Summer Time and the Livin’ Is Easy

My BETA-IATEFL Conference

The 22nd BETA-IATEFL Conference through the Eyes of the Beholder

A Desire to Share Passion

BETA-IATEFL Meeting with ELT Publishers

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Drums, please! Summer, summer, summer time! Time to sit back and unwind!

The feeling of great happiness is overwhelming but first, a big “Thank you!” to everyone who has been involved in the 22nd BETA-IATEFL conference! Without the dedicated work of the Committee Members, the conference secretary – Zhivka Ilieva, the host institution representatives, and the invaluable support from the ELT publishers, the British Council Bulgaria and the U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria, the weekend in Varna would not have been so memorable! We need to mention also the variety of workshops and talks, the challenging plenary sessions and the opportunities to meet old friends and make new professional acquaintances! Those who attended had the chance to listen to colleagues from Bulgaria and from abroad – Romania, Turkey, Serbia, and Greece. A big thank you to all of you who participated and attended the event!

Stay tuned from more news and coverage from the 22nd Beta-IATEFL Conference in this and in our next issues!

Enjoy your summer and find time for writing an article for our e-Newsletter! All contributions are welcome.

Tsvetelina Harakchiyska
Valentina Nikolovski is an English language teacher at the Studio for foreign languages “Matilda” in Belgrade. She has participated in a number of EFL conferences abroad and she has also completed successfully the Teaching English to Young Learners course as part of the E-TEACHER SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM of the American Embassy in Belgrade. She has participated in the 22nd BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference (21st – 23rd June 2013) in Varna as a representative of the English Language Teachers’ Association (ELTA) - Serbia.

What attracted you to the field of education?

It is very difficult to say what exactly attracted me to the field of education because when I think back at the time when I was deciding what to study and, later on, what job to apply to, it seems to me that it was only circumstances that decided instead of me, that there was no time to think or at least it was not important at the time whether you are attracted to something or not. It seems as if everything was just happening on its own. Yes, of course, as a child I have always played school with my friends, and yes, I can say “Oh, I like children, that’s why I am a teacher” but the fact is that attraction comes only later on. Only when you are deep into the teaching do you realize that you became addicted to it. That, no matter how much you complain of students, work load or low salary, you would actually never quit. Because all those things make it more interesting, more challenging in addition to that constant feeling that you need to learn more, you need to find better ways of transferring your knowledge, of getting to know your students and their needs. These are all the things that still make me attracted to this field.
Which aspects of your work do you enjoy the most?
I enjoy all the aspects of my work that are connected to my students and to what is happening in the classroom: talking and listening to them, learning from them, teaching them...

Was this your first BETA-IATEFL conference?
Yes, this was my first BETA – IATEFL Conference and I am really grateful for the experience.

What were your hoping to get from the conference, personally and professionally?
Personally, I was hoping to visit the Bulgarian seaside and relax as much as possible because I finished with my regular classes just a day before my journey to Varna and it felt like going on a short and well-deserved holiday.

On a professional level, I was hoping to meet a lot of new colleagues, exchange experiences, talk about similarities and differences in education and foreign language learning in different countries. I wanted to share experience from my classes with them and give them some ideas for activities for their classes.

I must say that all of my hopes and expectations were fully met. I had enough time to enjoy Varna`s coast and fresh sea air but I also made some valuable professional contacts and personal friendships.
What attracted you to the field of education?

I finished high school and applied for jobs and everybody asked me if I spoke English well and wrote letters in English. They told me that I could earn more if my English was better. Then I started improving my English (that I learned at school) going to a privately-run language course at the weekend when I found a job in a government office. Later on, little girls and boys in my neighbourhood asked for my help when they had their projects for their English lessons and I was helping them in the evening.

My brother always encouraged me to be an English teacher when he saw me that I really enjoyed helping those kids with their homework for their English lessons. In 1985, seven years after my graduation from high school I took the University Entrance Exam and I started studying English Language and Teaching. The same year, I started working for a language school in the evenings after observing the three teachers in the same school for a couple of evenings.
Which aspects of your work do you enjoy the most?

I will list them:

- I like being a teacher and spending time with my students in class;
- Reading and learning something new and sharing it with my students;
- Showing them how they can read and understand short or long texts;
- Sharing what I do in my classes with other teachers.

Was this your first BETA-IATEFL conference?

No, it was my second BETA-IATEFL Conference. My first conference was in Ruse in 2012.

What were you hoping to get from the conference, personally and professionally?

Quite a lot of things actually. Some of them are:

- to get practical ideas from the speakers and participants to use in my classes;
- to learn about the new publications;
- to share what I do with other teachers;
- to meet new people and teachers from different places;
- to have a social network with the teachers from different parts of the world.

When I go abroad for a conference, many people see this as a travel. They may be right, though. It is the last bit only. You need to work hard reading and doing many things extra besides teaching. When I travel to other places, of course, I experience many different things, such as different life styles and food and I like all.
Theodora Pontika holds a BA in English Language and Literature from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She has been teaching for the last seven years and is currently working at a private language school. She has been a member of TESOL Macedonia-Thrace, Northern Greece for a long time and has served on the board for six years. She is the vice chair of the current executive board and one of the volunteers on the SEETA platform.

What attracted you to the field of English language education?
I've always loved learning foreign languages so it was mainly my desire to share this passion with my students.

Which aspects of your work do you enjoy the most?
I do believe that our profession can be tiring and demanding but far from boring! I really enjoy the rapport we establish with our students, the diversity and creativity we can bring into the classroom but most of all I adore singing and dancing with them at every opportunity!

Was this your first BETA – IATEFL Conference?
Although I've attended lots of conventions in Greece, it was my first conference abroad. On that note, I have to thank BETA-IATEFL and TESOL Macedonia-Thrace, Northern Greece for cosponsoring my trip to Bulgaria. I'm really pleased I had the chance to attend this year's BETA-IATEFL Conference in Varna and I'd like to congratulate the board for organising it so successfully!

What were you hoping to get from the conference, personally and professionally?
I came to the convention both as a teacher and a representative of TESOL Macedonia-Thrace, Northern Greece, so, obviously, there were many things I got from the conference. I met lots of colleagues and exchanged ideas with them, I attended fascinating talks and got to know some brilliant speakers, I visited a wonderful city and had a great time! I would definitely love to attend next year's conference as well!
Many thanks to Zhivka Ilieva – Conference Secretary for the photography!

Conference Moments

Lance Erickson
U.S. Embassy in Sofia
Conference Opening Ceremony

Opening of the Pre-Conference Day
"Perspectives on ELT in Bulgaria"

Dr Galya Mateva, Associate Professor
Sofia Technical University
Plenary session: “In Memoriam. Suggestopedia: The Bulgarian Contribution to ELT”

Peter Ashton
British Council, Bulgaria
Conference Opening Ceremony

Dr Terry Lamb, Senior Lecturer
at the University of Sheffield, UK; Project Coordinator at ECML of the Council of Europe, Graz; FIPLV President
Plenary session: “Connecting to Learning: Listening to Learners’ Voices”
Conference Moments

Anne Wiseman
British Council, UK
Plenary session: “An APP(LE) a Day. How teachers work effectively with apps in the classroom”

Dr Rumyana Todorova, Associate Professor
Shumen University
Plenary session: “ELT Tendencies in Pre-school and Primary School Education”

Dr Steve Mann, Associate Professor
British Council Bulgaria;
University of Warwick, UK
Plenary session: “Innovation in the Provision of Pre-service Education and Training for English Language Teachers”

Sylvia Velikova, BETA-IATEFL President
University of Veliko Turnovo
British Council Event: PRESET Book Launch in Bulgaria and Panel Discussion

22nd BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference
21 - 23 June 2013
Looking Back and Moving Ahead Together: BETA-IATEFL Meeting with ELT Publishers

Sylvia Velikova

Sylvia Velikova is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Veliko Turnovo (Faculty of Modern Languages), where she teaches ELT Methodology and coordinates the school-based TP. She has worked on British Council Bulgaria and ECML (Council of Europe) projects related to teacher education. Sylvia has taught EFL in a variety of contexts and worked with language teachers and teacher educators in different countries across Europe. She is the current President of the Bulgarian English Teachers’ Association (BETA-IATEFL). Her research interests are in applied linguistics and psycholinguistics (first and second language listening), and teacher education and development. E-mail: sylvia.velikova@gmail.com

Upon an initiative of BETA-IATEFL Committee, a meeting between representatives of major ELT publishers in Bulgaria and BETA-IATEFL Committee members was held in Sofia on July 12th, 2013. Excellence Language Learning (Sofia) provided the perfect meeting venue, equipped with modern facilities in a stimulating atmosphere. The aim of the meeting was to get together and to discuss matters of common concern, as well as to examine prospects for future cooperation between BETA-IATEFL and the ELT publishers.

The following partners attended the event:

- **BETA-IATEFL** – Sylvia Velikova (President), Zarina Markova (International Coordinator and BETA-IATEFL 2014 Annual Conference Organizing Secretary); Ophelia Pamukchieva (Committee Member); Tanya Spahiyska (Committee Member)
- **AMERICAN EUROPEAN ALLIANCE FOR EDUCATION (AEAFE)** and
- **EXPRESS PUBLISHING** – Chavdar Zdravchev and Borislav Kinov;
EDUCATIONAL CENTRE – Kamelia Toteva;
EXCELLENCE LANGUAGE LEARNING – Femke Bex;
KLETT Bulgaria – Vladimir Kolev;
MACMILLAN EDUCATION – Yordan Stoyanov;
PEARSON LONGMAN – Rumen Kiryakov.

At the meeting, the participants reviewed their cooperation, provided feedback on the 22nd BETA-IATEFL Annual Conference 2013 in Varna, and exchanged ideas for concrete actions that will help achieve greater synergy in accomplishing the common goal for supporting ELT and the professional development of the teachers of English in Bulgaria.

The questions/issues raised and the specific actions considered during the discussion were as follows:

Questions/issues raised:
- How BETA-IATEFL Committee can make the association more visible to the teachers throughout Bulgaria, especially to the colleagues working in regions at a distance from Sofia;
- How BETA-IATEFL can motivate more teachers to attend BETA-IATEFL events;
- How publishers can promote their own participation in the BETA-IATEFL Annual Conferences;
- How publishers can make more visible their involvement with BETA-IATEFL activity in general.
**Actions**

**Partners:**
- offering discounts to BETA-IATEFL members on partners’ products and services;
- placing BETA-IATEFL logo (and link to website) on partners’ websites, newsletters, etc.;
- participating in BETA-IATEFL regional events (taking part in the exhibition; giving promotional talks; offering sponsorship for coffee-breaks, lunches, etc.; donating ELT books and other resources (eg. for the prize draw; for the library of the venue; for BETA-IATEFL competition winners, etc.).

**BETA-IATEFL:**
- organizing series of local events that take place in regions at a distance from the city, where the national conference is to be held;
- seeking funding opportunities that will make it possible to offer further discounts (or free attendance) to the (‘local’) teachers to participate in the annual conference;
- offering BETA-IATEFL institutional membership and/or discounts to the teachers of a partner school to attend the annual conference.

A follow-up meeting was agreed to take place in September 2013, before the beginning of school year 2013-2014.
BETA-IATEFL is pleased to announce that the 2014 Annual International Conference of the association will take place between 11 – 13 April 2014 at the South-West University of Blagoevgrad!

Don’t miss the opportunity to join the professional and promotional presentations, book exhibits and initiatives of cultural and educational institutions!
Webchat & Teacher's Lounge

SEETA TEACHER'S LOUNGE now

poetry
why blog?
coursebooks we've used
Webchat: recorded
Self-reflection through blogging
with Natasa Bozic Grojic

Young Learners: Tips and Tricks!

Ongoing!

Steliyana Dulkova

Magic tricks and fun stuff for young learners! Join us and share the fun.
In looking at Bulgarian stories for the EFL classroom dealing with contemporary realities, a prime recent collection of 50 tales, nearly all ‘short-shorts’—mini-fictions 2-4 pages in length— is Deyan Enev’s *Circus Bulgaria* (London: Portobello 2010). These are micro-masterpieces of ‘flash fiction’ (<http://flashfictiononline.com>), many less than 1,000 words and several just under 400 words: the shortest, “Cardilescu”, is but 385 words, “Maria,” 393 words. The tales are set in a kind of dream world, at times almost surreal, of contemporary Bulgaria caught in the grip of post-socialist freefall, its ghosts and contradictions. Given the post-1990 Bulgarian content of nearly all the stories and the fact that most are highly compact prose gems, this collection lends itself well to experimental use in the Bulgarian EFL classroom as ‘indigenous material’ (Templer 2013b), well suited for learners from the generation ‘children of the transition’ (born ca. 1980-85 and after) at mid-intermediate level and beyond.

**ENEV + KASSABOVA**

The tales here are masterfully translated into English by Kapka Kassabova (b. Sofia, 1974), an exceptionally gifted writer <http://www.kapka-kassabova.com> in her own right (Templer 2013a). Kapka has been an émigré Bulgarian since 1990, based
initially in New Zealand and from 2004 in Scotland. Much of her writing is imbued with a “cosmopolitan gaze” (Kostova 2013), an exilic sensibility on the road, as reflected in her remark “Всички сме чужденци в страната на миналото си” (“We’re all foreigners in the country of our past,” Kassabova 2003; 2011). She recently commented on what she likes and dislikes about Sofia (Kassabova 2013). Her translations of Enev’s tales are new works of artful fiction in themselves, brilliant in rendering his often singular and memorable metaphors and similes. By biography and temperament a quite different artist than Kassabova, Enev (b. Sofia, 1960) is one of the country’s best-known and most prolific short-fiction writers, with a number of published collections in Bulgarian to his name <http://goo.gl/wVSBzE>. These include Ловец на хора (1994), Клането на петела (1997); Господи, помилуй (2004), Всички на носа на гемията (2005), Българчето от Аляска (2011) and other volumes.

This is his first collection translated into English, and the reviews in the UK have been rave (Fischer 2010; Fitzgerald 2010; Popescu 2010; McRobie 2012). Enev is now an ever more internationally recognized distinctively Bulgarian master of the art of short-short fiction. The present collection was recently long-listed for the highly prestigious Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award <http://goo.gl/21Oz6y>, a special distinction.

FLASH FICTION UNDER FOCUS

Flash fiction is, I would contend, especially suitable for purposes of EFL, for obvious reasons. Many students want stories that are very short, or they won’t read (and reread) them carefully. Gaffney (2012) is a brief introduction to the micro-genre, with solid tips on writing ‘sudden fiction.’ Here links to a small library of micro-tales, postcard stories or micronouvelles, by a number of authors <http://goo.gl/MyIsT1>, and short-shorts galore in the SmokeLong Quarterly <http://smokelong.com> and the Vestal Review <http://www.vestalreview.net>. Short is sweet, no matter how bitter the content of that brevity may taste in Enev’s often deeply enigmatic tales. My hypothesis is that the ‘children of the transition’ and all its contradictions are a receptive audience for Enev’s often bewildering fictions, many themselves deeply dismayed by dint of their own disjointed biography growing up in the chaos and elemental uncertainties of post-socialist Bulgaria.
LADEN WITH ODDITIES

McRobie (2012) comments that Enev’s tales “are so stuffed full of richness and laden with oddities that it is tempting to quote whole pages verbatim. It’s one of those rare books where every word feels like an essential part. ... A gift in its own right, *Circus Bulgaría* is also a great introduction to contemporary Bulgarian fiction.” Enev’s mini-stories conjure up an almost fairy-tale world of despair, silent poverty, hopeless black loneliness, crushed human dignity, seemingly absurd surreal plots, deranged Bulgarians in psychiatric hospitals, recurrent senseless violence. The Parish Lantern (2011) observes: “This is a world where the lunatics have taken over the asylum, in fact all is asylum. Where a hitman has to kill his brother, where a ghost visits a pawnbroker to give him a watch inscribed to him.”

Regarding “all is asylum,” Popescu (2010) notes: “The mental asylum is the one constant in the stories, and the experiences of a night orderly provide some black humour. Enev himself once worked the hospital night shifts and evidently likes to explore the blurred boundaries between truth and delusion.” Significantly, Enev’s violent tale “Paris” is narrated by a psychiatric orderly and writer of short fiction working the night shift in a mental hospital. A nurse Valeria he fancies asks him to write a story about her, imagining her far away in Paris, her vibrant dream. He promises. That night after they make love she is attacked by one of the patients, badly injured. Their relationship collapses. The story ends: “Valeria, I have finally fulfilled my promise. I have written a story for you. Except that I don’t know how to end it. So I’ll leave it like this. All I know is that it will be called ‘Paris’” (218).

McRobie:

> It’s unusual for a book to equal at the atom-level of its metaphors and syntax the crafted shape of the narratives, but Enev seems to be painting with all colours at all times, each line as well-formed as each story. So many aspects of worlds are captured that *Circus Bulgaría* really feels whole: rituals, lies, the stasis of loss, the texture of the countryside, the personalities of houses, the myths of tower-blocks, shoulder-blades ‘delicate like seahorses’ wings’, skin ‘tender like the membrane of freshly boiled milk’ ...

In the story “Maria,” a storm descending on a Sofia park is described: “The sudden wind swept the rubbish along the alley. Crushed plastic cups trotted along like horses. Spectacular lightning in the form of a Chinese hieroglyph flashed in a blink, then the heavens opened.” McRobie is especially enamored of these ever-recurrent metaphorical bursts:
The fullness of Enev’s stories is mediated through his reverence for words. Language creeps into the natural world, and the natural world becomes text. Words ‘perch on their lines like hummingbirds’ and snowflakes gleam ‘like full-stops and dashes in some strange new Morse code’, while a full moon ‘keeps growing until it becomes larger than its metaphors.’

Yet these stories are full of compassion for the characters depicted: “running through all the grit, poverty and violence is a rich undercurrent of humour and compassion; and above all empathy … Drawing heavily on Balkan folklore, Circus Bulgaria is both a vivid illustration of a broken society, and a triumphant escape from its confines” (Fitzgerald 2010). Fischer (2010) echoes this: “Enev also has a strong lyrical streak, which the poet Kassabova renders beautifully: ‘Suddenly her face shrivelled up and darkened like burning paper.’ The overall tone of the collection, despite the general grimness of the panorama, is gentle and serene.” O’Riordan (2010) tends to agree, although he finds the collection in English a bit too long:

Many of the brief tales hark back to fairy-tales, with their orphaned children and maidens in distress … It’s not all miserable, either – there are some lovely touching moments, like the old lady who finally finds romance in ‘The Rag And Bone Man’ and the reunited couple in ‘Cardilescu’, and there’s a surreal touch to many of the stories that really appealed to me – check out ‘The Marionette’, with its unfortunate heroine and her pair of long-suffering puppets, and ‘The Small Orange Spot in the Distance’, where a hospitalised dad sneaks out for his son’s birthday and takes him for a ride on a stolen forklift.

LOOKING AT A FEW OF THE TALES

Pacho and his Beloved Lion Caesar

In the poignant opening tale, “Circus Bulgaria,” a clown turned pub-owner in post-socialist Bulgaria tells his lion-tamer friend Pacho: “You must be nuts not to see which way the wind is blowing. There is no more circus art in Bulgaria, get this into your head” (1). As the evening drags on, Pacho reluctantly agrees and soon sells his beloved lion Caesar—his “only family”—to a shady nouveau riche gangster who arrives in a upscale Audi. This is also a moving tale about the love of a man for his close animal, a recurrent motif in Enev’s stories. The story embodies a striking metaphor for the destruction of the old Bulgaria, so full of imagination and order, and circuses that came to entertain the masses, and the dark world of crime that has taken over a free-market nightmare dominated by endless avarice, the
underworld and its oligarchies, and the darkening ‘circus’ of aporias that Bulgaria since 1990 has for so many become.

Suicide, Violence, Satan in Bulgaria
In the iconic story “Niki-Nikola,” a small boy imagines he is an Icarus of the Sofia tower-blocks in the concrete residential complex of ‘Youth VII.’ He and his mother craft strange wings, invite a TV crew. The boy then is filmed [a media event!] jumping from the cramped high apartment to his death below. His mother tells a TV reporter:

*We spent so many years shut up in this tiny room. It was terrible. Nothing good awaited us down there either, just clumps of mud. You know, we had so much fun collecting the feathers. You are mistaken if you believe that Niki-Nikola is dead. My boy is far away now, very far away. He flew away to another country where people are not afraid (10).*

Fear, almost surreal, is a theme in many of these stories. In others, suicide looms (“The Longest Dance”; “A Nocturne for Ventsi”; “Over the Mountains”), the motives often wrapped in Enevian enigma. Violence is ubiquitous, as in “Saint Ana” and “Brother of Mine” about gangland wars and killings; or “The End of the War,” the postcard portrait of a crazed veteran from Serbia as he murders two Bulgarian sex workers in a roadside pub, for no apparent reason. “Casablanca” is a tale of the murder of a stubborn ageing couple who will not leave their house, a plot of land where some dubious developers wish to construct a gigantic nightclub CASABLANCA:

*One morning, Mr and Mrs Sarafov were found dead in their house. Their tiny bodies had been bound in transparent tape from top to bottom. They looked like sea-horses who’d fallen asleep in dewy grass. The beat-up municipal funeral van took them away without much ado. The next day, a bulldozer demolished their house (214).*

Several tales breathe with the strange presence of the Devil, breaking into chaotic, suffering everyday reality, as in story “Return of the Prodigal Son,” where a long absent brother returns home, and suddenly the room fills with ghastly rats as the tale cryptically ends:

*They stood to attention, in thick tidy ranks, and their tails formed straight lines. Their lead eyes were fixed on my brother's. Their black bodies shivered. My brother said something incomprehensible and, screaming and squealing, the rats started jumping out of the window. When the last rat was gone, my brother rubbed his red eyes, sat on the bed and began to tell his story (87-8).*
Or the brief micro-story “The Dragon,” where a strange suitor out of the blue coming to court an unmarried and lonely village girl appears to her as the Devil incarnate, although her father cannot see the diabolical apparition:

The stranger rose and his head hit the ceiling. He pinched Bozhana on the neck, ran back to his cart and jumped up on his seat. Fire came out of the horses’ nostrils, and soon there was nothing left of them, only black stones. ... ‘Don’t give me to him, Daddy,’ she wept, ‘don’t give me to him. Did you see his hands, Daddy, all covered in snake scales!’ ‘You heard what I said,’ her father said. ‘The wedding is on Sunday. Go and wash the rugs, guests are coming to the house’ (195-6).

Animal as prime metaphor

It is striking that many of these stories are about animals—sometimes direct from Hades as above—and the web of relations between them and often deeply lonely humans. “From the Life of Hedgehogs” is about loneliness, of a divorced man and a young boy he meets, who hunts hedgehogs and loves these creatures. “Koko,” one of my favorites, is about a pig and a boy who loves him deeply, their friendship and its dark ending in the blood-soaked snow, with a strange surreal twist. “The Slaughter of the Rooster” is about a geography teacher retired at his farmyard, his loneliness, failing memory, deep desperation, love and hatred for his sole rooster. “Orlando” features an old tramp and his beloved pet monkey, stolen from him as he sleeps. “The Chimpanzee” about a lonely monkey called “Friday” confined in a zoo, hungry for affection, who assaults a girl visitor and must be killed. “The Cricket” portrays a psychiatric patient Mad Max, released from a deteriorating hospital where he has been long confined into the Sofia concrete jungle, described at nightmarish length, and his worries about his closest companion, a pet cricket left back in his hospital room. “The Eagle” is a brief glimpse of a huge captured eagle hauled up by Sofianites in wild celebration to the top of their tower block, watched by a boy named ‘Orlin’ (eagle) and his mom, who gives the frightened bird in chains some water. One wonders: who is this prisoner, what is the hidden sense of the tale? “Storks” is a story about an ageing villager Patso and his enterprising son Lyubo, who has come for a rare family visit to put up political posters in the village. Patso searches for storks coming each spring, his secret belief that “once the storks were here, he’d make it to the end of the year” (220). But perhaps not this year ... At the story’s end, he is still scanning the sky: “… old Patso lifted his face and listened. He stayed like that for a long time. Then he let the door latch down and went in” (224). There are numerous folk beliefs about storks in Bulgaria, their cyclical
comings and goings, a central motif in Monica Shannon’s children’s novel *Dobry* (Templer 2013b).

Another superb tale, “Wedding,” is a portrait of an eccentric old village woman, unmarried, and her love for her goat Bucha. The narrative begins:

> STANA VARLACHKA HATED ALL THAT WAS MALE. No rooster ever crowed in her yard. ... If she saw a man in the street, she’d turn her head away and spit for a long time. Her household consisted of a she-goat and a couple of hens. That was all ... Her adobe house was like a pumpkin stubbornly rooted in the ground. Her messy yard was small like an ox’s footprint. ... And in the middle of the yard was a rubbish dump—a nice ripe dump, forty years old (37-8).

This dump symbolizes her protest against what her life has been since her torture by the police as a small girl in 1943; in the story’s final scene, Stana burns it, now somehow redeemed by the birth of Bucha’s small kid. “One Way Ticket” is about a young Sofianite who sees off his friend, emigrating to a new life abroad—but he stays behind, he won’t leave. Walking home from Sofia airport in the freezing late night, the narrator finds a bleeding rabbit, lonely dog and raven in the snow, and builds an igloo to shelter them (and himself) from the bitter cold. The tale ends in a memorable image of Bulgarian survival and grit, love for the land and human compassion for simple animals.

One of the most inscrutable and nightmarish of the tales, “Queen Bee,” is about a married couple, their disabled small son in a children’s home. They are lonely, somehow childless, the wife refuses to make love, tortured by great fears of something unspoken. Here the symbolic animals are bees: they appear first mysteriously and then come in great swarms to take over the couple’s apartment and make her their queen:

> My wife lay in bed, covered from head to toe with a solid sheet of bees. I stared at her with speechless horror. Suddenly, as if by command, the bees took off and I saw that her body was bound up in black and gold ribbons. ... Suddenly, she said: ‘You’ll have to go now, my darling. They will start stinging you very soon. I asked them not to kill you and they gave me their promise. Don’t waste time. Goodbye, my darling, it was good being with you (77).

Is this a horror fantasy about a mother who longs for children, and bees who come to crown her the queen of their strange gigantic hive?
Portraits of Penury, Persistence, Magic Powers

Many stories are about poverty, such as “The Little Rubbish Collector” and its impoverished young heroine Gerry, or “Django,” a tale about a Roma family and the torment they exist in. “A Day in the Life of Emma” is a searing portrait of an 11-year-old Romni who plays the accordion for a Rom beggar on the street; we see her daily ordeal with a paedophile, her hard life with her cruel dad, living in a wagon near the RR tracks under Chavdar bridge in Sofia. “Cardilescu” is a happy micro-tale (but 385 words) about Rom magic herbs and their salubrious effects on young lovers. Another Roma tale, “The Portrait,” spotlights a beautiful market seller Zura and her struggle to survive. “The Signalman,” “The Rag-and-Bone Man,” “The Orphan,” are all about people in the grip of poverty, their humanity and tenacious dignity. “Maria” features a woman sitting in a park and sending people secret magic rays of health and hope; only a small boy Bobby is aware of her special powers, and may have some secret paranormal powers himself. “The Mute” is a tale of magical waters that heal the dumb to speak, set perhaps near the Ruen monastery and the birthplace of St. Ivan Rilski.

The final and longest tale in the collection, “Over the Mountains,” focuses on a naïve British production agent Christopher Liner, who has arrived in Sofia to find out more about a story of a kidnapped girl allegedly being held as a slave tending swine in a Rodopi village. His firm seeks the rights for a possible book and film. It is a tale of sexuality, especially the British businessman’s reawakened own, and a striking portrait of Bulgaria’s contemporary chaos, violence and suicide, Liner’s personal reveries and much more. The tale’s final twist, deftly foreshadowed, is extraordinary. Its blends with the presence of a blind singer begging in the Sofia Metro’s dark cavern as Christopher suddenly realizes what has actually happened to him, his own “eyesight returned” (251).

ENEV’S SHORT-SHORTS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

Students at the mid-to-higher intermediate level and beyond will find all these tales comprehensible in their language—but often their meaning will puzzle, oddly enigmatic, part of their strange charm. Students can compare the original and Kassabova’s translations, proposing perhaps alternative English translations at points. They can also perhaps decide to read more of his work, some of his Bulgarian prose and poetry accessible online (<http://goo.gl/UMijSB>). Some students, working in groups, could craft their own translations of other stories and compare. Others might wish to try their hand at writing a mini-story about
something in their own lives, a creative activity teachers can encourage. Gaffney (2012) provides a handy introduction to writing micro-fiction, advising: “make your last line ring like a bell.” Using Enev’s building blocks, a bridge can be constructed between classes in Bulgarian literature and English, focusing on literature and its fantasy worlds. Students can also be encouraged to read some of Kassabova’s poetry and prose (Templer 2013a).

Questions abound: What stories do today’s student demographic find especially meaningful, and why? Do some of Enev’s fictions mirror a Bulgarian reality in their own experience? What folktales do some of the stories remind them of? What other associations do they have with specific characters and scenes? What can they learn from these tales about themselves, their country? Teachers may find many of these tales leave them in tears. They can ask students to select their three favorite stories, and explain why. Most tales are open to multiple interpretation, they conceal more than they reveal. This ‘riddled’ metaphoric quality can challenge students and fire their imagination. Enigmatic flash fiction set in contemporary Bulgaria represents an intriguing body of text for the EFL classroom. Experiments beckon.

REFERENCES


/N.B. all URLs here accessed 5 August 2013/
Dear BETA Members,

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- **10th September** – decision letters sent by BETA Committee to successful applicants.
- **20th September** – deadline for successful applicants to transfer their membership fee (25 BGN) to BETA bank account.
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Thank you for reading and supporting BETA-IATEFL by being a member!

EDITORIAL TEAM:
Newsletter editor: Tsvetelina Harakchiyska
Newsletter team: Sylvia Velikova
Zarina Markova

BETA – IATEFL
E-mail: beta.iateflbg@gmail.com
Address: Po Box 1047, Sofia 1000, BULGARIA

ISSN 1314-6874