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BEYOND THE DEFINITION. ALLEGORY IN BULGARIAN LITERARY THOUGHT AND ATANAS DALCHEV'S POETRY

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1. Between classic definitions and common usage

It is not an exaggeration to assert that contemporary literary thought has done little justice to the concept of allegory. In Western and Slavic tradition the term has been firmly associated with archaic genres, such as fable and parable, and thus deemed nonfunctional in modern literary discourse. While this is highly understandable from a historian's perspective, allegory has never stopped producing theoretical problems. Classic definitions of the term, deriving from Aristotle's "extended metaphor" and Quintilian's "one thing in words and another in sense", are still present in both academic and popular dictionaries and textbooks, however their interpretations and exemplifications immediately question the term's validity and scope of application. The 20th century has added more shades and complexity to the meaning of allegory, rather than reveal its unfashionable status in modern literature.

Although national schools of literary theory follow the traditional path to describing allegory, a number of differing preferences can be easily registered in its actual usage between English-speaking or Slavic scholars. The most notable issue, arising from the term's long history, is the trend to complement its unquestioned position amongst literary figures or tropes through three contradicting applications:

- as a single word/phrase (or symbol),

- as a widely perceived literary technique (wider than a single object and/or specific device),
- as a whole story (thus widening allegory's scope to a narrative encompassing the whole literary work).

While the first notion stays rooted in the classic “allegory – symbol” dichotomy, the last threatens to blur strict boundaries between literary technique and literary genre, allowing to classify allegory – at least in popular discourse – in line with terms like fable, parable, morality play or epic poem.

There is no doubt that much of the above-mentioned problems is due to the frequent unsanctioned usage of the term “allegory” in place of derivatives like “allegorical imagery/themes/motives/stories”, “allegorism” or “allegorical speech” (“Aesopian language”). What rises my concern, however, is the possibility of asking a naive question, which despite its naivety stays unanswered by acclaimed literary or general dictionaries: Are Bunyan's “The Pilgrim's Progress” or Orwell's “Animal Farm” allegories, or do they contain allegory as their dominant strategy of literary expression?

The dichotomy “literary device – literary genre”, albeit noted as causing theoretical issues, is most persistent in the English-speaking world. In one of the widely acclaimed English dictionaries of literary terms J. A. Cuddon tends to explain allegory predominantly as a “story in verse or prose”, although accepting its historical usage as a “mode of expression”¹. His article on allegory contains a bright example of the double meaning of the term, revealed in consecutive paragraphs: “The best known allegory in the English language (if not in the world) is Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). This is an allegory of Christian Salvation”. While these statements do leave room for interpreting allegory as a mere device (or technique/mode), they clearly don't encourage it (e.g. by clarifying that allegory is “depicted/contained” in Bunyan's work, rather than stating that the oeuvre itself “is” an allegory). Moving to “the origins of allegory” after analysing Bunyan's novel, the author states that allegory “appears to be a mode of expression (a way of feeling and thinking about things and seeing them)” and encloses several examples of “the use of allegory in literature”. In this way Cuddon clearly accepts at least a twofold meaning of the term without providing explicit differentiation between “story” and “mode of expression”.

The above problem is exemplified with much accuracy by Angus Stewart Fletcher, author of “Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode”², in *Encyclopaedia*

¹ “Allegory”, in J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, III ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 22–24.

² Angus Stewart Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964).

Britannica's online edition, where he warns that "the range of allegorical literature is so wide that to consider allegory as a fixed literary genre is less useful than to regard it as a dimension, or mode, of controlled indirectness and double meaning"³. The same approach is shared in Roger Fowler's "Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms"⁴ with "major symbolic mode" being the preferred definition of the term. A simple Google search on contemporary English language definitions of allegory easily reveals "narrative" and "symbolic mode" as today's most persistent descriptions of the term that replace the traditional but increasingly vague "extended metaphor" or "story".

From its part, Russian literary thought clearly prefers to interpret allegory as a sort of a literary device, avoiding technical terms like "mode" or "narrative". A good historical account of the term's development is given in "Poetics. A Dictionary of Current Terms and Concepts"⁵ (2008), where allegory is primarily defined as "a separate expression or a whole literary work", however its background from Graeco-Roman times to the European Enlightenment is traced from the perspective of an "artistic device" ("художественный прием").

Other authoritative Russian reference books concentrate entirely on allegory as a device⁶, with a notable exception being a 500-pages dictionary for high-school teachers, published in 1974⁷, where allegory is solely and categorically described as "a particular image of an object or phenomenon that substitutes an abstract concept or thought".

Russian dictionary descriptions of allegory, however, can also be confusing due to the frequent usage of the old Slavic expression "иносказание" / "иносказание" ("other-telling"). Although it is a literal translation of the Greek term, the general pattern is to define allegory as "a type of *other-telling*"⁸, which immediately suggests that "other-telling" ("иносказание") is a general term for a variety of metaphorical expressions or a synonym of "trope", which it certainly

³ Angus Stewart Fletcher, "Fable, parable, and allegory", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/fable-parable-and-allegory-1457283> (acc. 25.03.2016).

⁴ "Allegory", in Roger Fowler, ed., *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 5–7.

⁵ "Аллегория", in Н. Д. Тамарченко et al., ed. *Поэтика. Словарь актуальных терминов и понятий* (Москва: Изд. Кулагиной, Intrada, 2008), 15–18.

⁶ Cf. "Аллегория", in А. А. Сурков et al., ed. *Краткая литературная энциклопедия в 9 т.* (Москва: Сов. энцикл., 1962–1978). Digital edition: ФЭБ: <http://feb-web.ru/feb/kle/default.asp?feb/kle/kle/kle.html> (acc. 25.03.2016); "Аллегория", in А. Н. Николюкин et al., ed. *Литературная энциклопедия терминов и понятий* (Москва: НПК "Интелвак", 2001), 27.

⁷ "Аллегория", in Л. И. Тимофеев, С. В. Тураев, ed. *Словарь литературоведческих терминов* (Москва: Просвещение, 1974), 12.

⁸ А. А. Сурков et al., op. cit.; А. Н. Николюкин et al., op. cit., 27.

is not⁹. As a rule, literary dictionaries in East or South Slavic languages do not contain separate articles on “иносказание” and, to my knowledge, it has never been regarded as a strict theoretical term. When it does appear in literary dictionaries, it contains only a reference to allegory¹⁰.

Another Slavic strong stance in interpreting allegory as a device (trope) is held by the post 19th-century Polish literary tradition. The most authoritative dictionary of Polish language until modern times, edited by Samuel B. Linde, defines allegory as “figurative exposition or expression of an entire course of things”¹¹, which is conforming with the concept of extended metaphor. One century and a half later this formula remains valid in the next widely acclaimed general dictionary of Polish language, edited by Witold Doroszewski: “figurative representation of abstract concepts in a work of art”¹². In the second half of the 20th century, however, the representative Dictionary of Literary Terms, edited by Janusz Sławiński, transforms allegory from a device or extended metaphor into “a single motif or a developed set of motives (character, act, plot)...”¹³ – an interesting Polish contribution to debates on allegory’s nature.

The aim of this brief overview of modern definitions of allegory is to reveal some key discrepancies concerning its nature as a literary device, mode, story or figurative representation. English, Russian and Polish, along with French and German schools of literary theory significantly influenced all levels of Bulgarian modern culture since its formation in the middle of the 19th up until the end of the 20th century. It is therefore self-explanatory why Bulgarian theoreticians and historians of arts and literature have inherited many aspects of this long and complex tradition in their own endeavors to define allegory in national literature.

⁹ As a rule, “иносказание” never appears as a technical term for describing literary devices or tropes. Its usage is reserved solely for articles on allegory.

¹⁰ Cf. А. Н. Николукин et al., op. cit., 304.

¹¹ “przenośne wystawienie lub wysłowienie całego rzeczy ciągu” – “Allegorya”, in Samuel Bogumił Linde, *Słownik języka polskiego*, t. I, cz. 1, A–F (Warszawa: Drukarnia XX. Piarów, 1807), 13.

¹² “Alegoria”, in: Witold Doroszewski, ed., *Słownik języka polskiego*, t. 1–11, przedruk elektroniczny (Warszawa: PWN, 1997). An identical formula restricted to fine arts can be found in “Alegoria”, in Krystyna Kubalska-Sulkiewicz et al., ed., *Słownik terminologiczny sztuk pięknych*, IV ed. (Warszawa: PWN, 2003), 9.

¹³ “pojedynczy motyw lub rozbudowany zespół motywów (postać, wydarzenie, fabuła)...” – “Alegoria”, in: Janusz Sławiński et al, ed., *Słownik terminów literackich* (Warszawa: ZNiO, 1976), 17.

2. “Алегория” and “иносказание” – the Bulgarian troubles with allegory

The first definition of allegory in Bulgarian literature appears in one of the oldest Cyrillic codices, the so called “Simeonov Sbornik” or “Tsar Simeon’s First Collection” (also known as “Sviatoslav Izbornik” of 1073) – a collection of ecclesiastical writings translated from an original Greek source. The Slavic translation, commissioned by Tsar Simeon the Great of Bulgaria (reign 893–927), was a clear attempt to adopt the classic knowledge of 9th-century Constantinople. Among its 383 works it contains a treatise on poetical figures¹⁴ by George Choïroboskos – deacon, chartophylax of Hagia Sophia and leading grammarian, whose “dry and detailed treatises played a major part in transmitting ancient grammatical doctrine to the Byzantine world”¹⁵.

The translator of Choïroboskos slavified the names of all 27 poetical figures defined in the treatise and introduced the form “инословиѣ” (“other-word”) in place of “allegory”. The explanation follows strictly Quintilian’s formula: “other-word is speaking one thing and meaning another”. And the sole example, which marks the beginning of all Slavic interpretations of allegory, is: “as it was said to the serpent by God: *Cursed are you above all animals*. It is as if the word is about the serpent, but we perceive it to be the word about the devil, called figuratively a serpent”.

According to this first introduction to the nature of allegory in Slavic civilisation, “инословиѣ”/“other-word” (and not “иносказание” or “алегория”) clearly denotes a single word or symbol. Inherited by high Greek culture, allegory will travel through the centuries without causing debates among Bulgarian intellectuals until the beginning of the 20th century. It is worth noticing that the first authoritative dictionary of modern Bulgarian language, published by Nayden Gerov from 1895 to 1908, does not contain articles on allegory, “инословиѣ” or “иносказание”¹⁶. Literary terms there are excluded in general (no articles on metaphor or symbol, either).

¹⁴ “Георгия Хуровъска О образѣхъ”, in *Изборникъ великаго князя Святослава Ярославича 1073 года* (facsimile edition), Петербург, 1880, f. 237r–240v. Cf. Боряна Велчева et al., ed., *Симеонов сборник (по Светославовия препис от 1073 г.)*. Изследвания и текст, т. 1 (София: БАН, 1991), 668; Мирена Славова, ed., *Спасителна книга (Гръцкият оригинал на Симеоновия сборник)*, прев. от стгр. Петя Янева и Сергей Иванов (София: Архетип, 2008), 350. On the treatise vide Елена Велковска. “Трактатът на Георги Хировоск ‘За тропите’, неговият славянски превод и византийската риторическа традиция”, *Старобългарска литература*, no. 19 (1986): 75–83.

¹⁵ “Choïroboskos, George”, in Alexander P. Kazhdan, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 425.

¹⁶ Найден Геров, *Речник на българския язык*, vol. I, А–Д (Пловдив, 1895); vol. II, Е–К (Пловдив, 1897).

During the 20th century Bulgarian literary culture developed rapidly and although it showed significant interest towards Western European literature, its preferences in interpreting allegory as a device or a figurative representation of an object or story did not alter considerably¹⁷. An important linguistic consequence of the occidentalisation of culture and language, however, was the disappearing usage of Church Slavonic “инословие” and “иносказание” instead of “алегория” as the general term for allegory. To date, “иносказание” is no more than a short synonymous explanation of allegory or allegorical speech. A curious exception from this rule is found in Ivan Bogdanov’s Dictionary of Literary Terms, where allegory is described as an “expression” (in its elementary form) and “artistic device” (in its elaborate forms)¹⁸ with the term “иносъказаниѣ” (“other-telling”) pointed as the Old Bulgarian meaning. However, on page 148 “иносказание” does appear as an entry word, but it refers to “иносказателна литература” – a type of figurative (“other-telling”) literary works – and not to allegory. In other words, using “иносказание” in contemporary Bulgarian language becomes a risky matter – according to the majority of dictionaries, this term is a genuine synonym of allegory, but when used separately, it could mean a number of things related to figurative expressions that do not match entirely with allegory.

The little paradoxes in the Bulgarian usage of allegory and “иносказание” get another dimension in the National Academy of Science Dictionary of Bulgarian Language. The article on allegory there has two separate definitions, referring to: a) literature, and b) arts, only to find that they have different explanations, but identical meaning (a figurative expression of a concrete object)¹⁹. A separate article on “иносказание”²⁰ adds further obscurity to the question, because the term is defined as a “phrase or story containing additional, hidden meaning” along with being a synonym of allegory. In other words, allegory may signify “a poetic object (trope)”, “an image or personification”, while “иносказание” could mean those things in addition to being something more (a whole “story”).

¹⁷ Cf. “Алегоричен”, in Стефан Младенов, ed. *Български тълковен речник с оглед към народните говори*, vol. I, А–К (София: Дечо Стефанов, 1951), 68; “Алегория”, in Любомир Андрейчин et al., ed. *Български тълковен речник*, IV ed. (София: Наука и изкуство, 1994), 24; “Алегория”, in Василка Радева, *Български тълковен речник* (София: Изток-Запад, 2012), 19.

¹⁸ “Алегория”, in Иван Богданов, *Енциклопедичен речник на литературните термини* (София: Петър Берон, 1993), 28.

¹⁹ “Алегория”, in Кристилина Чолакова et al., ed. *Речник на българския език*, vol. I, А–Б, II revised and enlarged ed. (София: АИ “Проф. Марин Дринов“, ЕТ “ЕМАС“, 2001); <http://ibl.bas.bg/rbe/?q=алегория>.

²⁰ “Иносказание”, in Кристилина Чолакова et al., op. cit.; <http://ibl.bas.bg/rbe/?q=иносказание>.

A third kind of questionable definitions appear in the largest Bulgarian literary dictionary of the Socialist period²¹: “an image in literature and a device in visual arts”, suggesting qualitative distinctions of allegory in different arts.

Yet another problematic approach towards the subject is registered in a university textbook on literary theory, published in 2004, where allegory is described as “a kind of imagery in which something is presented figuratively (*иносказателно*)”²². It seems that this explanation most clearly illustrates the general problem with allegory in Bulgarian literary thought from the beginning of the 20th century to date. Discussing allegory, “иносказание” is seamlessly perceived as the literal Slavic equivalent to the Greek term *ἀλληγορία* in virtually all dictionaries, encyclopedias, reference and textbooks. Beyond the scholarly context of defining allegory, however, “иносказание” and its derivative “иносказателен” are best translated into English as “figurative” (“преносно”) or “metaphorical (meaning)” (“метафорично”) and not as “allegorical”. In this way the Slavic word per se implies qualitative fluctuations in the term’s applications and reveals itself to be an obstacle in literary terminology, rather than a genuine synonym of allegory.

From a historical point of view, it is worth noticing that the ubiquitous presence of “иносказание” as the direct Slavic equivalent to *ἀλληγορία* does no justice to the original term “инословиѣ”, which has been completely forgotten in Bulgarian literary tradition. Regardless of which Church Slavonic form prevailed in modern languages, ties with the old linguistic tradition inevitably imply an archaic aura to the term itself and to all things it potentially denotes.

It can be summarised that allegory in contemporary Bulgarian culture is vastly correlated to pre-modern periods of literary history, as well as to separate archaic genres, such as fable, parable, fairy tale and ecclesiastical writings. When it comes to examples from the national literary tradition, fables and other works by Stoyan Mihaylovski (1856–1927) serve as the prime choice²³.

Although there is no undisputed definition of allegory in today’s Bulgarian literary discourse, nobody has managed to question the utility of the term denoting something similar yet distinctly different from symbol, metaphor or figurative speech. It is, however, indicative that allegorism in the works of modern authors receives little to no attention by Bulgarian critics.

²¹ “Алегория”, in Лозан Ницолов et al., ed. *Речник на литературните термини*, IV revised and enlarged ed. (София: Наука и изкуство, 1980), 40.

²² Добрин Добрев, Магдалена Костадинова, *Увод в литературната теория* (Шумен: УИ “Епископ Константин Преславски”, 2004), 171.

²³ Cf. “Алегория”, in Лозан Ницолов et al., op. cit., 40; “алегория”, in Кристилина Чолакова et al., op. cit., <http://ibl.bas.bg/rbe/?q=Алегория>; Добрин Добрев, Магдалена Костадинова, op. cit., 171.

3. Reading Atanas Dalchev's poetry through allegories²⁴ – an unrealised potential

One of a few internationally renowned Bulgarian poets of the 20th century, Atanas Dalchev (1904–1978) became the epitome and exclusive target of “anti-symbolism” (“антисимволизъм”)²⁵ as a specific trend in national literature. This term serves as a general name for authors that opposed the total dominance of symbolist aesthetics and does not denote a separate poetic movement, however it clearly suggests a fierce negation of traditional metaphorical modes of expression in Bulgarian literature. Dalchev's works have been described by critics and historians as possessing strong streams of sensuousness, materiality, descriptiveness, rationality, intellectuality²⁶ – features that haven't inspired a search for deeper metaphorical messages in his short poems and tended to be interpreted as more or less self-explanatory. On the other hand, today the poet is regarded as “the most philosophical”²⁷ representative of contemporary national literature, “the most noninstitutionalized of our classics, and hence most readable and most tempting to subsequent interpretations”²⁸.

While the validity of such statements is extremely hard to question, they fail to reveal a very important quality of Dalchev's poetry – its evident Christian symbolism and messages. Reading Dalchev through philosophical trends and influences²⁹ has broadened the respect towards a rare erudite and his contribution to 20th century Bulgarian culture, but did not help significantly in revealing the core dimensions of his views on man, modern civilisation and, ultimately, salvation. In the same time, existing interpretations of Dalchev's poems from a Christian perspective concentrate on moral values or separate universal

²⁴ I regard allegory as a literary device (trope), a figurative representation of concrete objects or ideas (such as myths, legends, religious traditions, cultural concepts); it is neither a symbol, nor a motif or a story, but is the cause for allegorical motives or allegorical narratives; a story is never technically an allegory – it can only contain allegory as a leading artistic device, but never identify with it as this would create a terminological nonsense.

²⁵ On Dalchev's “programmatic antisymbolism” vide Светлозар Игов, *История на българската литература* (София: Сиела, 2000), 675.

²⁶ These categories appear in one of the earliest reviews of Dalchev's poetry: Константин Гълъбов, “Атанас Далчев. Литературен портрет”, *Изток*, no. 53 (22.01.1927): 2–4.

²⁷ Кирил Кръстев, *Спомени за културния живот между двете световни войни* (София: Български писател, 1988), 62.

²⁸ Биляна Курташева, “Далчев: приближавания”, in Михаил Неделчев et al., ed. *Да четем Далчев. Сборник от научна конференция по случай 100 години от рождението на Атанас Далчев* (София: Издателство на Нов български университет, [2006]), 6.

²⁹ Vide Бисева Дакова, “Дадено и действително в поезията на Атанас Далчев”, in Михаил Неделчев et al., ed. *Да четем Далчев. Сборник от научна конференция по случай 100 години от рождението на Атанас Далчев* (София: Издателство на Нов български университет, [2006]), 39–47; Дора Колева, *Атанас Далчев – поетът философ* (Пловдив: Жанет 45, 2014).

symbols³⁰, thus struggling to justify a deeper debate on the poet's imagery and metaphorical messages.

Apart from the traditional lack of interest towards Christian and metaphysical topics in general, a major obstacle for reading Dalchev through a Christian context in contemporary Bulgarian literature, in my opinion, is the critical unwillingness to reveal and debate on several evident allegorical aspects in his poems. The problem is not helped by the unconventional imagery used by the poet, as instead of banal symbols like the Cross, stars, doves and good shepherds the reader is challenged to deal with objects from everyday urban life (automobiles and carts, hospitals, rooms, windows, doors, backyards, etc.).

If one strives to find allegories in Atanas Dalchev's works, they could go back to several motives from the writings of early Church fathers that have long been accepted as inspiring universal metaphors for the state of humankind in cultures with Eastern Christian background. In Dalchev's "Hospital" (1923)³¹, for example, it is not difficult to recognise human suffering, inevitable death and hopelessness in a hospital without a physician as elements, constituting the allegory of Christ as the divine physician and the world as a hospital for those who have realised sin as sickness of the soul:

Тази бяла варосана зала на градската болница, до самите стени прилепените бели легла и лица побледнели по тях, и лица меланхолни с тъмножълтия цвят на студената зимна мъгла.	This white limed hall of the city hospital, the white beds adhered to the very walls and the pale faces on them, and melancholic faces with the dark yellow colour of cold winter fog.
Тези черни ръце връз прострениите бели покривки като черни оголени клоно на зимния сняг, тези сухи ръце и ракривени болни усмивки, и очи може би вече вгледани в другия свят.	These black hands over the white spread covers like black bare branches in winter snow, these dry hands and crooked sick smiles, and eyes maybe already staring in the afterworld.
Тишината и здрачът и тези прозорци тъжовни със петна от мухи и с бразди от прахът и дъждът, и звънът, и звънът на големия стенен часовник сякаш тежките стъпки на близката смърт. ³²	The silence and twilight and these sorrowful windows with fly spots and furrows from the dust and the rain, and the tolling, the tolling of the big wall clock as though heavy footsteps of nearing death. ³³

Apart from their biblical archetypes, the metaphor of Jesus as a divine physician can be traced back to Clement of Alexandria's (II–III c. A.D.) treatise "Paedagogus"; the concept of the world as a hospital for the soul was widely

³⁰ Cf. Снежана Ангелова, *Вратите. Интерпретации върху религиозната поезия на Атанас Далчев* (Враца: Одри, 2007); Васил Лазаров, *Християнство и поезия* (София: Огледало, 2012).

³¹ The poem "Болница" opens Dalchev's debut poetry collection "Прозорец" ("Window", 1926).

³² Атанас Далчев, "Болница", in Атанас Далчев, *Съчинения в два тома. Том първи. Поезия*, ed. Здравко Недков (София: Български писател, 1984), 33.

³³ Literal translation by Kamen Rikev.

exploited by Clement's student Origen and later in John Chrysostom's († 407) nine homilies on repentance (c. 386–387). Most importantly, today's representatives of Eastern Christian traditions did not come to use such metaphors through direct reading of Church fathers or studying arts, but through their ever-present visualisations in iconography, sermons and liturgical life. This is why I am inclined to think that although Dalchev may have not read any authentic work of Clement, Origen or Chrysostom, he possessed the knowledge and creative will to introduce such allegories in his poetry. In order to be true to the nature of allegory as a literary device, the hospital in Dalchev's poem could be interpreted as denoting the world, with the missing physician denoting the lack of a Saviour in the patients' lives.

Another evident form of Christian allegorism is presented in "The House" ("Къщата", 1925)³⁴:

<p>Сам дяволът я сякаш дал под наем, но неизвестно кой е наемателят. Затворена е всякога вратата, а мракът спи и през деня във стаите.</p>	<p>As if the devil himself has rented it out. But the tenant's quite unknown. The front door is forever shut and even by day dark sleeps in its rooms.</p>
<p>Дъждът гризе мазилката и бяга през счупените водостоци от олово и като пот по челото на болен по сивите стени избива влага.</p>	<p>The rain gnaws at the plasterwork, runs piercing the broken lead flashing, and like sweat on a sick man's brow through the grey walls the damp is bubbling.</p>
<p>И снощи (ти видя ли от прозореца?), когато писна ненадеен вятър, разтвори се, затвори се вратата, завиха ношни кучета на двора</p>	<p>And last night (did you see through the window?), with the shriek of the sudden wind gust the door banging open and shut set the night dogs' howling in the yard</p>
<p>и черна сянка, дълга като копие, разчупи се на каменните стълби и аз видях, и аз познах там мъртвия, когото преди девет дни заровиха.³⁵</p>	<p>and a dark shadow like a spear was broken up the staircase of stone and I saw and I knew the dead man there whom they'd dug in nine days ago.³⁶</p>

The title object depicted in demonic settings provides various contexts for interpretation, so it is tempting to ask the question why this poem has never been analysed through the Gospel parable of the human body (or man in general) as a house and the demons as its unwelcome masters³⁷? Such an allegory will

³⁴ From his first collecton "Window", 1926.

³⁵ Атанас Далчев, "Къщата", in Атанас Далчев, *Съчинения в два тома. Том първи. Поезия*, ed. Здравко Недков (София: Български писател, 1984), 54.

³⁶ Apart from a few modifications, here I follow Christopher Buxton's translation: Atanas Dalchev, "The House", <http://christopherbuxton.com/index.php/writing/translations/atanas-dalchev/> (acc. 25.03.2016).

³⁷ Vide Matthew 12: 43–45; Luke 11: 24–26.

also include the “night dogs” as impure spirits, the opening and closing of the door as the coming of the demons and the “sleeping darkness” as the emptiness of the human soul. In that perspective, the final verses of “The House” represent the realisation of personal mortality and the triumph of death without hope of salvation.

The list of works by Atanas Dalchev that may be successfully read through allegorical representations also includes his early poem “Lepet” (“Прокажен”), “The Books” (“Книгите”), “The Sinful Neighbourhood” (“Грешният квартал”)³⁸, “The Artist and the Wind” (“Художникът и вятърът”). The lack of critical and scholarly interest towards possible interpretations of Dalchev's poetry via allegories, however, is totally understandable not only in the context of conventional dislike for allegory in contemporary culture, but rather because it is part of a larger and far more complex tendency to deny or simply neglect Christian concepts in the works of XX century Bulgarian authors. In Dalchev's case this stance becomes visible through statements, such as Bozhidar Kunchev's general assumption that “he [Dalchev] has his own idea of God, but he will seek for the main contents and values of life in earthly human time. [...] It is possible that to him [...] God remains too distant and incomprehensible [...] Dalchev believes in His existence and, even more, in His necessity for the spiritual and ethical life of man. His works, however, are dedicated solely to man”³⁹. By concentrating exclusively on “earthly human time”, there remains little doubt that avoiding allegorical representations in the poet's works automatically hinders his reception as a Christian author, and vice versa – neglecting a specific stream of the poet's messages, e.g. Christian concepts and symbols, discourages the search for allegories in modern literature.

There is no risk to accuse Dalchev of poetic or intellectual backwardness in accepting the fact that his poetry contains several allegories. The same, I hope, can be stated about his poems reflecting Christian tradition. Nevertheless, unprejudiced historians and critics of Bulgarian literature may show more tolerance towards concepts with two millenia of history.

³⁸ The possibility for an allegorical approach here has been first noticed by Sante Graciotti: Санте Грачоти, “Поезията на Атанас Далчев”, *Литературна мисъл*, no. 2 (1982): 19.

³⁹ “Той има своята идея за Бога, но основните съдържания и ценности на живота ще потърси в земното човешко време. [...] Вероятно и за него [...] Бог е твърде далечен и непонятен [...] Далчев вярва в съществуването му и още повече в неговата необходимост за духовния и нравствения живот на човека. Но творчеството си той посвещава изцяло на човека.” – Божидар Кунчев, “Метафизик в конкретното”, in Божидар Кунчев, *Човешката участ в творчеството на Атанас Далчев, Александър Вутимски и Александър Геров* (София: Орбел, 2003), 68.

BEYOND THE DEFINITION. ALLEGORY IN BULGARIAN LITERARY THOUGHT
AND ATANAS DALCHEV'S POETRY

S u m m a r y

The paper reviews Bulgarian definitions of allegory appearing in dictionaries and reference books. It reveals several paradoxes concerning the usage of the terms "alegoria" (*алегория*) and "inoskazanie" (*иносказание*) in contemporary Bulgarian language. Contrary to the lack of critical interest towards allegorical expression in 20th-century poetry, the author argues that several of Atanas Dalchev's poems (most notably "Hospital" and "The House") can be successfully interpreted allegorically.

POZA DEFINICJĄ. ALEGORIA W BULGARSKIEJ MYŚLI LITERACKIEJ
I W POEZJI ATANASA DAŁCZEWA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

W artykule zostaje dokonany przegląd bułgarskich definicji alegorii, występujących w słownikach i materiałach źródłowych. Ujawnione są paradoksy związane z użyciem terminów „alegoria” (*алегория*) i „inoskazanie” (*иносказание*) we współczesnym języku bułgarskim. W opozycji do tradycyjnego braku zainteresowania krytyki przekazem alegorycznym w poezji dwudziestowiecznej autor dowodzi, że kilka wierszy Atanasa Dałczewa (a zwłaszcza „Szpital” i „Dom”) można poddać interpretacji alegorycznej.