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Detectives, Spies, Cold War:

Crime Fiction and Spy Literature in comparative perspective

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"Detectives, Spies, Cold War: Crime Fiction and Spy Literature in comparative perspective" is a study of the relationship between two literary genres – crime and spy narratives - which emerge in the epoch of modernity and to some extent define it. It consists of four parts, an introduction and a conclusion.

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The brief **introduction** outlines the range of issues the text will address. There, one of the main theses is stated. It insists on the fact that the relationship between crime and spy literature is ambivalent. On the one hand, there is a structural similarity between the two: the story is constructed in such a way that the reader enters a world that appears to be one but is in fact another. On the other hand, however, crime and spy fiction are value-different. The classic crime story, which began its development in the mid-19th century and continued until the mid-1930s, affirms in its finale the triumph of good and justice. There are no universal values in spy adventure narratives - values are always 'ours' and 'yours', they are distributed on both sides of the ideological and political barrier, and victory is not a matter of values but of strength, skill and cunning.

In the introduction the topic of the Bulgarian spy novel, central to the study, is also raised. Here is launched the thesis, which is to be further developed: that the Bulgarian spy novel not only misleads the reader's expectations, it says one thing, but it is actually something else, but it also masquerades as something it is not - a crime story.

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The **first part** of the study, **"The Classic Crime Fiction"**, deals with the crime genre as we know it from its first examples in the second half of the 19th century to the emergence of "noir" at

the end of the first half of the 20th century. The study calls this period of the genre's development "classic crime fiction". During the time of the 'noir', the patterns of the genre had begun to break down and what was later called 'crime narrative' had little in common with the 'classic exemplars' of the genre.

In the first part it is analyzed the resistance of the detective fiction towards the aesthetic dimension of literature by maintaining a constant subversion of the reader's identification through a suspicion, which encompasses all elements of the text, including the author. The anti-aesthetic nature of the classical crime literature is seen as close to the materiality of the letter as this theme is developed in the late works of the American literary theorist Paul de Man. By a close reading of Agatha Christie's novel "Murder on the Orient Express" is refuted the established view that classical crime fiction is a realization of an imperial attitude toward the Orient. The figure of the detective, determinant for the early crime literature, is presented as bringing in a typical for the genre contradiction: between the affirmation of the pre-modern values of the universal justice and truth and the modern world which is "depicted" by the crime literature and of which is a part the crime fiction itself, being harnessed to the machine of capitalism. Other features of the crime fiction are its belonging to both "high" and popular culture and its "worldness" – the circumstance that it does not protect the value of the national identity and its plots usually are not closed in the national borders but are situated between them - on the road.

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Part Two, entitled "**Around a genre that did not happen**" is connected with the Bulgarian literature. A subject of discussion is Pavel Vezhinov's novel "The Blue Sunset". It was published in 1947. World War II had just ended. Communist totalitarianism has not yet established itself; that is to happen soon. Vezhinov's novel successfully presents crime fiction in its second phase – the

"noir". This phase is characterized by the relegation of the detective to the background and the placement of the murderer at the center of the narrative. Also, the emphasis on logic and mystery, begins to disappear. The authors rely on psychology.

The study traces the critical response to the work. It is twofold. On the one hand, there is interest and even admiration for the text, but, on the other, it is attacked as ideologically irrelevant and as not fitting in with socialist realism. Vezhinov does not go on to make another similar attempt. His later "crime fiction" is in accord with the demands of the regime.

„The Blue Sunset“ represents the suppressed by the regime beginning of crime fiction in Bulgaria. Further in the second part, the perspective of the analysis of the relationship between the social system and the crime narratives expands in the direction not only of the repression against the detective genre, but also of its fundamental impossibility in the socialist society. By an analysis of Lenin's "The State and the Revolution" (a key theoretical text of the communist state) and a research of the works of prominent lawyers during the communist period, the study insists that the tradition of the crime fiction is not developed in Bulgaria, because, according to the official ideology, the crime is excluded from the socialist society due to the fact that this society is the fairest social system. The violation of the law can only come from outside of society, from the still-living participants in the regime before the establishment of the communist system (the so-called "former people") and from foreign agents sent by hostile capitalist states. This understanding is illustrated by the many examples of works with pseudo-criminal themes, published during the socialism. In these works the offender is always a political enemy. The political opponent, respectively, is also a criminal offender.

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Part Three ("Successful Narratives of Communism") is focused on the social repercussions of pseudo-crime fiction works at the time of socialism. These works, serving the ideology of the government, have received the kind of attention from readers that the most widely circulated exemplary works of socialist realism cannot hope to. Their film versions have also gained enormous popularity. Paradoxically, this success takes place in the aftermath of Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, when the regime slowly enters a crisis and alternative strategies to socialist realism are gaining ground in literature and cinema.

In the communist Bulgaria the above mentioned works are called "Intelligence-Adventure Genre" and are a variant of the spy novel in the Western literature. The third part studies the strategies of the official critique for the protection of the genre, as well as one of the series of the "intelligence-adventure genre": Andrei Gulyashki's novels about the intelligence officer Avakum Zahov.

The "Intelligence-Adventure" plots actually show the possibility of socialist realism's public success. And this at a time when the socialist realism is increasingly being "exposed" as merely a language of power. However, why do readers prefer precisely those works that serve the regime? Why don't the many poems praising communism or the novels about partisans and heroes of labor become so beloved? The study sees the answer to this question in a feature that makes "Intelligence-Adventure" works relevant both at the time of their publication and today: conspiracy. Socialist society is conspiratorial. Propaganda drives it to look around for hidden external enemies and to seek the enemy among its members. However, the socialist man is also haunted by the figure of the enemy in his private world. He cannot be sure of the other, the doubt whether he is a friend or an informer is constant. Today's man, as the situation of COVID 19 has shown, is also subject to conspiracy theories.

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Part Four ("Irony and Ideology") is dedicated to Bogomil Rainov's series on the intelligence agent Emil Boev. It is undoubtedly the most successful realization in Bulgaria of the spy novel genre. It is beloved by readers precisely as literature, because its film versions add nothing to either its "artistic qualities" or its popularity.

The study argues that readers' attachment (even regardless of political preferences) to this series is due to a play with the regime. For citizens of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, a visit to Paris or London is an extremely rare chance. Bogomil Rainov's texts provide it to them in full. The novels about Boev represent the modern West in considerable detail. And not from its tourist side.

The study also analyses the female characters in the series about Emil Boev. It turns out that in the series the attitude towards gender is ambivalent. On the one hand, it is typically machismo. The novels present the woman (of course, the woman-ideological enemy, the Western woman) primarily as a body, but on the other hand - the "conqueror" of this body, Emil Boev, does not behave like a macho, he is rather passive and feminine in love relations.

Part Four also focuses on the protagonist's relationship with his enemy, the American intelligence officer William Seymour. Here the study highlights a curious shaking of the character's identity. At times the text makes it clear that Boev and Seymour are one and the same person. This almost postmodern play with the character's identity, however, not only can be a cause for psychological reflection, it also fuels the novel's conspiracy theory - that Boev and Seymour, the communists and the capitalists, the East and the West - are pseudo-enemies, that behind the apparent ideological and political confrontation are the agreements between their spy elites, that there is in fact no Cold War but a subversive collaboration between declared enemies.

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The conclusion of the study makes a comparative analysis between the Western spy novel and the communist "Intelligence-Adventure" story. The main difference between them is seen in the fact that while the spy novel "depicts" a fragmented and alienated modern world, the "intelligence-adventure" novel describes a utopian happy reality - the socialist state - surrounded by the same negatively viewed modern world.