

Ivan Vazov's propagandistic novel Under the Yoke provides insight into the nationalistic sentiments of Bulgaria in 1893. Vazov is quite blatant in his condemnation of the Turk and praise of all things Bulgarian. Perhaps, Vazov is attempting to remind the Bulgarian people, who have been so long under the Ottoman yoke, what it means to be Bulgarian and free. Alternately, his goal could be to shape the morals of the new, free Bulgaria. Several qualities are extolled in the text, both openly and subtly, similarly, certain values are harshly criticized. Vazov seems quite taken with the idea of education, and its value is emphasized in a myriad of ways. Tradition, or at least the moderation of revolutionary zeal in the social realm of Bulgarian culture, is given veneration as well. Fidelity, personal and national, also receives attention as a valuable trait. Characters such as Ognyanov, the protagonist, Rada, and Stefchov all are meant to represent different archetypes, from the zealous patriot to the odious Turk-lover. The characters rarely exhibit any shades of gray, existing predominantly in black and white.

The theme of education appears many times throughout the novel. It first appears early in chapter one. Chorbadji Marko, portrayed as a good Bulgarian, places great emphasis on the education of his children. Marko "...believed in science, as he believed in God, unreasoningly." (18) Marko, unlike other characters, is not a diehard devotee of revolution. He believes in the cause, risking his life for it on several occasions and even donates his cherry tree to the artillery effort, but he does not immerse himself in the cause like Ognyanov and Sokolov. He is, in many ways, the novel's Everyman. Marko is an uneducated, simple man, like most of the Bulgarian population. His support of both education and the revolution is intended to be an example to the

people. Vazov hopes that all of his readers, even the simplest of them, will follow this example and support the sciences and education.

Another example of Vazov's support for education is a more subtle one. Ognyanov, who serves as an example of the ideal revolutionary, takes the job of schoolteacher in Byala Cherkva. Rada, the feminine Bulgarian ideal, also is a schoolteacher. By giving these characters occupations in the field of education Vazov is placing emphasis on education's role in the revolution and ascribing great prestige to educators. Of the other teachers at the school, only Merdevendjiev, who teaches Turkish, is spoken ill of, he is described as, "...a repulsive creature, with his devotion to the Psalter and his love of the Turkish language." (62) Merdevendjiev's un-Bulgarian affection for the language of the oppressive Turks marks him as a creature to be scorned. His role in the plot to uncover Ognyanov's true identity confirms his odious nature. Ognyanov is also fluent in Turkish, but this only serves to help him elude capture. The contrast in attitudes towards Turkish is important. Ognyanov's knowledge stems from his imprisonment at Diarbekir, while Merdevendjiev possess an actual, and very un-Bulgarian, fondness for the language. The criticism of Merdevendjiev's affection for the Psalter stems from the conservative nature of many religious leaders causing them to oppose revolutionary activity in a most un-Bulgarian fashion.

Vazov pays respect to tradition and Bulgarian culture, while at the same time calling for a revolution. A rather subtle affirmation of the importance of tradition is the school teachers' choice of play. They choose to perform "The Long Suffering Genevieve", a play that was

popular 30 years prior (79-80). After their performance the players and audience break out into revolutionary songs, but even this radical group holds more traditional works in high enough esteem to perform one of them. When the Turks attack Klissoura, as the people in the town are fleeing they are described as "...carrying their shoes in their hands, so as not to wear them out" (273). This is a reference to the traditional Bulgarian felt shoes, which, despite their impracticality, the Bulgarian patriots of Klissoura wore.

Another aspect of tradition that Vazov touches upon is the role of women in the free Bulgaria. During one of the revolutionaries' meetings Kandov brings up the idea of feminism. He vehemently espouses this doctrine to his fellow revolutionaries. However, he is warned that,

"You reject the laws- not of man, but of nature; you undermine the eternal foundations on which human society is built... What will happen to the world if we destroy matrimony, the family, the mother, and deprive the woman of her great mission?" (105)

Clearly, Vazov does not support non-traditional roles for women. Rada serves as Vazov's ideal Bulgarian woman. Her devotion to both Ognyanov and the revolution are meant to serve as an example.

Fidelity is one of the qualities most highly praised by Vazov. Ognyanov, Rada and Sokolov all exhibit supreme devotion to the cause of a free Bulgaria. At the novels end, all three willingly die for the cause, Ognyanov and Sokolov both saving enough bullets to ensure they will not be taken alive. They accept their fate voluntarily, the recently reconciled Rada and Ognyanov content to die with each other. The importance of fidelity to Rada and Ognyanov in

their relationship is also meaningful. At the first hint of infidelity on Rada's part, with only the slightest evidence backing it up, Ognyanov cruelly scorns her. This emphasizes the value Ognyanov, and by extension, Vazov, places on loyalty.

The manner in which Vazov portrays the villainous Turks provides a vital contrast with the good Bulgarians. The bey is portrayed as an arrogant, bumbling fool. The first instance of this is when it is revealed that Sokolov has been having an affair with the bey's wife. By making the bey a cuckold, Vazov paints him as weak and impotent. Later, the bey is made out to be a buffoon when, after the schoolmasters' production, the people burst out into revolutionary song in front of him and he is none the wiser. As well as, emphasizing that the Turkish bey does not know the language of the people he governs, the scene provides comic relief. Another example of comedic incompetence on the part of the bey is when he and Stefchov attempt to translate a revolutionary letter. Not only is the bey overly proud of his false interpretation, he mistakes the mention of the common herb belladonna for a direct reference to a person. This would particularly appeal to the rural readers, who would be more familiar with curative herbs such as belladonna. A final example of the bey's incompetence is that he is unable to gather any evidence about the revolutionary activities himself. He is forced to get his information from the traitorous Bulgarian Stefchov.

Stefchov plays several roles in the novel. His most immediate role is the repellent traitor of Bulgarian ideals. He also provides a strong contrast to the Turks with his cunning efforts to

sabotage Ognyanov and the rebellion. Several times Ognyanov is saved from capture by the Turks mistakes, such as at the inn where the Turks barge into the wrong room, mistaking its resident for the elusive Ognyanov. The only other Turkish agent to display competency and ability is Zamanov, a closet support of the revolution. In fact, it is only his superior knowledge and skills that allow him to save Ognyanov and the other rebels from Stefchov's machinations. In spite of this, Zamanov is still portrayed poorly, as he constantly asks for money and is nowhere near as selfless as Ognyanov or Sokolov.

Stefchov's character is further sullied by his motives. He has no true love for the empire itself, he simply wishes to thrive in the system that exists. His ardent quest to fight Ognyanov stems from personal jealousy and dislike rather than a desire to protect the empire. Stefchov would, arguably, be more sympathetic were he devoted to his cause out of true loyalty or altruistic concern rather than selfish gain.

Vazov's emphasis on the meaning of being Bulgarian shapes the entire novel. By espousing education and qualities such as fidelity, Vazov is reminding the Bulgarian people how to act. Too long they have suffered under the Yoke, forgetting what is good and Bulgarian. Vazov's Turks are crudely characterized as evil or bumbling, and far more sinister than the Turks themselves are the despicable Bulgarian traitors who serve the Turks. Ognyanov is meant to contrast with the other characters, he has remained a true Bulgarian, uncorrupted by Turkish rule, and therefore his convictions are pure. Vazov clearly sees this novel as a necessity in reestablishing Bulgaria as it was before experiencing the corrupting taint of the Turkish yoke.

