

## **Ethical and Moral Aspects in Macedonian Literature in the first Half of the Twentieth Century**

*Slavcho Koviloski*

### **A Look at Macedonian Literature in the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

The question of ethics and literature, that is, ethics in literature and literary ethics, has been elaborated many times by exceptional minds ever since antiquity, through the Middle Ages, to the 19th century and to the most recent times. The works of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, David Hume, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Bernard Williams, John Stuart Mill, and other authors address different aspects of human ethics and morality. In that, ethics are notionally defined by its subject, tasks, and goals (theoretical and normative ethics and contemporary ethical theories), similar to morality with its meaning and different terms (moral norms and values, moral freedom, moral character, moral intention, decision and choice, guilt and sanction, etc.) Therefore, determining the ethical and moral aspects in Macedonian literature in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a serious task for researchers facing an extremely large number of authors who cover a wide range of aspects of human behaviour. Therefore, we chose to present only some of the authors and their works, which we found to contain remarkable expressions of moral and ethical values, characteristic of Macedonian literature in the time frame that is of interest to us.

The period of the Macedonian 19th century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is filled with a number of important political, economic,

and social events that influenced daily life, as well as the educational, religious, and cultural conditions in Macedonia. The country was at the centre of clashes between neighbouring states in both the Balkan Wars and World War I, during which its territory was turned into a huge battlefield. After the end of the wars, the Macedonians continued to live and work in three different countries (Yugoslavia, Greece, and Bulgaria), preserving the Cyrillic-Methodist traditions of Slavic culture and literacy, despite the inability to create entirely in the Macedonian language.

It can be noted that Macedonian cultural circumstances and troubles constantly intertwined with socio-political conditions in Europe and the Balkans. As scholars of this period (Blaže Ristovski, Georgi Stalev, Blaže Koneski, etc.) determined, it is impossible to talk about Macedonian literature without discussing the social context in which Macedonian authors came to be. Starting from the Western European Enlightenment movement, through political and religious propaganda, different religions, schools in various languages, the clash of the traditional with the modern – all these contributed to the development of complex relations of all kinds on Macedonian territory that cannot be separated from each other.

In fact, the aforementioned and many other scholars begin the interpretation of Macedonian literary phenomena in the period of our interest with the revolutionary movements, the emigration, going back even to Kiril Pejčinovikj and his contemporaries (first half of the 19th century), so as to provide an appropriate explanation of the processes, authors, and works they interpret.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stalev states that most of Macedonian literature in this period is engaged realism: “Engaged literature, however, is what stands for truth in general, for righteousness, ethics, and which also contains unequivocal signs of this or that change. Namely, Macedonian literature throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reflects, in every respect, the revolutionary interference not only with the authors, but with most of the people.” Thus, begins the *History of Macedonian Literature from the First Half of the XX Century (Istorija na makedonskata kniževnost od prvata polovina na XX vek)* by Georgi Stalev, published by the

I believe that this introduction is a precondition of exceptional importance for further illuminating the events and directions in the development of Macedonian literature. This introduction is also important for getting acquainted with the themes and motives being elaborated by Macedonian authors, including the issue of ethics and moral values. Writing on the topics of economic migration, the working class, the preservation of the mother tongue, authors such as Anton Panov, Risto Krle, Kočo Racin, and others pose many ethical and moral problems, with axiological elements intertwined with thoughts and views on the system of values, with aesthetic and moralizing content.

Based on such issues, we can roughly divide the ethical and moral aspects of Macedonian literature in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by chronology and by genre. The chronological overview consists of three stages: a) the first decade of the century until 1912, i.e., Macedonia under Ottoman rule, b) 1912 to 1923/24, i.e., the years of the Balkan Wars and World War I and immediately thereafter, c) 1923/24 until the creation of the Macedonian state, i.e., between the two world wars. In the genre review, we find the clearest ethical and moral indications and values in plays, then in poetry, as well as in short stories. In this group, even though it may function separately, we include folklore in all its genres: songs, stories, sayings, proverbs, etc. Through them, the anonymous author presents very notable examples

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Institute of Macedonian Literature in 2003. It is only after describing the sociopolitical and cultural conditions in Macedonia that the author moves to the stated goal of giving an overview and view of the development of Macedonian literature from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A similar but not identical procedure in the creation of the *History of Macedonian Literature, XX Century (Istorija na makedonskata kniževnost, XX vek)*, is applied by Miodrag Drugovac. He, too, begins with events important for Macedonia and for the Macedonian people (Ilinden Uprising, Kruševo Republic, foreign propaganda), but does not interpret their sociopolitical influences on everyday life, only posing the main question: "How and to what extent did the overflow of literary ideas from the National Revival tradition take place?" (Drugovac/Друговац, 1990, p. 9).

of ethics and morality, and vice versa, a series of unethical and immoral acts of everyday characters are also revealed to us.

In our case, it seemed most appropriate not to make a chronological and genre division (some authors create in several genres or, some of them began publishing at a later age), but simply to list the authors whose works are most appropriate for analysis: Vojdan Černodrinski, Vasil Iljoski, Risto Krle, Anton Popov, Anton Panov, Atanas Razdolov, Lazar Pop Trajkov, Marko Cepenkov, then Gančo Hadži Panzov, Arsenij Jovkov, Nikola Kirov Mayski, Mite Bogoevski, Aco Karamanov, Kočo Racin, Nikola J. Vapcarov, Kole Nedelkovski, Venko Markovski and others. Of course, this list is far from final and complete. It is only an indication of the development of Macedonian literature in the given period, hereby opening the possibilities for continuous updating of the offered list. Since the number of authors is really large, we will look into just a few of their works.

### **Does literature have an obligation to be ethical?**

Man, whether real or a literary character, is constantly in turmoil. This turmoil can be caused by a multitude of situations and for a variety of reasons, but ultimately, the infinite pursuit of *something* must end with the establishment of a mental balance, that is, finding happiness. Aristotle observes that: “It can be said that man as an individual, or people in general, have a certain goal that they pursue both when they consciously choose something, but also when they run away from something. That goal, in short, is happiness and its parts...” (Aristotle/Аристотел, 1987, p. 31). Aristotle’s thinking is supplemented by Sigmund Freud, for whom psychosociological analysis indicated that the basic authentic value that man seeks is happiness, and after one finds it, the next step is for it to remain so (Freud/Фројд, 1988, p. 16). That would be the perfect end, but unfortunately (!) Freud lists the three primary sources that are obstacles to human happiness, namely the causes of human suffering.

First, it is the supremacy of nature over man, then the weakness of the body, that is, the frailty of the human body, and finally, and perhaps most important for modern man, the imperfection of institutions governing the relationships between people – family, state and society (Freud, 1988, p. 25). This thesis, in brief, contains a series of shortcomings, yet gives a general picture of human aspirations: overcoming weaknesses and shortcomings and achieving happiness. To reach it, people turn to love, friendship, but to a great extent towards material goods as well, primarily money. Therefore, very indicative are the titles of the works of some Macedonian playwrights from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: *Money is Death* by Risto Krle, *Migrant Workers* by Anton Panov, *Sold* by Radoslav Petkovski. On the other hand, in spite of all the good that financial stability brings with it, for many others, honour stands first and foremost: *Macedonian Bloody Wedding* by Vojdan Černodrinski, *Honour* by Vasil Iljoski. In these plays, we can follow the rise and fall of ideas of morality and honour, of the established code of conduct and understanding of the world.

Therefore, when it comes to the so-called moral degradation of character in literature, there are several questions about the functioning of the character and the impact that the social environment has on it. It is quite clear that in different circumstances, the reaction would be different. What leads to such a situation? Where does the behaviour come from, and what empowers a character, both literary and historical, to behave as it behaves? “The literary-theoretical elaborations on the semantic disintegration (‘emptying’) of the character rely, above all, on the structural-semiological and narratological instruments, that is, on the structuralist, post-structuralist, semiological and narratological theses, tenets, principles. The theoretical tools of the character, which is defined as a sign within semiology and narratology, are basically grouped into two global analytical approaches: position (where the character appears and what

its distribution is) and opposition (its relation to other characters)” (Mladenoski/Младеноски, 2006, p. 94).

Does this mean that there may be multiple ethics depending on the position or the opposition? In other words, does ethics depend on the power of the vertical of the individual in society? Let us not forget that English King Henry VIII at one time transcended legal procedures and held that until one of his six wives gave birth to a son, he was morally justified in executing them. It is also clear that such behaviour, a distorted interpretation of morality, must have been acceptable to his contemporaries in order for them to preserve both their functions and their lives. In this case, could, or more precisely, should literature with its tools abstain from displaying the distorted notion of morality, or, conditionally speaking, “condemn” the historical and literary character of the unruly king? Or maybe something quite different, since if not the same, then many similar motives (killing a wife in order to marry another woman, banishing one for another, etc.) are found in almost all works of literature, including Macedonian and especially in folklore.

Does literature have an obligation to be ethical? Will it help us become better people? These questions are constantly being raised in various studies devoted to ethics and literature, and it seems that they will not be adequately or definitively answered any time soon.

We should immediately point out that it was precisely the transition from the 19<sup>th</sup> into the 20<sup>th</sup> century that raised these questions. It was a period when changes in all segments of public and private life took place at an accelerated pace. Let us recall that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, due to bourgeois morality (and not only that), men wielded strong authority over women, as did parents over children. Further, great attention was paid to the chastity (virginity) of women, to thriftiness, and “morality was patriotic and rooted in tradition.” At the same time, “religious faith was a moral obligation, and religious practice – social duty” (Blackhaw/Блекхо, 1995, p. 378). Could the majority be happy?

Therefore, great changes happened in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: marriage became an equal partnership, divorce ceased to be a social catastrophe, the use of contraceptives began together with the development of healthier sex lives, children were treated better, and care for their mental development began, etc. However, the dynamic development observed in Western European societies has been less penetrating in the Balkans and in Macedonia. Most of the traditional values still apply here, so it is only logical that they found their place in Macedonian literature as well. As the most prominent example, where several motifs are intertwined, we will cite Panov's play, *Migrant Workers*. It contains a series of elements that illustrate the real state of life of the Macedonian man in the 1930s. Of course, they also represent the real obstacle to the happiness of two young people in love: tradition, money, and economic migration.

Macedonian literature in the period under analysis here does not have the basic conditions for development: national and political freedom. Macedonian authors, with exceptions, wrote in languages other than their mother tongue. This, among other things, is a paradox of their work. What language to create in, to ignore the vernacular or to create in a foreign language, whether to write at all when it cannot be in the mother tongue? Is it better to be silent and not use the imposed one, or to release the creative urge at all costs?

### **Ethics and morality in Macedonian plays**

Macedonian plays from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century abound with questions of ethical and moral character. The most prominent example of preserving and keeping women's honour, preserving faith, refusing the material, and refusing to convert to another nationality is found in the play *Macedonian Bloody Wedding* by Vojdan Černodrinski. The author found the inspiration to write the play in a real event, described on the pages of the daily press. The play was first performed in 1900, and by genre classification, it is daily life and social tragedy. The

composition is classically built in five acts: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and revelation. The theme is the love of the young Spase and Cveta disturbed by the violent Osman Bey. In fact, the names are not that important, since the basic idea was to portray the difficult life of the Macedonians under Ottoman rule. Along with the basic plot, the capture of Cveta by Osman Bey and forcing her to convert, the lifestyle of the Macedonians and their customs is shown. Thus, the language is vernacular, intertwined with folk proverbs, harvest, and komitadji songs. The wedding includes the customs of taking the bride from her home, followed by a song; there is also the belief in dreams and their interpretation, etc.

*Macedonian Bloody Wedding* is a drama of conflict. Its characters are presented in black and white; the good and the bad ones representing one side or the other are known in advance. Thus, on one side are the poor and hardworking Macedonian peasants, enslaved but proud of their customs. On the other side are the enslavers headed by Osman Bey. The enslaved peasants are peaceful and honest people who strive to preserve faith and honour in all possible ways even through struggle, while the slave rulers are portrayed negatively as thugs, criminals, and murderers who vigorously seek to take what is not theirs.

In the preface to the play, Černodrinski thinks aloud about the right or wrong act of the author to write about a real event and on such a painful subject. There he wrote:

“What did I write? I didn't write anything. I have copied from the still unwritten bloody history of Macedonia what the reader will read, and the viewer will see in the theatre. The bloodthirstiness of our Turkish beys, the readiness of the Macedonian women to die but not to convert, and the bravery of the Macedonian to heroically take revenge on those bloodthirsty men who defiled or tried to defile his family honour, in that mainly is the content of the play” (Černodrinski/Чернодрински, 1992, pp. 95-96).

The above example is not unique to Černodrinski's works. The motive of freedom, followed by the eternal theme of defending the honour to reach the "oldest and most naive canon – righteousness," is also found in his plays: *The Slave and the Agha*, *Happiness*, *Evil for Evil*, and so on. In them, "sentences, thoughts, messages on defending honour spring up constantly" (Mironska-Hristovska/Миронска-Христовска, 2005, p. 176). In addition to defending honour, Černodrinski's characters also clash with slander, or spying ("for spying there is no forgiveness," in: *Of the Head We Suffer*), with defending the homeland ("The glory of the homeland is built on the sacrifice of her sons," in: *Slav Dragota*), but also with personal interest ("Bad craft, but makes good money," in: *Macedonian emigration*).

Filled with ethical and moral dilemmas are the plays by Risto Krle: *Money is Death*, *Antica* and *Millions of Martyrs*. Similar to Černodrinski, here we come across a series of sentiments related to love and experience, to work, to the Macedonian way of life in the period between the two world wars. Thus, in *Millions of Martyrs*, in the conversations between the master and the apprentices, we come across a series of thoughts and sayings that confront the young with the old: "Patience is the solution," "Clean work and obedience!" etc. This generational conflict, now in the way of understanding and accepting love, is seen in the dialogue between the mother Savetka and the daughter Antica in connection to Savetka's marriage in the play *Antica*: Savetka had a marriage arranged by her parents, Antica wants to decide on her own marriage (Krle/Крле, 1976, p. 97).

However, as a play based on a real event, the greatest moral lessons can be drawn from the play *Money is Death*. Krle describes in detail the idea of writing the play in his *Autobiography*, in the chapter "The Tragedy of the Village of Alarup." Namely, one customer told him about the tragic event that happened in the village of Alarup. The tragedy happened when the only son of a couple returned home after

many years of economic migration. His parents did not recognize him and, lured by the prospect of easy enrichment, killed him. Shortly thereafter, when they found out what they had done, the mother suffered a heart attack, and the father committed suicide by stabbing himself with a knife (Krle/Kрле, 1990, pp. 359-361). In the play, Krle shows the determination of the father Mitre to kill the rich unknown guest (in fact, his son Angjele), in order to get the money that he owns. Justifying the future murder, Mitre convinces himself that the guest must have earned the money dishonestly, by killing another man (Krle/Kрле, 1976, 83).

The play is a true indication of a breach of the code of ethics of old, according to which every passenger should be provided with a safe roof over his/her heads. This raises a number of questions about the need to make money, that is, the state of being blinded by money, the effectiveness of long-term work abroad, but perhaps most importantly, the need to commit murder. In essence, Mitre is not a negative character. Yet, ultimately being blinded by money, he commits a crime. Spurred on by the thought of quick enrichment, he sheds the blood of his own child, presenting to the reader the dilemma of the character of the material gain. What is the limit, to what extent is it permissible for a person to go, to press, to strive in order to make money? Is money the basis for all misfortunes of mankind? And not only that. Krle also raises the topic of “justified murder” first by convincing that there is nothing wrong with killing the one who did evil to someone else, and then with suicide.

Another play based on a real event left a strong mark in 20<sup>th</sup> century Macedonian literature. This is the play *Eloper (Lenče from Kumanovo)* by Vasil Iljoski.<sup>2</sup> The work is dominated by daily life and social elements, and the theme is the forbidden love of two young people, a rich man’s daughter, and a poor peasant. The wealthy Adži-

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<sup>2</sup> As in the case of Krle, Iljoski heard about the real event in the bazaar, this time in Kumanovo (Aleksiev/Алексиев, 1984, p. 250).

Trajko and his wife Velika have a daughter, Lenče, who fell in love with poor Boško. The father, Adži-Trajko, however, has other plans and wants to marry her to Dose, the wealthy son of the merchant Stojan, who has some sort of mental disorder. There is a conflict between Lenče's father and mother over her marriage. Should they give her to the young and healthy, but poor man or to the "unwell" but very rich merchant's son? (Iljoski/Иљоски, 1978, p. 38).

While the parents are thinking, the daughter Lenče makes a step that no one expected, she flees from home and goes to live with poor Boško. Adži-Trajko is hurt by this incident. He is broken, feels powerless and embarrassed before the people both at home and in the bazaar because his word has been trampled on. At the time, it was a great shame for a young girl to marry on her own initiative. In the end, the play ends happily, as the rich Adži-Trajko, after much indignation, so as to defend his daughter's honour and save the family, accepts Lenče's love for Boško.

The play is full of ethical and moral elements that refer to the time in which the events took place, the period between the two world wars. Primarily these are the patriarchal relationships in the family (the obedience of the wife, the son and all the rest to the head of the family), the choice of the daughter-in-law by the parents; everyday customs, usury, gossip in the bazaar, as well as the fleeing of the girl from her home to go to her beloved. Writing about the creative properties of Iljoski, Nada Momirovska notes: "his basic thesis in choosing playwriting, entering into the conflicts and the weight of the people is to be a kind of artistic *moral and ethical catalyst* (underlined in the original – note S.K.) (Momirovska/Момировска, 1995, p. 11).

Similar in composition to *Eloper* are the plays *Teodos the Rich Man* and *Honour* by Iljoski. Here, too, we come across characters and situations that cross certain ethical and moral boundaries (trickery, insinuations, lying), honour is at the forefront (the mother worries as much for the life, as she does, and more, for the son's honour) and

there are prohibitions (love, ethnicity, and religion). The characters, especially in *Teodos the Rich Man*, are typified with pronounced features. Thus, the rich Teodos is portrayed as a man with a sharp, terse speech, a man who underestimates and despises those poorer and more inferior than him; his son Tomče wants to marry a poorer girl, but he is patriarchally raised, he respects and fears his father and will not marry without his consent; Arso is a clever and sly man of wickedness and cunning, but never of corruption, good-hearted and sensitive, etc.

In addition, we will mention just one more example of the Macedonian interwar drama, where strong ethical-moral dilemmas are developed regarding the daily life of the Macedonians and their economic migration. This refers to the play *Migrant Workers* by Anton Panov. This play, as well, is based on real events, that is, situations in the life of the Macedonian migrant workers, especially in Belgrade, where the author lived for some time. Namely, Panov attended high school in Belgrade, but also simultaneously attended the Music School. After leaving high school, he began working as a chorus member at the Belgrade Opera House. After the rehearsals and performances ended in the evening, he returned home on foot and could see the life of his countrymen, migrant workers. Hence the play *Migrant Workers*.

As can be deduced from the title itself, the theme of the play is the love of two young people, the poor Kostadin and the rich Simka. Since their love is burdened by material reasons, because of poverty, the young man is forced to go into emigration so as to make a living. The driving motive in *Migrant Workers* is money, for life, for the bride, for showing in front of the people (pride), but we also see other motives besides emigration, including the motive of love and of tradition. As in the previous cases, in the plays of Iljoski and Krle, the characters in Panov are clearly differentiated. On one side is the wealthy man, the usurer Jordan, who is cruel and insensitive and only interested in money, as opposed to poor Kostadin for whom love is in the first place

and thinks that the bride is not to be bought with money, because her voice needs to be heard too. The third party is Jordan's daughter Simka, in love with Kostadin. She is patriarchally raised and must not oppose her father, not even wanting to elope so as not to embarrass her family. Finally, everyone agrees that it is best for Kostadin to go out and earn some money, though everyone knows that it will be the end of their love, and he will never come back.

Thus, Panov raises several questions of existential nature related to the subject of our interest: the value of money, whether love is bought with money, whether men should buy their brides, the subordinate position of women and the equality of the sexes, etc. All this can be seen in brief from Kostadin's words: "No, I don't want a wife for money! I want Simka to come to me out of pure love, not for money!... I want a wife, not a slave..." (Panov/Панов, 1976, pp. 250-251).

From the above examples, we can conclude that the Macedonian plays of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which are mostly daily life and social in character, are dominated by topics related to everyday life. They intertwine a range of ethical-axiological values, among which the most common are morality, love, honesty, happiness, good and evil. In essence, the moral practices outlined in these works are influenced by tradition, people's consciousness, politics and religion. Oftentimes, they do not come into conflict with the laws, but exist and act together with them. And even if moral norms are violated, the punishments are imposed by close people (rebuke, boycott, exclusion). In these cases, the state is excluded from domestic life, thereby from sanctioning immoral life.

### **The sublime, the real and the ugly – the ethical and moral messages in prose and poetry**

Macedonian literature from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is rich in works based on tradition, patriarchy and pieces that follow the life destinies of the main protagonists. One of the more popular ones, if

not the most popular theme used in contemporary poetry, was the liberation movement, with a focus on the 1903 Ilinden Uprising. Here, in the foreground, is the personality and its relation to the liberation struggle: “From this aspect, the social and moral qualities of the personality are assessed. The notions of heroic, sublime, tragic, inferior, ugly, etc. were filled with an aesthetic measure according to the criteria of the people for participation and contribution in the liberation struggle” (Najčeski/Најчески, 1997, с. 156).<sup>3</sup>

Among the many notable authors who have produced poetry, plays, and history books is Nikola Kirov Mayski. We will briefly dwell on his plays and the Kruševo Manifesto, a historical document that was well ahead of its time with its contents.<sup>4</sup> The 1923 play *Ilinden* (in which the Manifesto is published) lacks the qualities of Černodrinski, Pjoski, and others, but its author deliberately avoids being subjective: “he does not put hatred in the foreground, but objective need and necessity. All the feelings in the work are subordinated to higher goals.” (Petrovska-Kuzmanova/Петровска-Кузманова, 2003, 26). Those “higher goals” will repeatedly pervade almost all of Kirovski’s works, i.e., the need for dignity and self-sacrifice to liberate the homeland.<sup>5</sup> As for the Kruševo Manifesto, we have to mention that

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<sup>3</sup> In addition, as Blaže Ristovski puts it: “It was already the new age that ended the period of Ottoman slavery in Macedonia, a time of heroic self-sacrifice and a firm belief in the victory of the righteous work of the Macedonian” (Ristovski/Ристовски, 1993, p. 106).

<sup>4</sup> About the play *Ilinden* and the sketches *Pitu Guli Among His Own*, *The New That’s Forthcoming*, *In Order in Kruševo* and others, more in: Nikola Kirov Mayski, *Drami*, edited by Tomislav Todorovski, Mislа, Skopje, 1991/Никола Киров Мајски, *Драми*, приредил Томислав Тодоровски, Мисла, Скопје, 1991. More on the poetry work in: Blaže Ristovski, “Poetot Nikola Kirov Mayski (1880-1962)”, in: *Pojavi i profili*, 2, Studentski zbor, Skopje, 1982, pp. 92-105 / Блаже Ристовски, „Поетот Никола Киров Мајски (1880-1962)“, во: *Појави и профили*, 2, Студентски збор, Скопје, 1982, с. 92-105.

<sup>5</sup> Let us recall that: “The world’s first political exclamation is poetic, and it is proclaimed from the depths of the VIII century BC: For it is a fine thing [...] to die, fighting on behalf of the fatherland! (Callinus, Tyrtaeus). Over time, this poetic premise was flipped, becoming an anti-stanzaicethical message: “To live

until several decades ago, it was attributed to the famous revolutionary Nikola Karev. Later, scientific research determined that the real author was Nikola Kirov Mayski.

In the Manifesto, the Macedonian revolutionaries address the local Muslim population in the Kruševo area (Turks, Albanians, Macedonian-Muslims). It gives a clear picture of the uprising's motives and aims, its liberating and social character. Noticeable are the words and expressions such as “your brothers” “own brothers” “honest Turkish people” etc., which the insurgents use to equalize themselves with the entire population of the region. In fact, the Manifesto shows all the future actions that the revolutionaries planned to take. According to the main and widely accepted division of ethics that consists of four different disciplines: normative, descriptive, applied, and meta-ethics, in the text of the insurgents, we establish: normative ethics, dealing with the practical consequences and forms of moral action, descriptive ethics (comparative ethics), which deals with the description of specific deeds, practices, beliefs, and applied ethics that build appropriate systems of moral behaviour within a given discipline. (KM, 1948, 5-6)<sup>6</sup> In this way, the Manifesto presents the social goals of the uprising – establishing a just society.<sup>7</sup>

Didactic-moralizing works were created by one of the most prolific Macedonian authors of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Evtim Sprostranov from Ohrid. Both in stories and songs and in his journal writings, he writes of the daily pretensions and whims of the people

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well!... that is – it is not essential – to live, but it is human – to live with dignity, nobility” (Aristotel/Аристотел, 2003, p. 35).

<sup>6</sup> The manifesto was first published in the play *Iinden* by Nikola Kirov Mayski, in: *Drami*, Skopje, 1991, 73. A. Aleksiev states that Arsenij Jovkov thundered when he uttered the words: “Countries having people’s manifestos such as Iinden 1903 do not die; those manifestos stand higher than peace treaties, political speculation, and trade in peoples!” (Aleksiev/Алексиев, 2001, p. 73).

<sup>7</sup> Returning once again to *Nikomahova etika* (*Nicomachean Ethics*), in Aristotle’s aethic theory, “righteousness is a kind of isometry that aligns social disorder” (Aristotel/Аристотел, 2003, p. 31).

who surrounded him. They show the attitude of society's progress and the need for education, which he considered is not limited either in terms of age or gender. Sprostranov protested against the immoral life of young people, the disruption of family relationships, the corporeal that replaced the sublime and the love, the loss of the meaning of marriage, the unequal treatment of women, critically referring to the bad upbringing of parents and the educational system, to the church, the clergy, the divorces, the self-awareness when voting ("not to be someone else's instrument"). He wrote about vanities, but also about the debt to the homeland, the family, society, and "about the obligations of the inhabitants regardless of the surrounding they live in, the choices of honest and moral citizens in municipalities that will work for the good of others" (Mironska-Hristovska/Миронска-Христовска, 2004, p. 315).

Atanas Razdolv's literary work is filled with clear and specific attitudes, with an open and bold approach to exposing lies, tyranny, and slavery. According to V. Tocinovski, Razdolv "elevates purity of thought and deed as the highest ethical norms and they are irreplaceable". Particularly interesting are the few verses in the book *Revolutionary or Betrayer*: "But in one thing I am happy, / In purity, my damn heart swim deep, / In despair and inferiority my step does not tread, / My pure conscience I sacredly do keep" (Tocinovski/Тоциновски, 1990, p. 141).

Self-sacrifice as the last act in the struggle for a better future, for the homeland and for the preservation of honour is a frequent motive in literary works of this period. Stories of disobedience in difficult life situations are repeatedly followed. That freedom is regarded as one of the highest human achievements, but also that sacrifices are to be made for it, is quite impressively presented in the poem "Lokvata and Vinyari" by the revolutionary Lazar Pop Trajkov. The poem is based on the battle on the locations of Lokvata and Vinyari, which was fought by the combined detachments of several Macedonian

revolutionaries against a far larger Turkish army in 1903. Recalling it, the poet sings about the “honour” of the revolutionary who fought for freedom. Self-sacrifice is an integral part of the struggle, but honor is above all: “Faithful to honour and duty, / young Dičo before collapsing, / makes a painful move / and takes his soul with his bullet (Pop Trajkov/ Поп Трајков, 2003, p. 30).

The unpublished novel of Vestala Timčeva *Risto from the Šatkovi Family* follows the fate of young Veles native Risto Šatkov, the only child in the Šatkovi family. Later in the novel, the key words are revealed: “Freedom requires great sacrifices” (Tocinovski/ Тоциновски, 1996, p. 123).

In the poem “I Shall Return” by Gančo Hadži Panzov, “the highest and most important ethical category for the poet is love and faith in man” (Tocinovski/Тоциновски, 1996, p. 90); in his publicist work, the Valandovo native Boris Džonov repeatedly asked whether it was right for numerous factories to “seek new profits and sacrifice from young people” (Ristovski/Ристовски 1982, p. 185); a similar question is raised by Mladen Martinov-Burinski in the work *Under the rule of the Executioners*, etc.; Arsenij Jovkov in his rich creative opus, and especially in the poem “Evil,” creates full-blooded persons with all their positive and negative qualities. These are people “who are able to love and hate, to sin and o forgive, to cheat and to punish” (Jovkov/ ЈОВКОВ, 2006, p. 200). Further, revolutionary and social motives are elaborated by: Vladimir Kovačev, Kiril Manasiev, Ivan Kerziev, Angel Žarov (Mihail Smatrakalev), Atanas Trendafilov, Volče Naumčeski, the members of the Macedonian Literary Circle in Sofia (1938-1941), and others.

For us, the authors from the Macedonian Literary Circle in Sofia (1938-1941) and those who gravitate around it, who will lay the groundwork for contemporary Macedonian literature, are of utmost importance: Kočo Racin, Kole Nedelkovski, Nikola Jonkov Vapcarov, Venko Markovski, and others, whose works have evident artistic

qualities. We should also note on this occasion that “all poets of this proletarian-social and revolutionary circle die as fighters or illegals during World War II (Kosta Racin, Kole Nedelkovski, Mite Bogoevski, Nikola Jonkov Vapcarov, and Aco Karamanov)” (Drugovac/Друговац, 1990, p. 51). Anton Popov should also be added to this group of literary creators killed during World War II. It is not by chance that the famous literary researcher Aleksandar Aleksiev calls them “worshippers of the sun and justice” (Aleksiev/Алексиѐв, 1984, 178).

Unlike their predecessors, for which ethical and moral laws are clearly visible and emphasized, and exclusively related to the homeland and the dignity of the home, the aforementioned authors face a number of more complex ethical-axiological and moral problems. Macedonian folklore was an inspiration and great influence on them, but artistically and stylistically, they built their own worlds dominated by the ethical notions of happiness, freedom, right to live, solidarity.

In his works, Mite Bogoevski plunges and searches for folk creations to “reach the most complex aesthetic and stylistic dignities” and “grasps the inhuman reality, the centuries of slaves, the humiliated, the hungry, the arrogant, the exploited workers through inhuman visions” (Momirovski/Момировски, 1988, pp. 82-83). The young poet Aco Karamanov, who died at the age of 17, had a very similar life and a poetical path to that of Bogoevski. His poetry is mature, authentic, filled with lofty ideals. It is artistically highly accomplished revolutionary poetry, and “its hallmarks are the criticisms of the injustices of a time, the satirical-ironic-sarcastic notes on life and the phenomena of life in bourgeois and petty bourgeois circles” (Radičeski/Радически, 2011, p. 259).

It seems as though Nikola Jonkov Vapcarov had more time to build his poetic language, original and unrepeatable, without the narrow-mindedness and romantic rhetoric, with mentioning heinous murders

and betrayals, the working life and fierce fate. The scholars of his work are unanimous that Vapcarov achieved a complete identity of his poetry and of his life, and Georgi Stardelov emphasizes that “even his last touches with life were filled with that famous duel of his poetry with the forces of evil and injustice which is a leitmotif of all his poetic experience, a poetic duel with that unceasing struggle with the decay, malice and cynicism of life” (Vapcarov/Вапцаров, 1991, p. 5).<sup>8</sup>

Anton Popov was shot along with Vapcarov. Interestingly, the death sentence pronounced on July 23, 1942, neither suppressed nor prevented his intentions to marry on the same day his beloved Rosica Manolova. The highest ethical category for him is love: towards woman and fatherland (without underestimating other notions like righteousness, joy, goodness). In the last letter written before the shooting, Popov writes: “I am dying for a new world that will dawn with so much light, with so much beauty that my sacrifice is nothing for it. I die proud with the name of my people, for the good of which I worked well until the last moment, for whose good future I die” (Popov/Попов, 1993, pp. 7-55).

Kole Nedelkovski, another poet closely related to the poetics of Vapcarov, Popov, and Racin, killed himself in order not to fall into the hands of the enemy. His poetry full of emotion, lyricism, but also revolutionary spirit, embodies his ethical concepts and characteristics. About him, Dimitar Mitrev wrote: “Opponent of any self-emphasis and unprecedented in his modesty, he took his strict criticism of himself and of his poetic development as something completely natural... Of course, his attitude to self-criticism and criticism did not deprive him of a healthy ambition and a hot desire to present himself as a poet” (Mitrev/Митрев, 1981, p. 162).

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<sup>8</sup> More in: Nikola J. Vapcarov, *Tvorbi*, izbor i predgovor Gane Todorovski, Mislа, Skopje, 1979 / Никола Ј. Вапцаров, Творби, избор и предговор Гане Тодоровски, Мисла, Скопје, 1979.

This series of poets, members of the Macedonian Literary Circle in Sofia who were killed in World War II, ultimately includes Kosta Solev, the famous Kočo Racin, one of the founders of contemporary Macedonian literature. Writing about the essence of the working class's struggle and its function in the sphere of culture, he says: "Our movement is not only economic-political, it is also culturally ethical... the working class builds its own culture and ethics during the struggle. But they are not some artificial creation, the workers' culture and ethics should be a continuation of the most exalted and most grateful the humankind created." So, thinking rationally about life, on a handwritten piece of paper, Racin wrote down six rules of work and behavior in life: "Strengthen the will to work, / Train and get accustomed to work, / Every day a little – success will follow! / overcome laziness, make a plan, and learn a language" (Racin/Рацин, 1987, p. 20).

Racin was familiar with the works of Hegel, Pisarev, and Kautsky, strongly penetrating the research into folk culture, Marxism, poetry, philosophy, history, and language. In his poetry (*White Dawns*), as well as in numerous journalistic and publicist papers, Racin raises a number of questions about the meaning of life, the right of "those who make the world to be worthily rewarded for their labours," that knowledge of slavery will bring first consciousness, and then liberation, he reflects on the need for everyone to decide for one's own destiny, instead of others to govern it, but also about the right to joy, happiness, love, individual identity, elaborating topics in the field of social, professional, organisational ethics.

The appearance of the poet Aco Šopov is also important for the Macedonian literature of this period. In his first poetry phase (1937-1950), he constantly learns, struggles, and questions himself; "Created with blood and plow, with love and passion, Šopov's engaging poem will rebel and grieve, fight and build, motivate and unite – for justice – for love – for freedom," notes Blaže Kitanov and adds: "it is poetry

that will fight and call, mobilize and communicate in the name of ethical ideals...” (Kitanov/Китанов, 1998, p. 70).

In the period between the two world wars, we also witness the emergence of Macedonian literary criticism that fulfills its basic condition of simply evaluating literary works in its classical, school-like sense. Although modest in scope, Racin again dominates this field. He is followed by Jovan Kostovski (Jovan Kostikj), Gjorgji Šoptrajanov, Dimitar Mitrev, Slobodan A. Jovanovikj, and of course, Anton Popov. Popov created a booklet of reviews titled *From ‘Storm’ Over the Homeland to ‘Strange Macedonia’* from 1940, writing that rated authors (A. Žarov, or Mihail Smatrakalev, K. Racin, V. Markovski, K. Nedelkovski, N. Vapcarov) have a single topic: Macedonia, with the ideal for the freedom fight (Popov/Попов, 1984, 6). The first publications of one of the most famous Macedonian literary critics, Dimitar Mitrev, date back to this time. Even then, he “denies ‘the idea of art that is itself a purpose and a value,’ just as in turn he speaks against the ‘vulgar sociologism and rough bias”” (Drugovac, 1988, p. 232). On what the critic should be and on his moral qualities, his thoughts, albeit naively, albeit with no great artistic value, and yet significant in understanding the role of the literary appraiser we can read in Venko Markovski’s 1945 novel in verse *Klime*: “The critic is a watchman, / with knowledge armed, / with a healthy sense, with a hardy mind, / and with a broad rich spirit, / he is a judge, is just, / is a politician, is eternally alive, / holds his pen strictly / and is hard on the enemy” (Markovski/Марковски, 1992, p. 288).

### **Ethics and morality in folklore**

It is well known that folklore, among other things, encompasses a set of beliefs, forms of behaviour, attitudes of one nation to different life issues and situations that are passed down from generation to generation. In this way, folklore legitimizes culture and transmits the morals and values of that culture. These moral values embodied in

customary law are not a state (political) decision or law but are associated with community members' moral and ideological and educational functions. Such rules of conduct are intended to indicate what is good, what is not, or what is allowed, and what is forbidden. Knowing that morality stems from customs, which in turn are transmitted through oral tradition from generation to generation, we can attest that it changes in line with changing social needs, but that, in any case, it remains the pillar of sustaining the society.

Therefore, we will briefly focus on folklore, which is extremely rich in examples of ethical-axiological and moral nature (proverbs, songs, stories, legends), which is a challenge for a separate research. Beginning with the 1860s, with the collections of Stefan Verkovicj and the Miladinov Brothers, through the revised materials of Marko Cepenkov, Kuzman Šapkarev, Panayot Gjinoski, Naum Tahov, Efrem Karanov, Vasil Ikonov, and others, the presenters of folklore works in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century maintained and enriched the repertoire with folk wisdom and high-quality artwork. The themes and motifs are largely the same as in the previous century, presented anew, adjusted to the new age, new socio-political conditions, and the new understanding of the presenters.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Marko Cepenkov continued his odyssey of completing and editing collected songs, stories and proverbs; Evtim Sprostranov, as well as Cepenkov, continues to collaborate with the *Collection of National Folklore, Science and Literature* being issued in Sofia, Bulgaria; of great importance are the publications of Anton Pop Stoilov; special collections of Macedonian folk songs are published by Pančo Mihajlov (1924) and Josif Češmedžiev (1926), and the brothers Dimitar and Kostadin Molerov in 1954 finally published the materials collected in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Kočo Racin, too, was interested in and wrote about folklore, and the rich folklore was incorporated in the works of almost all members

of the Macedonian Literary Circle in Sofia (Venko Markovski, Anton Popov), as well as other authors (Mite Bogoevski, Stojan Hristov). Particularly rich in folklore (proverbs, sayings, oaths, curses) are the works of Macedonian playwrights from this period. This situation shows us that it is not an exception, but an objective literary occurrence in which most of the poets who belong to the social-revolutionary Macedonian poetry from the period between the two world wars, and especially from the 1930s and the first years of the war participated. In them, the traditional model is transformed into virtue, that is, benevolence. In fact, we already wrote about them briefly in the above lines.

We can conclude that the themes and motifs processed are varied, ranging from the contrasting depiction of the faithful and unfaithful wife, the lazy and diligent woman, the girl who loves an honest boy, and so on. There are many songs and stories in which the girl opposes Turkish conversion and does not want to change her faith; of betraying oneself for material gain or falling in love with another; of incest between brother and sister due to ignorance. Topics with the most serious consequences end in violence, i.e., death. In such cases, unknowingly, the mother kills her son in order to take his money, that is, for material wealth; father kills son to have his wife, after which she kills herself; the mother-in-law does not love the daughter-in-law, due to which she kills her, and after her son learns the truth, she kills herself out of sorrow; brothers commit sister-related murders; the girl who was looking for a way to be with her beloved poisoned her own brother; the unfaithful wife falls in love with another man, kills her own child, after which her husband kills her; a young man was slaughtered at his brother's wedding (that is how it was written) and so on.

Proverbs and sayings containing the moral and ethical values and rules are an important part of Macedonian folklore. They are the wisdom and life experiences expressed in short form “thus presenting

conclusions on a series of life questions, expressing wisdom, advice, rules of conduct confirmed by experience, the values of the proverbs lie in their persistence, their striving to act in a positive direction, in the upbringing of generations” (Kitevski/Китевски, 1988, p. 32).

We will list several proverbs and sayings where one can see the popular experience. They are related to cause-and-effect relationships, which contain a series of ethical-moral components: “Honest death will glorify your whole life,” “Reap what you have sown,” “What goes around comes around,” etc. The meaning of these proverbs and sayings is to show humanness and empathy, to be grateful for the little things earned on one’s own merits, to be modest in everything, not to do harm to others, since the same can happen to everyone.

At the same time, what stands out is the large number of folk songs that have drastic deviations from the usual code of ethics and morality. We have already seen that in spite of “minor” moral offenses such as deceit or malfeasance, folk works often deal with “heavier” themes such as murder. This serious violation of moral norms does not always have a moral lesson. That is, the interpreter of folk doctrine knows how to leave a number of open questions: whether the murder is justified or not, whether there can be a justified murder, and often the ultimate fate of the perpetrator remains unknown, whether he is liable to punishment for the offense committed or not. Therefore, with regard to the framework thus set out for considering the ultimate disruption of established moral principles, there is even an amiable sound in the loving conviction of two young people who have difficulty to see each other alone. The girl’s call to the boy to come to her as a guest in the evening is rejected by the boy with the excuse: “Devilish girl, / I’m not coming, / for you have a mean mother” and “Devilish girl, / I’m not coming, / for you have / a fierce father.” At that, the girl is ready to violate her parents’ moral commandments by responding: “Be calm, / you mad quitter, / I will lull to sleep my mean mother” and “Be calm,

/ you greenhorn / I will get drunk / my fierce father” (Češmedžiev/Чеשמеджиев, 2009, p. 58).

There are differences also in the definition of male and female roles in the family and society. There is labelling, intolerance, and marginalization of the other, segregation, and significant deviations from the established patriarchal model (polygamy, homosexual and bisexual relationships). Although the Macedonian folk culture seems “patriarchal, closed, moralising, there is a whole area that we bring under the general term erotic folklore, which offers obvious examples of the erotic world of the Macedonian people, the degree of their sexual awareness, the patriarchal model and its disobedience, all kinds of relationships between men and women in families and the wider community, the spatial and temporal surroundings in which hidden or public erotic experiences, associations, psychological moods and many, many, many other aspects of eroticism are found” (Martinoska/Мартиноска, 2014, p. 43).

Kiril Penušliski notes that a taboo was imposed “not to publish ‘shameful things,’” which “scandalized.” However, he continues, there are events (ceremonies) where erotic songs are allowed to be sung freely, which in our opinion is a violation of imposed customary (moral) norms, but in a limited and short interval. Most often, the underlying motive lies in infidelity, how a man cheats on a woman or how a woman cheats on a man. “The most important preoccupation with the thematic elaboration of the basic sets of motives of erotic stories stems, in fact, from the way in which the erotic problems of people’s everyday experiences are resolved, justified or condemned,” he concludes (Penušliski/Пенушлиски, 1981, pp. 476-477).

From these briefly discussed themes and motives, as well as proverbs and sayings, we can establish that the folk genius knew the value of moral action. That is why they were used by Macedonian writers such as Iljoski, Krle, and others. Nada Momirovska writes that “with many years of use by the people (of the short folk genres – note

S.K.), and finely and unobtrusively incorporated into Iljoski's plays with their ethical and educational dimension, with which the author has clearly shown us his line of pedagogical and educational, these genres popular and valuable to the mass audience among the people have a great deal of significance" (Момировска/Момировска, 1977, p. 78). In addition to these words, we will cite A. Aleksiev's assessment: "It is precisely these high moral and ethical criteria that adorn Vasil Iljoski as a man and a creator, that have kept him persisting, not succumbing to misfortunes and injustices, ignoring obstacles and humiliation..." (Aleksiev/Алексиев, 2001, 113).

Generally speaking, the customary norms of the surrounding among Macedonians in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century played a significant role in establishing and maintaining family (and social) norms of pre-adopted moral values based on opposites: good versus bad, honest versus dishonest, true versus false, etc.

### **"Shoot up, shoot at the stars / Let us die free and honest"**

As we could see, classical Macedonian drama and literature in general from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century explicitly painted the characters of the main protagonists of literary works. Most often, they are presented as diametrically opposed and opposing each other. In fact, it is evident that the rich Macedonian middle class was heavily denounced by interwar Macedonian authors. It is mainly for two reasons: the advocates of traditionally patriarchal relations (the rich) held back the new libertarian ideas but widespread among young and progressive, but poor Macedonian intelligentsia, which often authored these literary works.

Hence, we have identified several types of characters, characteristic of these plays, with all their contrasts:

- rich: unjust (dishonest, greedy, proud);
- poor: fair (honest, sincere, truthful);
- houseboy (servant): bootlicker (liar, mocking, pretending);

– wife: decent (faithful, hardworking, caring).

From the works of the above-mentioned authors, we can also derive the basic moral and ethical notions which they elaborate: pride, shame, falsehood, boasting, pretense, irony, ridicule, ambition, bootlicking, greediness, in a word, viciousness, that may end up with theft, murder, false testimony, slander, insult, physical torture, violence; opposite them are the notions of liberalism and freedom, honesty, truth and truthfulness, probity, decency, justice and fairness, tolerance, reason, sobriety, friendship, i.e., virtue, etc.

Some of the literary characters, especially those in prose and plays, are portrayed or have morally ambivalent characteristics.<sup>9</sup> Unlike poetic works, where there is a relatively clear perspective on expectations and the characters' demands and actions, in the prose and plays, some of the characters have contradictory impulses. Since every morality is basically local to a given character, and the character is an individual who feels and behaves as the moment demands, the reader witnesses uncertain situations with unexpected twists, which brings us closer to postmodern attitudes about morality. In this case, the particular natural order in the historical-reflective occurrence can be set “in a relatively natural order of specific moral-ethical principles” in the following order: measure or midpoint, bliss or happiness, pleasure and joy and usefulness, from which the following ethical concepts emerge: eudaimonism, hedonism, and utilitarianism. Therefore, we fully agree with the conclusion that: “To the extent that each ethical concept seeks to establish and explain its own specific understanding of good versus evil, giving it a character of its own

<sup>9</sup> In fact, this has been discussed many times. It is almost impossible to grade the black-and-white nature of man, for, as David Hume observes, often virtuous and gentle feelings were replaced by pride or contempt for people which was considered the greatest wisdom, “though in reality it is the most stupid thing of all” (Hjum/Xjum, 2015, p. 334). See also: Fridrih Wilhelm Niče, *Genealogija na moralot, rasprava*, ARS Studio, Skopje, 2015, pp. 15-43 / Фридрих Вилхелм Нице, *Генеалозија на моралот, расправа*, АРС Студио, Скопје, 2015, с. 15-43.

leading ethical and moral principle, so each of them applies its specific thematization in which the general definition of good as a goal, i.e., principle, is met by specific content determinations.” (Donev/Донев, 2018, p. 98).<sup>10</sup>

Thus, in the face of numerous works that contain moral and ethical thoughts and concern themselves with certain moral and ethical issues, the literary researcher is confronted with elaborating theoretical ethics. It should study and explain the moral notions and relationships that appear at certain stages of social development, identify the conditions, causes, and consequences for the creation of moral understandings and investigate, describe and interpret the phenomena, sources, properties, goals, and tasks of morality. In this regard, it is noticeable that in the descriptions of patriarchal and rural areas, a large place has been given to the notion of honour. In the years just before the start of World War II, when the Macedonian Literary Circle came into play, among other ethical notions, human-rights demands rose highest.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, we can conclude that among the most dominant issues that Macedonian authors from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century write about are ethics and morality. Patriarchal ones intertwined with and were complemented by new modern understandings of life to be lived honestly and freely. Or as Vapcarov writes in the poem “Komitajis’ Poem”:

“Shoot up, shoot at the stars,

Let us die free and honest.” (Vapcarov/Вапцаров, 1991, p. 45).

<sup>10</sup> If we take good as our ultimate goal, we need to be aware that there is a penalty for breaking the norm. On the good, in: Vitomir Mitevski, *Antičkata filosofija i neјzinoto vlijanie: Aristotel*, Matica Makedonska, Skopje, 2014, p. 172 / Витомир Митевски, *Античката философија и нејзиното влијание: Аристотел*, Матица Македонска, Скопје, 2014, с. 172. For penalties, in: Jelena Svetanovska, *Grevot i kaznata*, Matica Makedonska, Skopje, 2012 / Јелена Цветановска, *Гревот и казната*, Матица македонска, Скопје, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, Racin, Vapcarov, Nedelkovski and others in their poems write about them. Based on Thomas Payne’s assertion that “reason is the surest guide in life, politics, religion, and morality”, one concludes that “human rights are a new foundation of ethics” (Temkov/Темков, 2014, p. 260).

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**Translated into English by:**

Marija Girevska, PhD.

St. Clement of Ohrid Faculty of Theology in Skopje, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, R. North Macedonia