Särtryck ur

*Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademiens Konferenser 16*

ISBN 91-7402-180-X

ISSN 0348-1433
1. General background

For some time after the liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire in 1878, Bulgarian literature continued along the course followed during the period of the Renaissance. Nothing could be more natural than that. The Bulgarian Renaissance (1762—1878), and particularly its latter period, had meant a considerable effort in most spheres of cultural and political life, and it took some time for writers to lift their gaze from the themes of enlightenment, revolutionary romantics and ‘das volkstümliche’, in short from patriotic themes. Naturally some change had to take place after 1878; since Bulgaria was no longer “under the yoke”, literature could not as before be aimed at that one great goal of throwing the yoke off. But in principle Bulgarian literature continued to have the same function and treat the same subjects as formerly. From its beginnings in the 1840’s almost up to the turn of the century, Bulgarian literature was written almost exclusively for practical national and political purposes and depicted the Bulgarian reality and way of life in a rather narrow manner. So far no one had discovered what was to be found either outside the Bulgarian borders or inside the individual human mind.

However, in the 1890’s the national liberation theme began to be perceived as outdated by some of the younger writers and literary critics. The glamour of the fight for freedom had faded away and the old revolutionary spirit could quite understandably not live on as before under the new social conditions. Likewise the enthusiasm of the first post-liberation years had disappeared and had been replaced by disappointment in many quarters on account of the unsatisfactory political situation. These circumstances, combined with a better education, made the new generation of young intellectuals feel that the national scene was too small for any further literary development and gave too little stimulus to the individual mind. The time was ripe, at last, to see what was to be found outside Bulgaria and inside man himself.

In the 1890’s the discovery of Europe, the Europeanizing of Bulgarian literature and the Bulgarian mind, followed two courses. In his still very readable satirical short stories Aleko Konstantinov made the old, orientalized Bulgarian peasant meet modern European civilization and thus directly and drastically confronted two worlds and two widely differing concepts of life. Konstantinov also introduced Europe and America through travel articles and his book Do Čikago i nazad and thus broadened the views of the ordinary Bulgarian, so far
confined to a small part of the Balkans. But because of the very theme Konstantinov made use of, the confrontation of the old life with the new, there was no possibility of development along his path; this confrontation was necessarily restricted to a short historical period.

Another way of introducing Europe into Bulgarian literature, which in contrast to Konstantinov’s had lasting effects, was shown by Pencho Slaveykov. Born in 1866 he studied for six years in his youth in Leipzig and was deeply influenced by German culture. Pencho Slaveykov firmly believed in the freedom of the individual and of the creative mind and was as firmly against any directing of literature on political or national grounds. That is not to say that he was against national Bulgarian themes; on the contrary he considered Bulgarian folklore an immensely rich source for the Bulgarian poets both thematically and intellectually. But he imbued his poetry, whether thematically national or not, with a philosophical and psychological depth that had no counterpart in the Bulgarian literature before him. Together with his friends and followers Krast o Krastev, Petko Todorov, Pejo Javorov and others, he introduced an aesthetic and ethical consciousness into Bulgarian literature which took as its standard the general European measure.

Pencho Slaveykov was the founder of individualism in Bulgarian literature and at the same time became the founder of Bulgarian literary modernism as a whole. The birth year of Bulgarian modernism can conveniently be put at 1896, when Slaveykov published his first collection of poems, Episkepi pesni. This first period of Bulgarian modernism—individualism—lasted for some fifteen years or up to Pencho Slaveykov’s premature death in 1912.

Pencho Slaveykov was an individualist but he was not a symbolist, and it was not until individualism with its influential journal Misal had existed for about a decade that symbolism made its entry into Bulgarian literature. Actually, again it was the journal Misal which acted as the platform for a new school in poetry through its editor Krast o Krastev, who gave the theoretical foundations for symbolism as well as allotting space to it in his journal during its birth years (Misal stopped publication in 1907).

Symbolism first saw the light of day in Bulgaria in 1905 in poems by Pejo Javorov and Teodor Trajanov; the latter in practice soon became the leader of the new literary movement and so remained throughout his life. It appears that symbolism was born at just the right moment in Bulgaria, a moment when most intellectuals definitely found the time ripe to turn away from petty, everyday problems to something more esoteric and, in their opinion, more eternal. Within a few years symbolism became the dominant school within Bulgarian poetry and to this school there belonged a considerable number of really talented poets; apart from Javorov and Trajanov one might mention names like Dimcho Debeljanov, Christo Jasev, Nikolaj Liliev, Emanuil Popdimitrov and Ljumil Stoianov. Symbolism flourished for a period of some fifteen years, say from 1907 to 1922 (with some nationalistic interruptions during the wars), but lived on, mainly through the writings of the “unchangeable” Trajanov, for a decade or so also after this period.

In what way, then, did Bulgarian symbolism differ from its predecessor individualism (which had paved the way for it)? Since symbolism in Bulgaria, as elsewhere in Europe, was not a unified literary movement but consisted of a number of sub-groups and individuals, each with their aesthetic understanding and development and often highly intolerant among themselves, this difference cannot be stated very exactly. However, some characteristic features of Bulgarian symbolism as compared with individualism may nevertheless be pointed out:

a) The symbolists denied Bulgarian folklore any value as a source of inspiration for the poets; it was considered too poor both thematically and formally. Pejo Javorov was an example of this change of opinion, consciously turning away from individualism to symbolism in this respect.

b) The symbolists searched for what was universally valid, even in the concrete event or in the individual man; poetry should be concerned not with particularities but with the general problems of the human race.

c) The symbolists restricted themselves to literature, whereas the individualists wanted to raise man himself to a higher spiritual dimension. Through this restriction the symbolists managed to achieve one of their main aims: to create a new poetical language, elevated in content and formally exquisite.

d) The symbolists strongly opposed the “restricted” conception of the individualists of the national in art: insofar as they accepted anything national at all in art, it was to them something wider, something more difficult to define and capture. National things were to the symbolists not events or people but national psyche, spiritual qualities, historical fate.

2. Geo Milev—the man, the publicist, the poet

Against the literary background sketched above, the young Geo Milev emerged and developed as a man, a publicist, and a poet. Geo Milev, whose full name was Georgi Milev Kasabov, is one of the most interesting figures in the whole history of Bulgarian literature; one might truly say that he was unique. He was critical, categorical, intense, and a vigilant fighter whatever he fought for—and this changed virtually from one extreme to the other during his mere thirty years of life—always and impatiently searching for new aesthetic paths for Bulgarian poetry in particular and Bulgarian culture in general. He had a far greater knowledge of what was going on in the international scene than any of his contemporaries or, indeed, anybody before him, and throughout his life
tried by means of an enormous literary activity—translations, articles, play
staging, original poems, editorships—to acquaint the Bulgarian public with
European literary events and to raise Bulgarian literature to the general Euro-
pean standard. In addition, Milev was honest, he fought for what he deeply
believed in and spared neither friends, nor foes; in the end this caused his own
tragic, premature death.

Perhaps the most typical feature of Milev’s personality was rebellion, his con-
stant wish to turn all established truths upside-down, to throw away all that
was old, conventional and traditional. It was part of his nature—or, rather, it
was his nature—to break down the existing order of things, in art and, towards
the end of his life, also in society. Milev wanted to create a new Bulgarian
literature on new aesthetic principles which better answered to the new, rapid rhythm
of life. This was like a vocation to him: as an aesthetic search and re-valuator
he was untiring.

Geo Milev was born in 1895, almost at the same moment as modernism first
emerged in Bulgaria through the writings of Pencho Slavejkov. Already as a pupil
at the secondary school in Stara Zagora in 1907—1911 he was entirely absorbed
by his literary interests: he edited handwritten journals, put together anthol-
gies, wrote poems, made drawings (he had a clear talent in this respect too).
The young Milev completely adopted the individualistic aesthetics and
poetry of Pencho Slavejkov, and his poems from his school time are entirely
under the influence of Slavejkov.

After a year at the University of Sofia, Milev went to the University of Leipzig
in 1912. This was very natural; in Leipzig the much admired Pencho Slavejkov
had studied, as had Krast’o Krastev and Petko Todorov. The two years Milev
spent in Germany deeply influenced his young and enthusiastic mind. He be-
came absorbed by West European and particularly German modernism and
from his first published work, the eight articles Literaturno-chudožestveni
pisma ot Germanija in the journal Listopad in 1913—1914, it is apparent that
he was by now a devoted adherent of l’art-pour-l’art aesthetics. In the 20’s he
was to give up this aesthetic approach but the formal side of German (and
French) poetry he got acquainted with during his two years in Leipzig influenced
him for the rest of his life.

In the hot summer of 1914 Milev went to London, where he learned English,
studied English literature and met Emilie Verhaeren. He wrote a paper on
modern poetry in the journal Zveno, in which he fiercely defended “decadent”
modernistic poetry, went back to Leipzig, but was forced by the events of
the time back to Bulgaria in 1915. In the same year he published five lyrical leaflets,
Lirični chvářešti listove, with translations of Stéphane Mallarmé, Richard
Dehmel, Emile Verhaeren, Paul Verlaine and Friedrich Nietzsche. These
leaflets were dedicated to the young Bulgarian symbolists Nikolaj Lilev,
Teodor Trajanov, Dimčo Debeljanov, Ljudmil Stojanov and Nikolaj Rainov.

This shows that the by now 20-year-old Geo Milev had completely adopted the
young symbolists’ aesthetic values, whereas he had come to look upon Pencho
Slavejkov and his individualistic poetry as something belonging to the past.
From 1915 a booklet with original poems by Milev has also been preserved
(some of which were later published in his first collection of poems Žestokijat
prsten); all of them are symbolic. That year Geo Milev went back to Stara
Zagora, where he temporarily took over the bookshop run by his father, who
had been called up by military service; with this return to his home town one
can say that Milev’s first literary period ended.

In 1916 Geo Milev was himself called up and sent to the front at Dojrjan
against the English and the Italians. In contrast to most other Bulgarian writers,
including some of the symbolists, he was not carried away by war hysteria and
nationalism. Actually, his only work about the war, the diary-like collection
of sketches Pri Dojranskoto ezero, written in 1916 but not published until 1942,
is strictly realistic and lacks any idealization of the war. Through this realism
they are strikingly different both from almost everything else that Milev wrote
up to 1922–1923 and from almost all that was written by others on the war
during the wars.

In spring 1917 Milev was severely wounded and lost his right eye. He was
sent to Berlin, where he spent more than a year, from February 1918 to March
1919, and was operated on several times. During this period he devoted himself
with feverish passion to literary life in Germany. He contributed to the leftist
expressionist journal Aktion, and German expressionism strengthened its grip
on his mind; even in his last revolutionary poems this influence is strongly
palpable. Politically the Spartakist rebellion made a strong impression on him;
he was later to bring up this event in Ekspresioniističko kalendarsče za 1921 g.
(1921) and Grozni prozi (1924).

Back in Sofia Milev began to publish the journal Vezni, which survived for
two and a half years (September 1919—March 1922). Vezni, whose name was
undoubtedly influenced by the Russian symbolist journal Vesn, immediately be-
came the main journal of the Bulgarian modernists. During the Vezni period
Milev was still an uncompromising adherent of symbolism and expressionism—
“symbolism is not a school, it is art itself”—and a convinced opponent of realism
(although some slightly different tones may be apprehended towards the end of the period). Milev’s own poetry during this time, e.g. in the collection Žestokijat
prsten (1920), is symbolic as to content but expressionistic as to style and formal attributes; it makes an often chaotic impression, is difficult to grasp, it works a great deal with unclear, fragmentary associations and unfinished thoughts and metaphors. Much is left to the
reader’s imagination, the poems must be complemented and interpreted
through the reader’s own experiences and associative ability.

Milev’s poetry is not as easy to classify as one might first think. He has,

among other things, been called a subjectivist, a symbolist and an expressionist, and whatever feature one wishes to stress in his poetry and whatever label one prefers to use, one has to admit that somehow he constitutes a group of his own within Bulgarian modernism, a third group besides individualism and “true” symbolism. To the pre-1923 Milev the poet is a closed, autonomous microcosm and this microcosm cannot be comprehended, cannot be grasped by the usual five senses. It can be experienced intuitively and described expressively but there is no way of reaching it objectively; it can only be viewed through the mirror of symbols. Nonetheless Milev’s conception of poetry and his own poetry differ from that of the “true” Bulgarian symbolists in several respects. The “archsymbolists” like Trajanov, Liliev and Jasenov were pessimistic and disappointed, and they expressed their pessimism and disappointment in an even, elegiac rhythm, which is harmoniously perfect to such an extent that it can be felt to be monotonous. Milev was not contemplative, elegiac and pessimistic to the same extent, often we do not find any resignation or melancholy at all in his poetry. Formally and rhythmically, too, he is quite distinct from the symbolists, being, through the influence of German expressionism and, in his later years, Russian futurism, much more lively, dramatic and expressionistic.

3. The Plamáčk period

After free parliamentary elections the Bulgarian Agrarian Union (BAU) was strong enough to form a one-party government in May 1920 with Aleksandar Stambolijski as Prime Minister. New elections in spring 1923 made it possible for the BAU to continue to run the country alone. However, the BAU reforms of 1920-1923 had damaged the interests of the bourgeoisie, and on 9 June 1923 the army carried out a coup d’état. Stambolijski was murdered, the new, fragile democracy was crushed, and a totalitarian regime took over power.

A rebellion against the new, illegal regime in June 1923 was followed by another in September 1923. Both were harshly suppressed and the September uprising in particular was followed by cruel reprisals, in which many people—even those who had not taken an active part in the uprising—were shot or hanged without trial.

The political events of June and September 1923 deeply affected Geo Milev and forced him to make a complete turn-around in his views on the role and mission of literature. Already before the summer of 1923, under the influence of his experiences in Berlin in 1918-1919 and of the works of Majakovskij and Blok (both of whom he was well acquainted with and had translated), Milev had begun to question his firm belief in l’art-pour-l’art aesthetics. Now, however, he rapidly completed this ideological reversal. In a number of articles in the weekly paper Vážchod in December 1923 he urged Bulgarian writers to play an active part in the social and political struggle of the people against the fascist regime and, above all, in January 1924 he began to publish a new journal, Plamáčk. The explicit aim of the new journal, announced in an information leaflet, was “in an epoch of insensible social and cultural devastation... to be a torch which illuminates the road towards a new future”. Thus, ideologically Plamáčk had nothing in common with the symbolist journal Vezni, which Milev published in 1919—1922. But aesthetically they were related. Plamáčk was not a symbolist journal but it was nonetheless decidedly modernist and it combined a social and political mission with an expressionistic form to create a very harmonious and effective blend.

Plamáčk immediately attracted most of the progressive critics and poets. They did not, however, form a tight literary group and they were united by ideological rather than aesthetic ties. Altogether eleven issues of Plamáčk appeared from January 1924 to January 1925 (plus an extra issue for 1 May) but during this short period it acquired an importance and a reputation which went far beyond anything that this handful of issues might suggest. In broad circles Plamáčk came to symbolize both the resistance against the regime and the intellectual honesty on the part of the intelligentsia. If anything, its importance as a symbol in these respects grew after it was forced to cease publication.

In Plamáčk Milev, with considerable civic courage, published some of his most interesting and valuable works: articles and poems. Already in the first issue he pointed out in a programmatic article the position of the journal and what he considered must be the place of the Bulgarian intelligentsia: “We must be there, where the People are: with the People, in the midst of the People.” He still acknowledged the merits of symbolism for the development of Bulgarian poetry; symbolism had brought it to formal perfection. But he now categorically rejected symbolism for its formalism and its “pure art” position and denied poets the right to remain isolated from the life of society. Indeed, he had come far away from the idea of the poet as a subjective, autonomous microcosm.

Most of Milev’s socially committed prose sketches and poetry in Plamáčk are written in an unquestionably expressionistic style; over only a few years he had radically changed his ideology but even during the Plamáčk period he remained by and large true to his post-war aesthetic programme. One may say that he had left subjectivism and symbolism behind but that he still found expressionism to be a suitable poetic device both for his social and literary aims and for his own artistic temperament. This is clearly seen, for example, in his most significant and by far his best-known literary work, the long, impressive poem Septemvri, which was published in Plamáčk no. 7—8 in autumn 1924.

Because of Septemvri that issue of Plamáčk was confiscated by the authorities—in January 1925 the journal was banned altogether—and Milev was brought to trial. On 14 May 1925 he was sentenced to one year’s dark im-
prisonment and fined 20 000 levas for publishing Septemvri. That, however, was not enough; the following day he was arrested by the police and he was killed some time in the next few days. The exact date of his death is not known, nor is the place where he is buried.

4. The poem Septemvri

The subject of the poem Septemvri is the September uprising of 1923: its outbreak, its suppression and the reprisals that followed. The poem is fairly long, covering almost twenty pages, and divided into twelve numbered parts. These are of very varying length, from more than a hundred lines down to a single line. The poem is built up on a fairly logical tripartite basis: in principle parts 1—6 describe the outbreak of the uprising, enumerate those who took part in it (and those who did not) and why they did so, parts 7—11 deal with the suppression of the uprising and the alleged reasons for this as well as the ensuing terror, and part 12 puts this particular event in a historical setting, beginning back in antiquity and looking forward towards a paradisal future. However, the poem is not epic in the sense that it chronologically describes event after event; it is a blend of generalized views, momentary pictures and the poet’s own flaming pathos, being at the same time emotional and expressive, realistic and lyrical, unveiling and protesting.

Formally, Septemvri is very far from the smooth, lulling, monotonous rhythm which characterizes the symbolists. It is, for the most part, strongly rhythmic—for Milev rhythm was always important, it was to him the feature which united content and form, in some ways it actually constituted poetry to Milev—but the rhythm is uneven, vivid, lively; the rhythm is there not to put the reader to sleep but to wake him up, to shake him. In several places Milev also makes use of sound symbolism. A good example of this is the first lines of the poem, where the dark stressed vowels strongly reinforce the dark fateful content:

Nošta ražda iz märtva utroba
vekovnata zloba na roba:
svoja purpuren gnjav —
veličav.

Dálbko sred mrak i mágla.

Here we find an almost complete dominance of the dark vowels /a/ and /o/., complemented in one case each with the likewise non-front vowels /æ/ and /u/., in the following pattern:

/a/ /a/ /a/ /a/
/o/ /o/ /o/ /o/
/æ/ /æ/ /æ/
/ʊ/ /ʊ/ /ʊ/

The fateful, solemn tone indicated by the dark stressed vowels in these lines is further enhanced by the abundant use of harsh fricative sounds, the vibrant /r/ and, in the fifth line, the striking concentration of two instances of dark /l/ and three velars /k, k, g/. Even those who do not know one word of any Slavic tongue immediately realize that this cannot be, say, a lyrical love poem or a poem about the pleasures of a cloudless summer’s day.

In order to give an idea of the formal structure of the poem, both as a whole and the twelve parts separately, I have put together some basic data on the length and number of lines, the number of words and the number of words/line in a table. This table shows that the most common length of line is that consisting of one word only, followed by the length two words/line (often a preposition + a noun). These two lengths of line together constitute more than half of all lines or, more exactly, 56.41 %. Accordingly, the type value is 1, the median value is 2, whereas the arithmetical mean value is 2.51 words/line. All these values, taken by themselves or seen as a group, do say something essential about the formal structure of the poem.

Table 1. Length and number of lines, number of words, and number of words/line in Geo Milev’s Septemvri.

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<th>No of words</th>
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<td>196</td>
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<td>592 1485</td>
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Percent-
| Page | 31.92 24.49 19.08 13.18 8.11 2.20 0.51 0.34 0.17 |

Accumu-
lated % | 31.92 56.41 75.49 88.67 96.78 98.98 99.49 99.83 100

Notes. In part 4

Stara

\}

Zagora

Nova

has been counted as two lines with one word and one line with two words.

In part 8 the line without any words consists only of four dashes.

In part 12 Kasandra-prorucica has been counted as one word (there are no other cases of this type in the poem).
The table also shows that the poem becomes heavier towards the end. This applies both to the length of the parts and the length of the lines. Thus, part 12 is the longest in the whole poem with 103 lines, and parts 11 and 9 come in third and fourth place. In the first two parts the word/line length is the commonest, whereas in the last two parts this length is only in third and fourth place. Even more significant is the average number of words/line; the three highest figures occur in the last three parts, with the top figure in part 12.

The numerical data given above are connected with the syntactic structure of the poem. Thus, in the first half of the poem we find long enumerations of nouns and adjectives, whereas in the latter part there are more complete, more prose-like sentences, giving the poem a somewhat more epic character. To give just one example, but a highly significant one: in part 1 there are 41 prepositions and 86 nouns but only 4 finite verbs!

When writing Septemvri Miley used, almost for the first time in his life, a concrete historical event as the basis for a literary work. There is not the slightest doubt as to the fact that Uprising as such, Rebellion as a symbol, Man's eternal longing for a free and humane world is not the only subject of the poem. This general aspect is, of course, also inherent in the poem but only as an underlying principle. The concrete scenes are, although adapted by the poet's mind, taken directly from this particular, tragic event in Bulgarian history—an event which by then was not yet history but a harsh reality. The geographical setting is rendered by Miley in some detail. Already in part 1 he mentions Sopi, i.e. the peasants in the Sofia area, as participants in the uprising, and in part 4 we are given a detailed enumeration of participating villages and towns:

- Magliț beșev prav
- Stara
- Zagora
- Nova
- Ćipan
- Lom
- Ferdinand
- Berkovica
- Sarambej
- Medkovec

In part 4 the only person mentioned by name in the whole poem—Pope Andrej—also turns up (later in the poem he plays an important role). Pope Andrej was a real person taking part in the September uprising and all in all—the geographical data, Pope Andrej and other details—made it absolutely clear to every reader, including those in power, that what Miley was celebrating was the September uprising and the heroic part played in it by the people and those on whom he poured out his wrath were those who ruthlessly crushed this rebellion.

The poem is written with vigour and conviction, in rapture and wrath, it is touching and revealing. It is interesting to note how Miley understands the very nature of the uprising. It is unorganized and spontaneous, the masses gushing forth are rendered as an element of nature, as a huge tidal wave, unrestrainable because of the anger and bitterness that centuries-long oppression and tyranny have brought to a point, at which all dams are broken. Hatred that has been stored for ages comes to the surface as the masses tumble down the slopes and mountain sides like a glowing lava stream. There is a mighty, a primitive force in this moving forward of the masses—all belonging to the people of physical labour, from all walks of life, from towns and villages all over the country—that tears everything with it and shakes the very foundations of the society that the oppressors have built. In this rendering of the masses we see clearly Miley's ideological development: from the freedom of the individual only a few years ago to the freedom of the collective. There is no doubt that in this ideological change there is a great deal of influence from the Russian revolution.

In Miley's depiction of the participants in the uprising there is for the most part not a trace of social realism (a realism which, of course, is not realistic at all, since the heroes are so idealized that they usually cease to be human beings). Miley's heroes are ordinary people, often even with negative characteristics, which is a consequence of the intolerable conditions under which they have been forced to live. They are "sullen, misshapen, crippled, ragged, wild, mad, blunt, without brains", they are "peasants, workers, rude simpletons, illiterate, ignorant, hooligans, wild boars, beasts". Life has made them what they are, it is not their fault and they cannot be blamed for this, and now that they have taken the right to form a better, a more humane life into their own hands it is the moral duty of the poet—even at the risk of his own life—to defend wholeheartedly their "holy cause".

There is one exception to the rule of unidealized heroes in Septemvri. This exception is Pope Andrej, who, realizing that religion is only a means of keeping the people down, gives up his Christian belief and sends the last shell of the captured gun right into the church, where he had sung liturgies and litanies:

I se predade.
"Da se obezi červenija pop!
Bez kršť — bez grob!"

Do telegrafnija stâlb be izpraven.
Do nego palača.
Kapitana.
Vâžeto
be gotovo.
Balkana
tâmnele mračen.
Nebeto —
surovo.
Popa stoele ogromen,
izpraven v celij si râst,
cjal
spokoen kato granit —
bez žal
bez spomen
— na ekrâte Christovija krâst.
One cannot read this part of *Septemvri* without calling to mind another well-known poem about another Bulgarian apostle of freedom, Christo Botev’s *Obesvaneto na Vasili Levski* (The Hanging of Vasili Levski). The parallel between the hanging of Vasili Levski by the Turks in 1873 and the hanging of Pope Andrej by the Bulgarian regime in 1923 is so obvious that beyond any doubt it is intentional; Milev wanted every reader to feel that oppressors are always oppressors, irrespective of nationality and the political situation.

As was noted above Milev sees the uprising as a spontaneous phenomenon: there is no party, no organization, no leader, no verbalized ideology behind it. It is a truly national uprising of the common people, understandable, defendable, righteous, holy. It was born in the dark of the night, caused by unbearable oppression, carried out by people without education and extremely badly armed:

v răcete — ne s bljaskavi špapgi,  
a s prosti tojagi,  
šopi s sopi  
s práti  
s koprali  
s târnokopi

s vili  
s bradvi  
s topori  
s kosi  
i slâncogledi

The uprising is heroic—but doomed; this is suggested already early in the poem. What could these people,

izpokăsani  
kalni  
gladni  
navăsni  
izmărşaveli ot trud  
zagrabei ot žega i stud  
urodivi

sakati  
kosmati  
černi  
bosi  
izpodrani  
prostii

virtually without any arms at all, armed with only what they happened to find at the moment of birth of the uprising, mostly instruments characteristic of peaceful work like axes, hay-forks and scythes, what could they really do against

redovni planeni vojnic  
i razljutena milicija —

who were armed with cannon, machine-guns, shells and mines? What could these tired and hungry people do against regular infantry, cavalry and artillery? The concrete uprising was doomed but the hope for a better world, for a better future did not die with the suppression of the uprising. The poem ends with an exclamation that is full of optimism, full of faith; eventually the poor and suppressed will rise again and throw off the yoke that gods and rulers have put on their shoulders from time immemorial. And this prophecy is no longer restricted to a particular country or a particular people; it concerns man’s life on earth. It is a prophecy about that day when earth will cease to be a place of distress and despair and will turn into a paradise for man to live on:

Vsičko pisano ot filosofi, poeti —  
še se sbădne!  
— Bez bog! bez gospodar!  
Septemvri šte bâde maj.  
Čoveštka život  
še bâde edin bezkonečen vâzchod  
— nagore! nagore!  
Zemjata šte bâde raj —  
še bâde!

* * *

In Milev’s *Septemvri* we find features of content and style from German expressionism, Russian futurism and native Bulgarian tradition. This kind of alloy of different influences is probably both symptomatic of and necessary for the great works of literature of small nations. *Septemvri* marks the terminal point of early Bulgarian modernism as well as the beginnings of a new vital modernism of a radically different character: Elizaveta Bagrjana’s vigorous sensual poetry of the 1920’s and Nikola Vapcarov’s equally vigorous futuristically
stamped optimism of progress of the 1930's. From Milev's *Septemvri* onwards the Bulgarian poets went out of themselves and, in one way or another, into the world. Thus, *Septemvri* constitutes at one and the same time the finale of one great period in Bulgarian modernistic poetry and the birth moment of another, perhaps even greater. In this respect *Septemvri* is as Milev himself in Bulgarian poetry — unique.