy of any pedantic authority, of any tyranny over the free human thought, a restless fighter – not in the name of his own or any other doctrine, but in the name of an abstract, an ideal “truth”, the truth of the strength and the freedom of human spirit. The text puts an emphasis on the heroic behavior of the central character on his way to the pyre, at the same time describing him as “a handsome young man” (Lewes 1893: 340), which, by any means, Bruno was not at the age of 52, after having spent eight years in the prisons of the catholic inquisition. The style of the whole article could hardly be described as academic. It is rather pictorial and essayistic, a feature that must have appealed a lot to Krastev’s taste. It is, however, indicative that in summarizing Bruno’s philosophical achievements at the end of his article, Lewes evaluates them as destined to be forgotten, because today they could induce “only historical interest, rather than an intrinsic one” (Lewes 1893: 507-508). So, from the very beginning, from his first appearance on Bulgarian literary stage, Bruno was pronounced a weak and “phantastic” philosopher, despite having “some adequate ideas”, but nevertheless, an important figure in a biographical perspective – a martyr and “a knight of truth” (Lewes 1893: 342).

The second article on Bruno was probably also an idea of doctor Krastev. It appeared in the year 1900 and was a translation of a chapter from another textbook in history of philosophy, this time, the *History of Modern Philosophy*, where Bruno is listed among the number of *modern* philosophers by the Danish philosopher and theologist Harald Høffding. The translation, however, was made from German, and since no translator’s name is indicated, I tend to assume that it had been translated by doctor Krastev himself (see Høffding 1895; 1900). Here again, the portrait of Bruno is very similar to the one by G. H. Lewes. It represents a biographical account of Bruno’s life and doctrine, demonstrating high esteem for Bruno’s personality, combined with a negative opinion regarding the value of his philosophy. According to Høffding (just as Lewes before him), the philosophical thought of Giordano Bruno was confused, obscure, abounding with typical superstitions, and lacking a clear principle or a method due to the inner contradictions of his character (Høffding 1900: 646-647; 649). Nevertheless, compared with Lewes’ Romantic fire, Høffding’s essay retains a more modest and academic tone. In any case, the Nolan entered the Bulgarian cultural scene directly surrounded by the halo of his martyrdom. He was appreciated for his deeds, for his persistence and courage, rather than for his philosophical ideas.

What is more important in this case, is the fact that the year 1900 was marked by no less than three Bulgarian publications focused on figure of Giordano Bruno. One of them is the translation of Høffding’s chapter on Bruno, while the other two are in fact the first two articles of Bulgarian authorship. All three are dedicated to a particular occasion – that is 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bruno’s death in Piazza Campo de’ Fiori in Rome in the year 1600. It is worth noting that in that period, such a number of publications must have indicated an extraordinary interest in a certain topic.

The first publication is a paper written in the tradition of academic history of philosophy. Its author is a professor at the University of Sofia, known as the first Bulgarian historian of philosophy – prof. Ivan Georgov. The thirty pages of his research appeared first in an academic periodical, *Balgarski pregled (Bulgarian review)*, then were edited as a separate booklet, included in a series under the

symptomatic heading *Martyrs of science* (the second volume presenting Roger Bacon) (Georgov 1900). The article combines biographical research with a historical-philosophical one, outlining the fundamental features of Bruno's metaphysical and cosmological thought, and should be regarded as the first genuinely Bulgarian interpretation of the Nolan's philosophy. Unfortunately, prof. Georgov doesn't deliver any information about the sources he used, though we might suppose textbooks similar to the ones of G. H. Lewes and Harald Høffding.

A much more interesting publication appeared two years later, in 1902, in Plovdiv. This book is extremely unusual; the author's name is Slavcho or Slav Kesyakov – a completely unknown figure in both philosophy (or its history), and literature. It seems that he had been a high school teacher in Plovdiv where, in 1882, together with a colleague of his, he published a textbook in Bulgarian history (Gorov & Kesyakov 1882). In 1887, Kesyakov also published a collection of poems with the title *Victory*, dedicated to the Serbian-Bulgarian war of 1885 (Kesyakov 1887). The publication of 1902 is presented in high-quality typography and is composed of two parts, whose relation to one another remains quite obscure. The first part is a long study on Bruno entitled *Giordano Bruno: An Italian Philosopher. His Life, Doctrine, and Writings* (Kesyakov 1902: 5-145), the subtitle including the points “significance and martyrdom of this philosopher”, and that – just as Lewes's essay, – it begins with the scene of Piazza Campo de' Fiori (Kesyakov 1902: 5). The second, and more curious part of the book consists of a long poem, about twenty pages, under the title *The Drunkard*. Furthermore, it is provided with the subtitle *Romanticity! or Romanticism!* (Kesyakov 1902: 147-168).

Although the book was published in 1902, from its preface we learn that it has been prepared to be issued in 1900, that is precisely for the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the martyrdom (Kesyakov 1902: 3). This is also indicated in the beginning of the essay: “Three centuries... Three hundred years passed on the 17<sup>th</sup> of February this year, from the day, when countless people gathered in the square Campo de' Fiori in Rome to watch how they were going to burn alive one of the greatest thinkers among the philosophers and one of the boldest preachers among the apostles...” (Kesyakov 1902: 5). This opening sentence is followed by a vivid description of Bruno's death and his inclusion into a line of martyrs for truth and freedom of “Thought and Speech”, alongside Jesus and Socrates. “Every new thought was bound to pass through a “baptism with blood”. And then, from all these flames, victims and bloodshed, a new doctrine arose, favorable to mankind” (Kesyakov 1902: 6).

To prove his claim, the author introduces numerous quotations from all authorities of Romanticism: first of all, from Byron and Mickiewicz, but also Shelley, Goethe, Schiller, Gryboedov, Pushkin, Shakespeare. Kesyakov demonstrates a remarkably good knowledge of his subject, as well as his enormous erudition, citing in every possible language – Italian, German, Polish, English. From a contemporary point of view, we might assess Kesyakov's interpretation of Bruno's philosophy as quite adequate, but nevertheless, all too Romantic. Here is what we read: “And then Bruno became “the bard of philosophy”, and he sang about the Deity that humiliated people with its dogmas [...] He was a knight-errant of Truth [...] For the great souls there is no middle way. Bruno – the young, handsome, joyful thinker and dreamer – as a poet-

philosopher, he was a martyr of free thought [...]. Bruno was that new Prometheus that brought the divine fire down to human thought, and that is why – since it was not possible to chain him to the rock, as Aeschylus' hero, one could at least burn him on the pyre..." (Kesyakov 1902: 7). We might notice here the definition of Bruno as "knight-errant of truth", a phrase that we recognize from G. H. Lewes' article, published in the journal *Misal* in 1893 (Lewes 1893: 342), but also the Nietzschean idea of a "joyful thinker". Kesyakov compares Bruno to "a new Prometheus", a typically Romantic figure we may find in Mary Shelley's famous subtitle of 1818 "The Modern Prometheus", related to Frankenstein.

Kesyakov introduces a whole lot of references and quotations in order to present Bruno as a Romantic, even Byronic hero. We will give just a couple of examples for such allusions. At the beginning of chapter III of Kesyakov's essay we find two references to Byron. One of them is hidden in the motto by Tasso: "I suoi pensieri in lui dormir non ponno" (*Jerusalem Delivered*, X, 78), "His thoughts cannot sleep within him" (Kesyakov 1902: 35). Kesyakov mistakenly indicates the line as coming from *Orlando Furioso*, obviously confusing Tasso with Ariosto. But there is more to it: this is a line by Tasso only at first glance – it is much more likely that Kesyakov noticed this verse in Byron since it is precisely the motto to *The Corsair* (Byron 1814). Just a few lines later in Kesyakov's article, there comes a quotation from that very poem – four rhymed lines are designated as a quote from *Morski razboynik* (the Bulgarian translation of *The Corsair*) (Kesyakov 1902: 35). However, it proved impossible to identify these translated lines with anything in the original text of Byron's *Corsair*. Nevertheless, it is interesting to read the commentary to these lines. After the second motto (from Shakespeare) Kesyakov exclaims: "There are people who can rest only amidst the fight!" Then the four lines, presumably taken from Byron, follow: "The sailor to rest/ From the storm; / My lot is a fool,/ My eyes shed tears for the fight", and then Kesyakov adds: "Thus sings Byron, and Bruno was also one of Byron's children" (ibid.).

According to Kesyakov, Bruno was born a Romantic hero, destined for great deeds from the outset. The idea that a significant person would express his abilities from the very first phases of his life, is also of a Romantic nature. Thus, it is probably not unusual that in proving his claim Kesyakov uses a "poetic" demonstration – he quotes in Polish the following lines from Mickiewicz's *Ode to Youth*: "Who, as a child, detached foul Hydra's head, / In Youth, shall strangle Centaurs even; / Snatch victims from the Devil dread, / And for the laurels march to Heaven" (Kesyakov 1902: 10) (English translation – by Jarek Zawadzki). Here, Mickiewicz's name is indicated after the lines, and the translation is given in a footnote. Kesyakov underscores the word *victim* (*ofiara*): "Instead of snatching victims, he [Bruno – note B.P.] became a victim himself" (ibid.).

The interpretative gesture of Kesyakov is carried out through quotation. In order to present his own perception of Bruno's significance, the author had to identify him with the heroes and characters of the literature of Romanticism – with Byron's Conrad or Childe Harold (saying Bruno was one of Byron's *children*, that is one of the children of Byron's poetic imagination), or with the quasi-Hercules of Mickiewicz's programmatic poem *Ode to Youth*. Mickiewicz appears to be one of Kesyakov's

favorite reference points. In the essay on Bruno, he frequently quotes lines from Mickiewicz's drama *Forefathers' Eve (Dziady)*, but the actual extent of his attachment to the Polish romanticist becomes clear by the subtitle of the poem *The Drunkard – Romanticity!* (Kesyakov 1902: 147). This link was noticed by my colleague and specialist in Polish literature, Katherina Kokinova, who pointed out that, along with *Ode to Youth*, Mickiewicz' poem *Romanticity* (or *Romanticism*) is considered one of the key texts of Polish Romanticism.

Although there are no unequivocal thematic connections or references between the first part of Kesyakov's book – *Giordano Bruno: An Italian Philosopher*, – and the poem *The Drunkard*, a common interpretative line could be easily discerned in both texts. It is not only the fact that they are published together as “part I” and “part II” of the same book (this already implies a higher unity that is supposed to bind them together): it is the common Romantic themes and motifs, the Romantic atmosphere, and first of all, the common Romantic personality – Bruno in the first part, and the nameless Drunkard in the second. I would even suggest that we can juxtapose these two characters and use the figure of the Drunkard in the poem to comprehend Kesyakov's concept of Bruno's personality and significance. I won't go any further into this interpretative possibility, but I would like to remark on a couple of central lyrical themes that emerge in the poem and bring about the connection to the Romantic authors and the first part of the book. Such themes are for instance: youth as an essential feature of the human; striving, passion and disappointment with the limitations of earthly life – usually implied in the image of the stormy sea waves or the raging volcano; the image of the heart, or the chest, as a receptacle of all that is important to the human spirit; death and its menace; the overcoming of death by the force of human heart (as in Mickiewicz's *Romanticism*).

In conclusion, we may say that all forms of reception of Bruno into Bulgarian culture at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century were marked by a Romantic interpretation. This is partially explicable by the specific features of the way the discipline history of philosophy was practiced by that time. However, this literary, or poetical aspect did not disappear from the Bulgarian reception of Giordano Bruno's image. It persisted throughout the communist, and even post-communist period. We might be as bold as to affirm that the actual, unprejudiced, non-ideological, as well as non-fictional reception of Bruno in history of philosophy started only with the first Bulgarian translation of a text by Bruno, published in 2016.

During the Socialist period (1944–1989) there was one philosopher who appears to be extraordinarily excited by the story of the Nolan. His name was Slavi Boyanov. Despite his scholarly interest and a whole monograph on Bruno, written in the 50's and published 1966, he became much more popular as a novelist with a historical novel about the life of Bruno.

Boyanov's first publications from the early 50's were devoted to the Ionian natural philosophy as a basis for scientific cognition, which represents him as a philosopher of science who assumes the viewpoint of dialectical materialism (Boyanov 1950). This is by no means unusual for the period, since Marxism became the official philosophical doctrine in Bulgaria after World War II. Boyanov's first major philosophical-historical publication presents his research on Bruno – it is an essay included in the



second volume of the *Annual of Sofia University* for the year 1954. It bears the title *The Philosophy of Giordano Bruno: Materialism and Dialectics* and remains the first and for now the last, more or less contemporary and independent research into Bruno in Bulgaria, written in Bulgarian and French (Boyanov 1954). This publication was a doctoral thesis and more than ten years later, in 1969, the same study was revised and edited as a monograph entitled *The Philosophy of Giordano Bruno* (Boyanov 1969). The two editions are very similar in contents, the main difference being the fact the one 1954 was a chapter shorter and presented in two languages – Bulgarian and French. Boyanov structures his study in two parts, a biographical-historical one and a theoretical-philosophical one. The historical part follows the already existing Romantic models – it describes the untamable personality of the Nolan, his struggle for truth, and his tragic end, all located in the historical context of an epoch, perceived as “anti-materialist” and “fanatically devoted to religion”, i.e. to superstition, the period of the Counter-Reformation (Boyanov 1954: 70-72).

Despite his ideas of the cultural situation in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, Boyanov demonstrates a remarkably profound understanding of Bruno’s philosophy. He retraces its sources back to the Ionian philosophers and enumerates, after Plato, the names of authors such as Plotinus, Proclus, Raimundus Lullus, Nicholas of Cusa, as well as earlier Italian humanists like Lorenzo Valla and Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Bernardino Telesio and Girolamo Fracastoro. Back then, in Bulgaria of the 50’s, these were no more than names, and they were about to remain so until the 80’s. Of course, Boyanov had no choice but to underscore the “materialist” side of Bruno’s philosophy (a concept that is heavily criticized and even completely refuted in the present-day scholarship) and to renounce prof. Ivan Georgov’s opinion as “too idealistic” (Boyanov 1954: 88). Thus, his central claim would be that in Bruno, matter appears to be the constitutive principle of all bodies, so that all philosophy could be brought down to the problem of matter (Boyanov 1954: 102). However, after announcing this obviously wrong statement as his main argument, Boyanov proceeds to two chapters that are entitled “The minimum, the maximum, and the monad” and “Dialectics of the One” – topics which bare a rather Platonic, or even “idealistic” hallmark. Throughout the book, Boyanov never misses an occasion to underline that under the guise of the “monad and the One” in Bruno, we should always perceive matter itself. His philosophical Bruno is thus a radical materialist – unlike his fictional Bruno, who is more similar to a Romantic idealist. But except for the claim that matter is a synonym of the One in Bruno, all other reflections on the metaphysics of the Nolan seem very elucidating and accurate. It is worth noting that in the edition of the monograph from 1969, an entire chapter was added – the one entitled “Anti-religious ideas” (Boyanov 1969: 64-69). Its inclusion in the book might have been dictated by the need to strengthen the ideological aspect of the publication and to facilitate its publication in an official publishing house.

A couple of years after the first publication of his thesis on Bruno, in 1966 Slavi Boyanov published a novel whose main character was Bruno himself. The novel bears the title *Lights from the Pyre* (Boyanov 1966) and seems to have been a great success, since it was re-published twice – in 1970 and in 1985. Written in the tradition of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century historical novel, the novel combines the features of a biographical

narrative and the *Bildungsroman* with its philosophical and didactic messages. The book was probably oriented toward young-adult public, which becomes visible also from the fact that it was issued by a publishing house, specialized in such editions – *Narodna mladezh (People's Youth)*. In the 70's Boyanov published two further philosophical monographs, one focused on the notion of humanism in a theoretic perspective (Boyanov 1976), and one on Renaissance humanism (Boyanov 1980), but neither of them makes any mention of Bruno. In the 80's, before emigrating to France, Boyanov dedicated himself to semi-fictional didactic writings in the genre of *ocherk* (biographical portraits of famous personalities) – in 1986 and 1987 he publishes two books of collected biographical stories oriented towards children and young adults, describing in a fictional mode the lives of significant persons from the past such as Socrates, Plato, Thomas More, Leonardo da Vinci, Goethe etc. Bruno is the only character present in both books.

Before the publication of the first Bulgarian translation of a text by Bruno, the personality of the Nolan philosopher was to a greater extent that of a literary character than the product of a historical or philosophical research. This literary or even poetic interest continued after the year 2000. In 2011 one of the Bulgarian avant-gard poets, who uses the penname, or rather pen-initials VBV, published a poem openly developing the figure of Bruno as a literary character. The poem is entitled *Shlyaya* (an untranslatable word game, involving a Bulgarian verb with the meaning of 'to hang about') and makes part of the poetry book *Shte*: (the particle for future tense) (2011: 58-60). Bruno is here included in a line of figures, defined as "the precursors of modernism in art" (the cycle "The Precursors of Modernism in Art" begins as early as VBV's first poetry book, *E:to* (2000)). In the poem about Bruno, the main character is presented mainly as a constantly transforming physical body that cannot come to terms with a presumable "they", the others, the society. VBV's Bruno is not a Romantic, but a Modernist hero, a dissolving, fragmented subject with no fixed identity. Nevertheless, the idea of a person unacceptable to society, diverse and non-meeting the expectations of a social norm, still preserves the features of the Romantic hero as a solitary rebel and unbreakable genius.

In conclusion, we might underscore once again that in the Bulgarian cultural context, Giordano Bruno has been presented as a character in fiction and lyric poetry, rather than as a historical person in the development of Western philosophy. In the early publications of historical-philosophical nature, from 1893 to 1902, the accent fell heavily on Bruno's personal life and traits, and especially on his death (with an exception of Ivan Georgov's study). Generally, the publications of this period represented Bruno mainly under the guise of a typical solitary hero, the extraordinary genius, inherited from Romanticism in poetry. Nevertheless, all texts around the year 1900, the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bruno's death, demonstrate a visible appreciation of Bruno's intellectual behavior and biographical persistence at the expense of his purely philosophical merits. After a long break in the tradition of treating the subject (1902–1954), Bruno returned for a short while to the philosophical scene in Bulgaria with Slavi Boyanov's monograph, this time thanks to the materialist element of his philosophy, which resonated with the predominating Marxist and generally materialist discourse of the epoch. Afterwards, again, we find a fictional character, both in prose

and avant-garde lyrical poetry. In Slavi Boyanov's novel he still wears the traditional Romantic mask, while VBV's poem introduces an interesting transformation, using Bruno's rebellious halo as a means to reinvent avant-garde poetics.

At the end, we must add that two secondary texts on Bruno's philosophy have been translated after 2015 – these are two chapters of the monograph *La soglia dell'ombra* by Nuccio Ordine (2003), one of the leading contemporary Italian specialists in the field. These chapters were used as introductions to the Bulgarian translations of *De l'infinito* and *Candelaio* (Ordine 2018, 2019). Additionally, the translation of *La cena delle ceneri* was accompanied by an original essay by the translator Vladimir Gradev (2016), and the one of *De la causa* – by a historical-philosophical study by Paskaleva (2020). The bilingual edition of these four major works of Giordano Bruno was realized in the Bulgarian publishing house "Iztok-Zapad" in a collaboration with the Italian Cultural Institute in Sofia. This project could serve Bulgarian scholars as a stable foundation for further academic research on Bruno's heritage.

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