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The Dead Female Body and Necropolitics. The Topos of a Walled-up Woman in Bulgarian Modernist Plays¹

The topos of a woman entombed alive in the foundations of an edifice under construction is a relic of an archaic foundation ritual that was practiced throughout South-Eastern Europe and other places. In time, human sacrifice (a woman or child) began to be substituted with an animal or material goods, as corroborated by archaeological finds in the foundations of mediaeval structures (Wawrzeniuk, 2016). In Bulgaria and North Macedonia, which is the scope of the present article, this ritual was practiced until the mid-19th century, yet

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by that time immurement only meant burying a piece of thread – a symbol of a “human shadow” (Княжеский, 1846, pp. 204–205). Although this archaic custom was eventually abandoned, its memory must have inspired fascination and fear, since it has been preserved in the collective memory of the region’s inhabitants in the form of ballads and legends, irrespective of its original meaning, which is now shrouded in mystery. This is clearly evident from the archives of collectors of oral tradition, in which thousands of tales are recorded. From the late 19th century onwards, the impact of this topos was further reinforced through the education system and education-related activities (using the ballad of immurement as an instrument for shaping moral attitudes), as well as through works of literature and art.

Although, in the context of Bulgarian folklore, scholars generally agree that this ritual reflected some archaic ideas regarding the cosmic act of creation, the details of their theories differ. According to one group of academics, making a blood sacrifice to destructive spirits was intended to make the work of human hands more durable (Колев, 1995, p. 260; Парпулова, 1983, pp. 20–33). Others saw it as magic aimed at creating a guardian spirit for the erected edifice (Арнаулов, 1961, pp. 5–76, 1972, pp. 221–244; Георгиева, 2013, pp. 333–347). Yet others perceived the narrative of entombing a woman in walls as reminiscent of the rite of passage associated with marriage and motherhood (Agoston-Nikolova, 1994; di Nola, 2006, pp. 269–274; Атанасова, 1993, pp. 169–188); as a remnant of the Thracian Orphic solar cult or even of ancient Indian mythology (Атанасова, 1993; Моллов, 2002; Николова, 1991, pp. 88–112, 2008, pp. 9–52); as evidence of religious syncretism (Guéorguieva-Dikranian & Ouzounova, 1998, pp. 121–148; Георгиева, 2012); as a naive literalization of metaphors known from the Byzantine Marian cult (Парпулова, 1990, pp. 28–38); or as evidence for the psychotherapeutic potential of native folklore (Анчев, 2011, pp. 101–156).²

The motif of a walled-up woman is not only a topic of discussion among humanists; it has also survived in Bulgarian cultural memory and become

² Many interesting interpretations have originated from other cultures of Central and South-Eastern Europe whose folklore has also preserved the motif of an immured woman: Hungary, Romania, Albania and the Slavic countries of the region, as well as Greece. The topic is the focus of an ongoing grant project entitled “The topos of an immured woman in the cultures of Southeastern Europe and Hungary”, funded by the National Science Centre, Poland (2020/37/B/HS2/00152). The present article deliberately avoids a comparative approach, focusing solely on Bulgarian literature and its folklore-centric associations.

subjected to artistic recycling, which is particularly prominent in modernist culture, most notably in texts written for the stage, as exemplified, e.g., by Georgi Atanasov's famous opera *Гергана* (1917), which is set to a libretto by Lubomir Bobevski. The present article focuses on four plays written in the first four decades of the 20th century: *Зидари* [Masons] (1902) by the Neo-Romantic Petko Todorov (1879–1916); *Над безкръстните гробове* [Over the Crossless graves] (1906, published in 1910) by the versatile writer Anton Strashimirov (1872–1937); *Мостът на река Струма* [Bridge over the river Struma] (1930) by Stilyan Chilingirov (1881–1962), a freemason and an epigone of the Bulgarian National Revival (Чернокожев, 1994, pp. 411–412); and *Янин извор* [The Spring of Jana] (1939) by Ana Karima (1871–1949), a feminist activist (Пенчев, 1992; Радев, 2009, pp. 175–190).

The chosen texts are an interesting testimony to the artistic search undertaken by writers who confronted essential folk tradition (visibly on the decline at the turn of the century) with the yet not consolidated ideas of modernity. They strove to find an artistic language that would be able to express the crisis they were experiencing. Folk songs based on the primordial cosmic monism to which they made references offered a ready-made dramaturgical model (crisis – intrigue – sacrifice – the return of order). As a motif, the ritual of walling up a woman as a means to avert a crisis provided not only symbolic material for reflection on the metaphysical aspects of creative work, but also inspiration for reevaluating the image of sacrificing a woman's life, both of which were essential in folklore. These attempts went hand in hand with reflection on the individual creative act of the Neo-Romantic artist-genius (Dąbek-Wirgowa, 1973; Пенчев, 2003, pp. 9–58), as well as on the ancient communal forms of mystical participation in a collective act of creation (Levy-Bruhl, 1992).

Despite all the differences in poetics and artistic format, what these plays have in common is that the ritual of immolation does not work in the presented world. This failure occurs even though the logic of the myth is faithfully observed: just as in folk songs and legends, the sacrificed woman is someone perfect, the embodiment of wisdom and altruism, while the ritual itself follows the rules of choosing a scapegoat and establishing a new order, as described by Girard (1987, pp. 37–84). In each of the plays, the act of walling up a woman (or, in the more “sophisticated” version, her soul represented by a thread made to measure her shadow) fails to produce the results promised by the “wisdom of the ages”. Buildings and communities crumble; the new order does not emerge (*Зидари*, *Мостът на река Струма*) or is brought

about by means of religious persuasion (*Янин извор*) or even manipulation (*Над безкръстните гробове*). Although the viewer of these dramas does not collide in their finale with a fully disenchanting world, he or she is confronted with a questioning of its existing foundations, including the foundations of gender-conditioned biopower.

Interesting insight into this last issue comes from analyzing how artists conceptualize the forms of social management of the remains of female bodies left after the completion of this ritual. In her book *Nekros. Wprowadzenie do ontologii martwego ciała*. [Necros. An introduction to the ontology of the dead body], Ewa Domańska puts forward an interesting proposal for the study of the dead body that is deeply rooted in philosophy³. She writes:

[...] I consider the participation found in new animism as a desirable orientation towards the world. [...] Efforts towards creating a form of knowledge that would be complementary to the dominant method of its organization, acquisition and presentation – which is science – have led to a resurgence of interest in (new) animism, (new) totemism and (new) vitalism, as well as in all manner of indigenous knowledge that embodies the principle of participation. [...] This context invites the hypothesis that the dead body and remains have never undergone secularization and that presenting them in academic categories on the one hand and in terms of magic and religious aura on the other (i.e., combining causality with participation) might result in interesting research perspectives on the matter. (Domańska, 2017, pp. 54–55)⁴

It may be argued that such cognitive optimism is particularly justified if an analysis pertains to texts of indigenous culture. The plots of the plays under scrutiny revolve around conflicts associated with the construction of a bridge (Chilingirov's *Мостът на река Струма* and Karima's *Янин извор*) and the ritual death of female characters (which are, as stated above, the embodiment of womanly virtues in the patriarchal sense), but these deaths do not make the bridge stronger – the sacrificed women do not become the guardian spirits of the bridges, as folklore would dictate (Попов, 1994, p. 220). In the first case, the bridge remains

³ It should be noted that the scholar who introduced the category of 'necropolitics' into academic discourse was Achille Mbembe. In his 2003 article "Necropolitics", he used it to denote contemporary forms of subjecting the lives of great human masses to systemic violence (Mbembe, 2003). Through planned systemic action, large populations are given the status of the 'living dead', slowly dying out as a result of unbearable living conditions. Domańska abandons the post-colonial perspective, defining necropolitics as an ideologically conditioned way of functionalizing/commemorating the dead body. I also use the category in this sense.

⁴ Translator's note: Unless otherwise stated, all passages from non-English-language publications have been translated solely for the purpose of the present article.

unfinished due to the death of the main constructor, who commits suicide – devastated by his failure to save his wife from immurement. In *Янин извор*, after a short moment of triumph for the builders, the bridge is torn down by a raging river; the villagers experience cognitive dissonance and sink into sorrow.

In both plays, the collapse of man-made structures appears alongside an attempt to reconceptualize female roles. To this effect, both authors use folk narratives that describe the fate of the walled-up women after death. Chilingirov took care to add a museum setting to the events portrayed (in the ethnographic museum, the story of “walling-up” is presented by mannequins which come to life every night). The epilogue of his play contains a scene of particular importance: an infant is fed by the ghost of Milezina, who (in an earlier section of the text) defines her understanding of womanhood thusly:

I don't know... If people were only guided by the reason of masters, they would build bridges, build houses, erect palaces, but they would not raise children... We women are simple and do not comprehend great matters... We understand only one thing: that you have to bow to the masters and love people. (Чилингиров, 1930, p. 89)⁵

The motif of a lactating corpse used by Chilingirov appears in folk songs in which the heroine who is about to be walled up pleads with the masons to leave an opening for her breast, so that she could still feed her baby.⁶ In the legends the lactation never stops, and the milk flows down the stone walls, providing sustenance to many, which is a trace of the right of participation in animism that involves the mystical and material unity of objects, animals and people. This slightly perverse manner of visualizing the phenomenon of post-mortem lactation, present also in Byzantine literature, in the tales of the *Miracles of the Mother of God* (*Чудесата на Пресвета Богородица*, 1995, pp. 8–11), finds rational support in modern interdisciplinary studies on corpses (Thomas, 1991,

⁵ Не знам... Ако хора се водеха само по ума на майсторите, щяха да градят мостове, да зидат къщи, да вдигат палати, но челяд не щяха да отглеждат... Ние жените, сме прости и от големите работи не разбираме... Разбираме само едно: да се покланяме на майсторите и да обичаме човеците.

⁶ Струпали Димки камен по камен, / камен по камен, дърво по дърво, / та си вградиха Димка невеста. / Димка невеста тихо ромони: / – Польока форлей, първичко любе, / че сам оставила москоно дете, / москоно дете в летвана люлка. / Оставите ми барем леваса бизка, / да си изхранем москоно дете! (“Врадена невеста”, 2011). [They were throwing stones over Dimka, one by one, / Stone by stone, piece of wood by piece, / And they immured the young woman Dimka. / Dimka the bride whispers softly: / – Watch out as you throw, my first love, / For I have left an infant boy, / An infant boy in a slat crib. / Leave at least my left breast out, / So that I could feed my boy!].

pp. 9–27) and on the gradeability of the state of death. In Byzantine stories that are formative for Christian imagination, the breastfeeding mother suspended in sleep ultimately comes back to life, having also saved her baby.⁷ However, the fate of the walled-up woman is very different.

Chilingirov's Milezina enters a new form of existence – life in non-life – while still retaining her identity and thus all her worries for her child, the people and the bridge. Although the author does not follow the Romantic path in that he does not make her the redeemer of the world, the image of Milezina still contains strong notes of biological and metaphysical superiority determined by her gender (Harrell, 1981, pp. 796–823). The lactation and integrity that transcend death grant ultimate status to her remains, which do not become the bonding agent to connect the stones of the bridge or the community (Simmel, 2006, pp. 248–255), but remain a vessel for “otherness” (Janion, 1996). However, in Manol's eyes, she only serves her own powerlessness, as a being trapped in the realm of life without life.

Voice. Manol... Has the bridge connected the two lands of Strachilov?...

Manol. It has connected our shadows, Milezina... Shadows, shadows only!

(Чилингиров, 1930, p. 280)⁸

Karima offers a similarly essentialist and affirmative understanding of female altruism. In the finale of the play, in a world where magic has failed and social relations based on violence bring only suffering, a ray of hope is provided by a miracle, understood as divine intervention into human reality. The protagonists see a spring of “water of life” burst forth from the stone grave encasing the measuring thread that symbolizes the soul of the sacrificed woman and mother (Bartmiński, 1999, pp. 235–246). This is hardly a case of a necrotic transformation in the new animist sense, since Jana's corpse remains outside the scope of this transmutation. It is her soul, freed from stone, that seeks communication with people in this way and bestows matter with causality. Symbolically in this context, it is her own child – on the verge of death due to the lack of mother's milk – that becomes the first person to be healed and brought back to life. Here, the symbolism of water as a life-giving substance clearly alludes to Jana's corporeal, biological motherhood; at that moment, her social function

⁷ The collection *Miracles of the Mother of God* contains a description of the Third Miracle – “On the dead woman who breastfed her infant for an entire year and then came back to life” (*Чудесата на Пресвета Богородица*, 1995, pp. 8–11).

⁸ Гла сът. Маноле...моста свърза ли двете страхиловски земи?... / Манол. Свърза ни сенките, Милезино... Сенките, само сенките!

extends to encompass all of humankind. As an entity seeking relations, Jana remains a person, albeit a not-only-human one, who maintains close relations with others only through the medium of the water of life. The Orthodox Church reclaims this ambiguous and heterogeneous – to use (neo)animist terminology – “necropersona” (Bird-David, 1999, pp. 67–91; Domańska, 2017, pp. 57–59) by surrounding her and the spring of “water of life” with an aura of sanctity.

The spring marks an innocent soul which you have put to death. God has made Jana’s innocent soul holy. Let those who drink from the pure spring find their cure and bless Jana’s name. (Holds out his hand over the spring) Let the spring of Jana, innocent Jana, remain here forever. And let the memory of her purify all dark souls! (Raising his hand) Let her name be eternal! (Карима, 1939, p. 39)⁹

The overtly moralistic conclusion of the story serves the purpose of social didactics and constitutes a folklore-clad sublimation of Ana Karima’s feminism with undertones of indigenous mysticism (incidentally, in her time the author was deemed the very embodiment of misandry; Кузмова-Зорграфова, 2002). Consequently, despite its leftist sensitivity to the economic aspects of the depicted tragedy, in its reliance on the topos of the walled-up woman the play *de facto* preserves the religious and folk understanding of the role of a mother who – even after death – is predestined to maintain relations with others and (in line with original mysticism) to retain her conscious intentionality.

The much more androcentric plays represent the polar opposite of this ontological situation: Todorov’s *Зидару* (1902) and Strashimirov’s *Над безкръстните гробове* (which forms an intertextual connection with the former). The plot revolves around the construction of a temple which symbolizes the sacral and the realm of male creation. The events result from an internal crisis (in both works, it fits Girard’s model of mimetic rivalry) and an external threat (bandits in *Зидару*, and a barbarian invasion in *Над безкръстните гробове*). In Todorov’s work, which develops the theme of two men vying for social prestige and the affections of the same girl, the disappointed suitor is the one who turns Rada in, making her become the foundation sacrifice (Атанасов, 2004; ИвановаГиргинова, 2010). Believing in the wisdom of an ancient

⁹ Изворът сочи невинна душица, дето вие затрихте. Невинната душица на Яна Господ е сторил светица. Тоз който пие от извора бистър, лек да напери и името Янино да благославия. (Простира ръка над извора) На веки Янина извор тук да пребъде – извора на невинната Яна. И нека поменът неин да чисти всички тъмни души! (С дигната ръка) Да пребъде името и!

custom, which they (mis)interpret using Christological code (Донева, 2009, pp. 107–113), the builders of the little church commit murder.

Dragan. God wants to test our faith first; force us to atone for our sins, and then put the foundation of His name on pure ground! (...) He wants sacrifice! To atone for everything. A human sacrifice – to make our faith stronger.

[...]

Foreman Brayno. When there is no agreement between masons, a sacrifice is needed to unite them.

Dragan. Indeed. This has been masons' law since time immemorial. The sacrifice is a test from God: it binds, reconciles, unites. It supports foundations and structures. (Тодоров, 1968, pp. 133–134)¹⁰

The masons fail, nonetheless. Although they manage to finish the church in the allotted time, it does not serve the function of uniting the community. The church is perceived as a grave not only for Rada but also for the villain Doncho who – as befits a Judas-like figure – hanged himself from the cross crowning the dome. It therefore seems that the female character's death was futile from the perspective of the community's interest. Magic is questioned as useless and unnecessary. In this case, the body of the stoned girl does not undergo any bond-making necrotic transformation; her death does not result in the emergence of any new life forms or any causative non-human matter that would communicate with people. Only Christo – who is consciously made to be the builder of the free world of “true values” – regards his murdered fiancée as the source of future inspiration and decides to search for her “shadow”/soul in the world.

Christo. (...) I have no-one, and I want no-one. I will venture into the world alone, to search for Rada's shadow. Somewhere I will collect stones, and she will teach me how to build a church with confidence... A new church, my church! (Тодоров, 1968, p. 176)¹¹

Significantly, in his interpretation of an artist's dilemma, Todorov does not turn to Luciferian symbolism (typical of Neo-Romanticism), instead

¹⁰ Драган. Господ иска да ни изпитапо-напред вярата; да ни накара да си изкупим греховете, тогази на здраво място да тури темеля на името си! (...) Жертва иска! Тя да изкупи всичко. Човешка жертва – вярата ни да уякчи. (...) / Майстор Браино. Когато няма сговор между зидари, трябва им жертва да ги свърже. / Драган. Тъй! То си е зако зидарски от памтивека. Жертва е изпитание от бога: тя събира, примирява, сплотява. Тя крепи темел и сгради.

¹¹ Христо. (...) Никого нямам, никого не ща. Самичък ще тръгна по света, сянката на Рада да гоня. Камъне отвед ще събера и тя ще ме научи как с вяра в себе си черква да дигна... Нова черква, моя черква!

using the image of a woman's soul as the personification of Divine Wisdom (Sophia) with the characteristics of a Christianized muse (Brzozowska, 2015, pp. 171–248). This symbol engages the sense of hearing, not sight. In order to hear this faint voice, the artist must reject the conformism of collectivism and take on the future titanic work alone. Only then will Rada's voice, inaudible to others, be able to serve its intimate function of giving advice.

In his *Над безкръстните гробове*, Strashimirov exposes the mechanisms of female objectification in a patriarchal society yet does not actually give women a voice. In creating an image of essentialistically perceived womanhood, he uses various topoi from religious folk culture in a way that reveals their ambiguity. He refers to the myth of the Sun's betrothed, the legend of the suicide and martyrdom of 40 virgins at Cape Kaliakra (*История и легенди за нос Калиакра*, n.d.), while also finding an unobvious way to functionalize the topos of a walled-up woman, encoded, e.g., in the titular metaphor of "graves unmarked by crosses" and the "walling up" lexeme ("вграждане") that often recurs in the characters' lines, e.g., in phrases that refer to resisting the enemy (Страшимиров, 2008, p. 21), to hiding in the literal sense (Страшимиров, 2008, p. 45), or to struggling with a curse (Страшимиров, 2008, p. 30).

The first semantically important "crossless grave" is the grave of the mother of the play's two estranged protagonists, Georgi and Nikola. After Nikola, the builder of the church, seduces/rapes Georgi's fiancée, the mother of both men curses him and secretly joins her wronged son, the Hermit, who is now living alone. It is the Hermit who steals his mother's corpse from the cemetery and walls it up at the highest point of the rocky peninsula as the foundation stone for the construction of a lighthouse (Страшимиров, 2008, p. 24). The motif of an elevated, light-bearing woman comes from the circle of Gnostic thought: as the female aspect of the Divine, she personifies the "first idea" at the basis of all things (Quispel, 1988, pp. 118–127). However, although Strashimirov alludes to gnostic fantasmata, popular in modernist literature, the semantics of that topos is never developed but is only touched upon in the play.

The other case of immurement pertains to the bodies of girls escaping the enemy. After the trauma of hiding under corpses dripping with blood, they seem to belong to Thanatos from their very first appearance on stage (Страшимиров, 2008, p. 37). In the face of an imminent invasion, the person who decides their fate by suggesting collective suicide to avoid defilement is Nikola, the Hermit's wayward brother and the father of one of the girls. He is still a would-be artist whose ambition resurfaces, influenced by the rekindled

rivalry with his brother, and who fervently dreams of building a non-material, mystical church:

[...] all my life... I have crushed stone... built temples... bound stones with mud and lime... My God, with mud and lime I have bound stone... Grant me thy will, Almighty, so that I may erect a temple immaterial – so that I may create life through death. (Страшимиров, 2008, p. 43)¹²

Nikola begins to perceive himself as a co-creator of God's supernatural reality. Therefore, when the crisis arises, he treats the girls instrumentally, while they themselves succumb to the persuasions of the *pater familias* and jump off a precipice in pseudo-mystical ecstasy. Soon afterwards, in a state of prophetic rapture, Nikola foretells their return as swans (which, in modernist literature, are known to symbolize, e.g., purity and a complete mystical experience) (Podraza-Kwiatkowska, 1975, pp. 182–192). Assuming the role of the mediator between God and humankind, he prophesizes a miracle.

However, after the Tartars leave, Nikola himself dies, the church is ruined and the people slaughtered. The bodies of the virgins wash ashore; the whiteness of their flesh makes the survivors remember Nikola's prophecy. Strashimirov introduces dissonance to this clear allegorical interpretation. The young women's bodies are already intertwined with other, non-human life forms: "their hair entwined with the grasses of the sea" (Страшимиров, 2008, pp. 48–49).¹³ They seem affected by necrotic transformation, belonging no longer to the Sun but to the Earth. The world thrown to the mercy of death has lost its contours.

However, Strashimirov's play has two endings (Попилиев, 2008). The first one, briefly summarized below, portends utter disaster. The other was published in 1929 (i.e., thirteen years after the first premiere of the work) in the form of a two-page epilogue. A monastery brimming with life stands on the "rock of execution". Pilgrim rituals concentrate around the cavern with a crack overlooking the precipice, at the foot of which lay the graves of the virgins. The main facilitator of the cult spins his bond-forming, manipulative narration. His name remains unknown, yet his "face of a mummy" evokes associations with the necrotic. What he puts in the spotlight are not the martyred women but the patron of the monastery – the once wayward master Nikola,

¹² [...] аз цял живот... скали троших... храмове зидах... с кал и вар камъни лепях... Господи, с кал и вар камъни лепях... Дай ми могуци, волята си храм нетленен да издигна – със смъртта живот да творя.

¹³ косите им преплели тревите на морето.

now fashioned into a servant of God. He is portrayed as the one who, by divine inspiration, first saved the girls' earthly lives, and then their eternal souls: "children of Christ, break the rock with your bodies, discover God's light and become one with it" (Страшимиров, 2008, p. 51).¹⁴ An attentive reader might experience a cognitive dissonance at this point. In the alternative ending, the false legend and hagiographical mystification triumphs. Everything that Todorov's *Зидари* presented as remaining in the realm of oneiric potentiality and based on trust in the genius individual becomes reality in *Над безкръстните гробове* but bears the mark of the daemonic. The "immaterial church" is built due to the ennoblement of that which had grown in the shadows of the master's heart. The artist is presented as an individual following misdirected drives. The remains of the swan-girls, encased in stone, walled up into cracks in the rocks, become the silent humic foundation of the male world, as does the "burning" body of the protagonists' mother. Strashimirov does not grant these corpses any other role besides that of neutralized objects of male historical necropolitics which – although not venerated themselves – have not been desacralized either and continue to inspire *tremendum et fascinosum*.

Conclusion

The modernist plays analyzed above were born of the writers' intention to subversively reconceptualize the topos of a walled-up woman. They document the process of "wrestling" with archaic cosmological imagery and persistently durable mental structures undertaken by the creators of modern Bulgarian culture. In all four cases, the artistic transformation of relics of folk magic in the depicted world leads to a disturbance of the axiological (and sometimes also ontological) order perpetuated by songs, ultimately resulting in a theurgic dystopia. The body of the victim does not imbue stone with its life force, does not become the binding agent, but it leaves a trace nonetheless. Thus, the concept of necrogenesis and the Platonic thesis that expresses it ("all life comes from non-life"; as cited in Domańska, 2017, p. 70) are suspended (*Зидари*, *Мостът на река Струма*), relativised (*Над безкръстните гробове*) or subjected to pseudo-Christian sublimation (*Янин извор*). However, as

¹⁴ чедата христови, пробийте скалата с телата си, открийте сиянието на Бога и се прелейте в него.

if to spite the modernist fascination with the character of a free male artist-genius, Bulgarian plays from the first half of the 20th century paradoxically present him as an entity dependent on womanhood that is frail yet possessed of metaphysical power. Thus, the message of the texts under analysis stems not only from the unfulfilled need to understand the contradictions characteristic of traditional forms of biopower, but also from a certain kind of impotence in the face of pressure from imaginaries originating from there. Consequently (and seemingly contrarily to the authors' own intention) literary attempts at subverting the archaic ontology of the dead female body lead to forms of recycling the folk topos of a walled-up woman that, in their innermost sense, still fit within the framework of the folk aesthetics of recurrence. Furthermore, from the standpoint of contemporary neo-materialism and post-humanistic ethics (which offers a different perspective on the presented issues), this fact does not depreciate the value of the plays as "not modern enough" or "not providing sufficient amounts of conceptual and artistic surprises". One should rather speak of the authors' noteworthy tendency to yield to the culturally transmitted intuition regarding the complexity of the world, the high unconveyable entanglement of bodies, substances, living beings and stones, a transcendence that carries meaning but does not always undergo affirmative transformation. That which appears to be petrified is given new color in the light of post-humanist ethics which – as Monika Rogowska-Stangret put it:

despite the entanglement, preserves the indigestibility of difference, especially the difference between life and death. It is the relation between life and death (and not any element of this relation) that is put at the center that implodes – becomes life in death in life in death... The one draws nearer to the other like an asymptote. It has room for raw life and raw death, for situations in which one cannot shape one's own life or one's own death, and which get stuck in one's throat despite all transformative efforts. (Rogowska-Stangret, 2021, p. 49)

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Martwe kobiece ciało i nekropolityka. Topos wmurowanej kobiety w bułgarskich sztukach modernistycznych

W bułgarskiej tradycji ludowej topos wmurowanej kobiety jest pozostałością martwego mitu, który nadal jest upamiętniany w kanonie tej kultury. W XIX i XX wieku stał się on przedmiotem twórczego recyklingu w literaturze i sztukach wizualnych. Artykuł prezentuje wyniki moich badań nad toposem wmurowanej kobiety w czterech sztukach napisanych w pierwszych czterech dekadach XX wieku przez Petko Todorova (*Зидару*), Antona Strashimirova (*На безкръстните гробове*), Any Karimy (*Янниият извор*) oraz Stilyana Chilingirova (*Мост на река Струма*). W centrum uwagi stawiam kwestię zdeterminowanego przez płęć kulturową znaczenia, jakie bohaterowie nadają szczątkom kobiecym pozyskanym w wyniku rytuału wmurowania. Omawiam także sposoby, w jakie autorzy wykorzystali tę „pozostałość” narodowej/ludowej archaiczności, która przez cały XX wiek budziła moralny niepokój, a w XXI wieku może okazać się ważnym tematem refleksji post-humanistycznej.

Słowa kluczowe: kultura bułgarska, dramat, folklor, kobieta wmurowana, nekropolityka

The dead female body and necropolitics. The topos of a walled-up woman in Bulgarian modernist plays

In Bulgarian folk tradition, the topos of a woman entombed in a wall is a remnant of a dead myth that is still commemorated in the canon of that culture. In the 19th and 20th century, it became the subject of creative recycling in literature and visual arts. The article presents the results of my research on the topos of a walled-up woman in four plays written in the first four decades of the 20th century by Petko Todorov (*Зидару*), Anton Strashimirov (*На безкръстните гробове*), Ana Karima (*Янниият извор*), and Stilyan Chilingirov (*Мост на река Струма*). The analysis focuses on the issue of the protagonists assigning meaning (determined by cultural gender) to women's remains “acquired” through the ritual of immurement. It also discusses the ways in which authors employed this “remnant” of national/folk archaic material, which continued to raise moral concern throughout the 20th century and in the 21st century may prove an interesting topic for post-humanist reflection.

Keywords: Bulgarian culture, drama, folklore, walled-up woman, necropolitics

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