

Violence in *Bai Ganyo*: From Balkan to Universal

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The theme of violence in Balkan literature has many possible trajectories. The most obvious is the recent tragedy accompanying the dissolution of former Yugoslavia and how it is treated in literature and the other arts. Another is the construction of the Balkans as, among other things, a violent and fractious Other by the Great Powers and how this was reflected in, as Goldsworthy (1998) puts it, *Inventing Ruritania* (see also Todorova 1997). Here I would like to consider the portrayal of violence in a Balkan literature itself, namely Bulgarian, but from an earlier period. I will examine a single nineteenth-century masterpiece that is normally *not* associated with violence at all, but rather with humor, namely Aleko Konstantinov's picaresque novel *Bai Ganyo* ('Uncle Ganyo'). I will argue that the role of violence in *Bai Ganyo*, while reflecting to some extent the prejudices of Aleko's time, also contributes to the novel's universal appeal and to its worthiness of a place in the canon of world literature.<sup>1</sup>

Ivan Vazov's 1894 novel *Pod igoto* 'Under the Yoke'—an account of the unsuccessful 1876 April Uprising of Bulgarian Christians against Turkish rule—is still popularly considered in Bulgaria to be the most important work of the nation's literature.<sup>2</sup> However, *Bai Ganyo*, the first edition of which appeared in 1895, has attracted considerably more attention in western scholarship, including two recent articles in *Slavic Review* (Daskalov 2001, Neuberger 2006; see also Todorova 1997:38-61) and the first annotated scholarly translation into English (Konstantinov 2010; all quotations in this article are from that edition).<sup>3</sup> Even in 1913, a US periodical (*The Independent*, 2 January, p. 30) hailed *Bai Ganyo* as "the first classic of a national literature." Violence is a recurring theme in both works, but whereas Vazov's portrayal of violence is a dualist one in the service of a monolithic Bulgarian national narrative, Aleko's deployment of violence is more complex. I will restrict myself to physical violence in *Bai Ganyo*, which can be divided into two types: unmotivated, i.e., accidental, and motivated, i.e. perpetrated for a purpose. For the analysis of *Bai Ganyo*, motivated violence can be classified as ethnicized, politicized, and/or personalized: it can be treated as an ethnic characteristic, as a political tool, or as serving a strictly personal end, and these categories are not mutually exclusive. We can also distinguish between what I will call diagetetic and non-diagetetic violence. In the context of *Bai Ganyo*, non-diagetetic violence involves references to historical moments or persons such as the 1885 battle of Slivnitsa between Serbia and Bulgaria, the abovementioned April Uprising, the defenestration of Czech politicians, or Khan Krum the Terrible, who had the skull of his defeated enemy, Byzantine emperor Nicaphorus I, cleaned and lined with silver for use as a goblet. These historical incidents and figures are all unquestionably associated with violence, but none of the events are actually described in *Bai Ganyo*, and, for the most part, they

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<sup>1</sup> As I observe in my introduction to *Bai Ganyo*, "Aleko himself is the only Bulgarian author to be honored in his own country by being routinely referred to by his first name" (Konstantinov 2010:3). It is a status rarely achieved, and it can be compared to that of Vuk Karadžić for the former Serbo-Croatian. I have chosen to retain this mark of both intimacy and respect in this article about *Bai Ganyo*.

<sup>2</sup> I wish to thank Prof. Yana Hashamova of The Ohio State University for this information, based on a survey conducted in Bulgaria.

<sup>3</sup> *Bai Ganyo* has been translated into all of the standard languages of the Balkans and the rest of Eastern Europe as well as the languages of the Great Powers.

are references aimed at a specifically Bulgarian audience.<sup>4</sup> I will restrict myself here to diagetic violence: explicit descriptions of acts carried out in the main threads of the narrative.

*Bai Ganyo* can be divided into two parts of nine chapters each.<sup>5</sup> In Part One, Bai Ganyo, a merchant of rose oil, is traveling around Europe (Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, and Switzerland), disrupting formality, and always on the lookout for a free lunch. Part One is a classic example of internalized Balkan Orientalism, in which Bai Ganyo functions as the embodiment of undesirable and highly satirized Balkan characteristics such as aggressive behavior and lack of personal hygiene, all construed as national failings.<sup>6</sup> In Chapter 9, “Bai Ganyo in Russia,” Aleko describes his anti-hero as “a disgusting miser, an egotist, a sneak, a hypocritical exploiter, coarse and vulgar to the marrow of his bones” and as a “crude, sneaky, miserly wretch.” In the same chapter, however, Aleko also distinguishes Bai Ganyo from his faults:

[T]he evil does not reside in him but in the influence of his environment. Bai Ganyo is energetic, level-headed, observant—especially observant. Put him under the guidance of a good leader and you will see what deeds he can do. Until now, Bai Ganyo has shown only his animal energy, but hidden within him is a tremendous supply of potential spiritual strength that only awaits a moral impulse to be transformed into a living force. (Konstantinov 2010:81)

In this part of the novel, Aleko is arguably participating in a Balkan orientalizing discourse that blames negative characteristics on the clichéd “500 years under the Turkish yoke,” although he is in all likelihood also criticizing the ruling circles of the time when he was writing.<sup>7</sup>

In Part Two, Ganyo has returned from Europe to his native Bulgaria, and the satire turns dark and bitter as he bribes and bullies his way through Bulgarian society. At this point, there is not a shred of decency or any other redeeming feature left in Bai Ganyo. In Chapter 12, “Bai Ganyo the Journalist,” Ganyo proposes founding a mud-slinging newspaper, with Danko the Thug as editor. This is the only chapter in Part Two where anyone in Bai Ganyo’s circle is depicted as having any potentially redeeming features, while Bai Ganyo is portrayed as making sure these features have no chance to emerge:

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<sup>4</sup> Non-diagetic violence is generally used by Aleko to critique (1) jingoism, (2) dishonesty, or (3) diagetic violence, e.g. when (1) Bai Ganyo boasts inappropriately of the battle of Slivnitsa or Khan Krum, (2) a scoundrel claims to be a refugee from the Batak massacre (during the April Uprising) in order to cadge money from a charitable society, (3) diagetic violence on the part of Bulgarians in Part Two is compared to violence under the Ottomans. Occasionally non-diagetic violence, like unmotivated violence, simply serves as background, e.g. when the Bulgarian delegates to the Prague exhibition are shown local attractions including the site of Czech political defenestrations.

<sup>5</sup> Aleko was murdered before he could bring the work to what would become its final form. As a result, only chapters 1-9 were originally numbered, and it was not until after his death that all the available chapters were gathered into a single volume. My division of the novel into two equal parts, in Europe and in Bulgaria—although in fact one chapter in Part Two (“Bai Ganyo in the Delegation”) actually takes place in Russia, but only as a reference to Bulgarian politics—makes the most sense in terms of Aleko’s approach to his (anti-)hero.

<sup>6</sup> See Bakić-Hayden and Hayden (1992) and (Bakić-Hayden 1995) on Balkan Orientalism. I prefer this locution to Todorova’s (1994, 1997) Balkanism because that latter term actually has an older, linguistic pedigree (Seliščev 1925), which refers to just the opposite of violent fractiousness, namely, an element of linguistic convergence resulting from Balkan multilingualism.

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that in popular discourse in Turkey, the same problems are blamed on wasting five centuries trying to rule the Balkans.

One couldn't say that Gochoolu and Dochoolu were enamored of these particular qualities in Danko the Thug [...] However, the storm of wild passions that raged during the intervening years, the demoralizing influence of the demoralized press, the raw all-consuming materialism, the possibility of getting rich quick if you were willing to put your conscience to sleep, the example of the ruling elites—all these phenomena had buried their nobler feelings under such a thick layer of muck that only a new era [...] could do away with the alluvial layers of vileness and unearth those pure feelings, like relics of past greatness. [...] And yet, on top of the heavy sediments that covered their nobler feelings, Bai Ganyo added a new layer, which smothered them completely. He eloquently laid out for them [...] the material advantages that would accrue to them from the enterprise. Gochoolu and Dochoolu needed no further persuasion. (Konstantinov 2010:127)

The theme of this chapter is verbal violence -- such as slander and muck-raking -- which strictly speaking is beyond the focus of this article. Nonetheless, it reinforces the image of Bai Ganyo in Part Two as a purveyor or approver of violence, much of it politically motivated.

Politics is only marginally present in Part One, and does not figure in the two occurrences of physical violence there. In Part Two, however, physical violence occurs in four of the nine chapters and is always motivated and politicized, usually with an implication of personal gain. Ethnicized violence occurs in both parts, as we shall see.

The first occurrence of violence is an accident in Chapter 4 “Bai Ganyo in Dresden.” The American boyfriend of Bai Ganyo’s sister, who was a student in Dresden, slipped as they were climbing up a precipice during a summer hike and they both fell to their deaths. This accidental death is simply the pretext for displaying Bai Ganyo’s rude behavior when he comes to Dresden for the funerary gathering, and the violence itself is merely a backgrounding plot device.

The second occurrence of violence, in Chapter 9, is motivated and personalized with overtones of ethnicization, but it is a justified response to unjustified harm. An Albanian student in St. Petersburg named Kocho attacks a Bulgarian scoundrel named Aslanov, a specialist in bigamy, blackmail, and slander, who has cheated him out of his measly three-ruble monthly stipend by falsely accusing him of being a spy. The narrator is Kocho’s Bulgarian friend, and Bai Ganyo is tagging along because he is too miserly to spend money on a hotel and insists on sleeping in their dorm. As noted above, however, this is likewise the one chapter where Aleko also ascribes positive characteristics to Bai Ganyo.

Aleko describes Kocho sympathetically, but also in terms of ethnicized violence:

He'd give his life for a friend, but God forbid that you make him angry; in an instant all his Albanian tribal passions would boil over, he'd go pale with rage, and his eyes would become completely bloodshot: a real beast!” (Konstantinov 2010:81)

A similar stereotype is reflected in a passage from one of Saki’s short stories (H.H. Munro 1904):

And I think there should be a sort of bounty-fed export (is that the right expression?) of the people who impress on you that you ought to take life seriously. There are only two classes that really can't help taking life seriously--schoolgirls of thirteen and Hohenzollerns; they

might be exempt. Albanians come under another heading; they take life whenever they get the opportunity.

To be sure, there is a difference between Saki's Edwardian, colonial, imperial disdain for the "primitive" Balkans and Aleko's sympathetic attitude toward Kocho, but both draw on stereotypes of Albanians as violent. A comparison can be drawn with stereotypes of Italians as Mafiosi in the United States. Later in the chapter, Bai Ganyo and the narrator are taking a walk and see Kocho on the Anichkin Bridge, and it is here that the violence occurs.

Kocho, like an enraged tiger, was squeezing his iron fingers into the neck of an unknown gentleman, whose hat had rolled onto the cobblestones. He had bent the man's head back and was trying to throw him off the bridge. The victim was making every effort to get away, but it was not so easy to escape the hands of the maddened Albanian. 'Crook!' roared Kocho. 'Bastard! Scoundrel! You're the spy, not me, you spy, you son of a bitch! I'll kill you, you wretched scum!'" (Konstantinov 2010:82)

The description of Kocho as a "maddened Albanian" reinforces the stereotype. Kocho's friend rushes to separate them and Bai Ganyo tells the friend to play it safe and keep out of it. At this point the scoundrel makes a desperate lunge and gets away, the narrator then learns Kocho's reason for the violence (the cheating mentioned above). Kocho swears an oath in Albanian (*besa ta besa*) that he will have his revenge, which however, does not occur in the story.

The story eventually ends on the gloomy note: "Those scoundrels are capable of fouling the name of an entire nation." (Konstantinov 2010:85)<sup>8</sup> Thus, Kocho's violent behavior, while ethnicized, is also presented sympathetically, and the villain is a dishonest Bulgarian. In a sense, this foreshadows the use of violence as critique of dishonesty in Part Two. Unlike the violence in Part One, that in Part Two is always performed by agents of the state against its citizens with Bai Ganyo as either the instigator or an approving onlooker.

In Chapter 11, "Bai Ganyo Does Elections," Aleko gives a lightly fictionalized account of his own experiences when he campaigned for election in his native Svishtov. At one point Bai Ganyo says:

"I'll show them freedom! On Sunday they'll see a freedom that they'll remember the rest their lives. Especially Gramatikov [i.e., Aleko, VAF]! That poor bastard hasn't seen our elections yet. Just let those Vlachs of ours come out to meet him, those Gypsies with their bloodshot eyes bulging out an inch..." (Konstantinov 2010:107) (NB Vlach here means Romanian.)

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<sup>8</sup> Chapter 9 itself concludes Part One and ends with the framing device used in each chapter (a group of educated young men telling stories about Bai Ganyo). At the very end of the chapter, however, Aleko concludes with the words: "Farewell, Bai Ganyo! Travel around Europe. Bring the products of our beautiful Valley of Roses to every land, and please, Bai Ganyo, gaze more deeply into European life, and may you see its face. Its wretched backside has been forced on you enough." (Konstantinov 2010:85) Although this implies a critique of the negative aspects of European society, in fact nowhere in the novel does Aleko actually supply any examples. Interestingly enough, there are passages in his travelogue *Do Chikago i nazad* ("To Chicago and Back" 1894. Sofia) where some of the attitudes presented as failings in Bai Ganyo are deployed as critiques of Euro-American society. These critiques, however, are not evident from the text of *Bai Ganyo* itself.

On election day, a group of 20 armed, mounted police and a band of 50 thugs violently drive the voters away from the polls so the ballot boxes can be stuffed. At the first charge of mounted police, sabers drawn: “The Turkish voters began to evaporate one by one, saying ‘Why should I get myself beat up?’” (Konstantinov 2010:119). This moment is significant because it is the only time a Turk speaks Turkish in *Bai Ganyo* [in the original: *Ne me lâzım bana dayak eme*]. All other Turkish sentences are spoken by Bai Ganyo himself, who also uses far more Turkisms in his Bulgarian than the narrator (i.e., Aleko). These usages are all part of a discourse according to which Turkish language and words of Turkish origin are associated with the “Turkish yoke” and therefore to be avoided or stylistically lowered. This same stylistic lowering, however, can also create a nuance of earthy, warm, familiarity. When Bai Ganyo speaks Turkish, however, it is always in the context of some plot or scheme. But let us return to the election.

After the first police charge, Bai Ganyo’s gang appears:

Gramatikov began to tremble. The year 1876 flashed through his mind. The bashibazouk hordes were resurrected before him. The name of Fazli Pasha froze on his lips. (Konstantinov 2010:119)

Here Aleko is making an explicit comparison between the so-called Turkish Yoke and the corruption of Bulgarian politics. On the one hand, it can be said that he is supporting a stereotype of Turkish violence, but this is contradicted by the portrayal of local Turks as attempting to participate in the Bulgarian polity. Rather, we can see this as Aleko’s critique of Bulgarian reliance on such stereotypes to distract his fellow-countrymen from what is actually going on in their country almost two decades after Turkish rule has ceased. The account of the violence ends with this image:

Poor Grandpa Dobri! Shoved into the street, hit hard on the head, weeping from pain, or anger, or grief, he kept saying, poor fellow, in a cracked voice, ‘Well, Mr. Chief of Police, well, it's like this, you know, somehow, they were supposed to be free, somehow or other.’  
Poor Grandpa Dobri! (Konstantinov 2010:120)

Aleko ends the chapter with a bitter comment:

The people you believe in are slaves, I tell you. *Slaves*. Slavery is a blessing for them, tyranny is a boon; servility is heroism; a contemptuous curse from above is music! And yet this nation is wretched and unlucky; thrice unlucky. Beaten down by fate, condemned to suffer and to depend on others, tormented by enemies, and even more so by friends and saviors, it has no fixed point to rest its gaze on, nothing to hang onto. It has lost faith in itself and in its fate and has become too "practical" and sober, sober to the point of unconsciousness. Look at it—without aid, without counsel, shattered and torn apart inside and out, a pitiful, storm-tossed remnant of the past. Is there anyone to revive it, to pull it forward? Ideals?—Vanity! Wind!" (Konstantinov 2010:121)

In *Bai Ganyo*, violence does not have the power to create martyrs and potential redemption as in *Pod igoto*, rather it is a symptom of a society desperately in need of reform.

Chapters 15 and 17 are both letters from Bai Ganyo, one to an imagined opponent the other to an actual Bulgarian politician. In both he recounts scenes of election-related violence and assassination in approving terms. Chapter 15, entitled “Bai Ganyo in the Opposition? Don’t

you believe it!,” is a mock letter to the editor of a mock newspaper. Aleko’s purpose here is to critique those who had come to power as reformers in 1894 and, as in Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, ended up using the same hated methods as their predecessors.

Those who preceded us had gone berserk. They were shooting and hanging and beating and maiming the populace right and left. And for what? For nothing. And today, do you see? It's only at election time that they clamp down and won't let you budge. Otherwise, you're free to do whatever you like! Shout, curse, sling as much mud as you want—no one says anything to you. And why should they bother with the opposition? Let 'em make a stink, who cares? *Our people* who are now at the top can just sit back twirling their mustaches and laugh at them! [...] Anyway, listen, lad, didn't *our people* go a bit overboard with that protest rally in Lom? I hear that people were wounded, even killed. Listen, we have to be careful, you know. They cut off the hands of the old prime minister; we have to watch out lest times get tough. (Konstantinov 2010:42)

The “shooting, hanging, beating...” refers to prime minister Stefan Stambolov’s regime (1886-94). The rally in Lom, a town on the Danube in northwestern Bulgaria, was organized on 29 October 1895 to protest the rigged elections of 22 January under prime minister Stoilov, after the fall of Stambolov. The city was surrounded by police, who met villagers coming in for the rally with clubs and beat them viciously, driving them away. Nonetheless, the organizers began the rally peacefully with the signing of a letter of protest addressed to parliament. At that moment, the mounted police descended on them, sabers drawn and whips flailing. The police wounded almost all the demonstrators and shot one man dead. The final passage cited above refers to the historical events of 3 July 1895, when ex-prime minister Stambolov was attacked with sabers and knives in the center of Sofia, in full view of the police. His doctors amputated his hands in an attempt to stop the bleeding, but he died of his wounds. The assassins were Macedonian revolutionaries, but it is generally accepted that they were acting on orders or with approval from the Bulgarian government.<sup>9</sup> Although non-diagetic, unlike references to battles and tyrants in other chapters, these historical moments are accompanied by overt, albeit brief, descriptions of the violence to which they refer. Aleko was adamantly opposed to the corruption in Stambolov’s regime and portrayed Bai Ganyo as Stambolov’s opportunistic supporter. After Stambolov fell in May 1894, the “opposition” came into power, but ended up using the same methods, and sometimes even the same people as Stambolov, to maintain their grip on that power. The result was Aleko’s deep disillusionment, and the violence described and referred to here reflects those sentiments.

Chapter 17 “A Letter from Bai Ganyo to Konstantin Velichkov” was written in response to Velichkov’s parliamentary speech mocking the voters of Svishtov for being intimidated. Bai Ganyo writes to him:

And you're right, Kocho! No way twenty cops and a gang of fifty drunkards could have gone and busted up thousands of voters. Big deal! The cops would have shot at most a hundred voters. Is that such a big deal? All in all, they would have put about two hundred households into mourning. And let's say that the next Sunday, soldiers come, and they start shooting and kill at most, at most three hundred people. How many orphans? Five hundred! Big fat deal! (Konstantinov 2010:150)

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<sup>9</sup> The details and motivations are not relevant here. They can be found in Konstantinov (2010:142).

Here Aleko is not only expressing his abhorrence of violence serving the purposes of political corruption, he is also expressing his rage at Velichkov. The politician was in the opposition under Stambolov and left Bulgaria in self-imposed exile under that regime owing to its corruption. When Stambolov fell he returned and moved easily into positions of power, and subsequently supported the same kind of corruption as Stambolov's, much to Aleko's disillusionment.

The last chapter, *From the Correspondence of Bai Ganyo Balkanski*, consists of four different letters to Bai Ganyo and his replies to each. Of these, two are requests for a favor involving corruption and influence, both of which Bai Ganyo mockingly declines, implying someone else has offered him a better deal. The other two involve pleas that Bai Ganyo intercede in cases of state authorized violence. Illustrative excerpts will make this clear:

“I appeal to you. You are the people's representative, and I ask henceforth that such things not continue, specifically, that an entire regiment goes through a forest barking like dogs so the gentlemen officers can hunt hares, [...] and even though you're completely exhausted, dead tired, tears flowing from your eyes, starving, they still force you to bark, and it better be good or else you get a beating, because you didn't know how a hunting dog barks and they killed only five hares. At least they didn't wound a soldier, because then you get another beating for not being careful.” (Konstantinov 2010:155)

Bai Ganyo replies:

“Patience is a virtue, as they say. You can't fight city hall. After all, under the Turks we suffered for a whole lifetime. Whatever we have to suffer under the Bulgarians for two short years is no big deal. [...] As you well know, the saber doesn't cut off a bowed head.”<sup>10</sup> (Konstantinov 2010:156)

In the second item, Ganyo's nephew writes to him:

“My career is completely ruined. I have been expelled from school and sentenced to three years hard labor, and the reason for all this is that damned Bulgarian spelling system; they've been promoting a new fashion: [...] We protested to our learned tutors, and they declared us mutineers. On the very day of the birth of Jesus Christ, the savior of mankind, they escorted us under a convoy of mounted police [...] They say that for the triumph of the Bulgarian spelling system they intend to educate us for three years in prison gangs. I have now been brought here to your city, and I write this letter from my cell. If you would be so kind, come visit me and bring a doctor, because I don't know if it's from the journey or from the cold, but lately I've begun to spit blood. [...] P.S. I have heard, uncle, that the Turks had a custom for major holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, to let Christian prisoners out on bail to visit their relatives and to spend the holidays with them. Is this true, uncle?” (Konstantinov 2010:157-58)

Bai Ganyo replies:

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<sup>10</sup> This proverb is well known in Turkish and all the Balkan languages. It is the quintessential expression of how to avoid trouble from brutal authorities.

Are we playing tiddlywinks or running a kingdom? What do you mean by this abuse of freedom? How dare you prattle on to me about the Turks as if they were more merciful? They're not merciful, but they are suckers. If they were smart, they wouldn't have given up the kingdom to someone else. ... You just rot now in the police stations and barracks so that you get some sense into your head ... How many times have I tried to teach you that the saber doesn't cut off the bowed head? ... As you have sown, my boy, so have you reaped. (Konstantinov 2010:158)

And as Aleko himself sowed, so, too, did he reap. He was shot through the heart in 1897 by an assassin's bullet while riding in an open cab with two local politicians in southern Bulgaria. The most widely known story, and the one that the assassins themselves insisted on at their trial, was that the shots fired were intended for one of the local politicians, the cause being the kind of local boundary and property disputes that so often result in rural violence. Recently, however, Pančev (1997) has argued that this account was intended to hide the real motives, which emanated from Sofia and were aimed at Aleko owing to his stinging critiques of the government, or they at least included him with the others. Pančev's evidence is largely conjectural and circumstantial, but the weight of those circumstances makes it impossible to dismiss his conjectures as unfounded. The question must be considered moot.

Violence thus forms an integral part of both the plot of *Bai Ganyo* and the fate of its author. As a plot device, it is intended mostly to criticize political corruption, although Aleko does not escape the ethnic prejudices of his day. Violence also signals the transformation of Bai Ganyo from a bumbling Balkan boor in Part One, where he seeks to avoid it, to a brutal Bulgarian bully in Part Two, where he approves of it. He even participates in violence by organizing others to perpetrate it. In Part One, Bai Ganyo does not see the Europe for the Balkans, instead: "he meets with the same Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Serbs, and Albanians that he's used to meeting every day." Violence in Part One is a natural force, either indifferent, as in Dresden, or ethnicized, but only provoked by evil, as with Kocho the Albanian. In Part Two, ethnic violence is Vlah and Gypsy on the side of corrupt Bulgarians, who are compared to the Turks of imaginings like Vazov's *Pod igoto*. But, in Aleko's estimation, it is the Bulgarians who are found wanting. Even the Turks let prisoners out on bail, and the one time a Turk speaks Turkish in *Bai Ganyo* it is to reject Bulgarian violence. In *Pod igoto*, the noble Bulgarian people fight bravely against the cruel Turkish oppressors and against impossible odds. Their 1876 defeat is historically but a prelude to their subsequent triumph in 1878, albeit with the help of Big Brother Russia. In *Bai Ganyo* the Bulgarian people have their freedom but end up hopelessly oppressed by their fellow Bulgarians, who are portrayed as even worse than the Turks. And it may well be that Aleko's portrayal led to his murder while he was still publishing the feuilletons that would eventually be gathered to form the text of *Bai Ganyo* as we know it today. As the saying goes in Bulgaria: Aleko created Bai Ganyo and Bai Ganyo killed Aleko.

Although Aleko shares some of the pride and prejudices characteristic of the various European nationalisms of his time, his reflexivity and willingness to critique "his" nation-state is part of what enables Aleko to turn the local into the cosmopolitan. And his deployment of violence to critique corruption is part of that process. While the violence described in *Bai Ganyo* is usually connected with specific real events, those events are themselves symptomatic of problems that are by no means limited to nineteenth-century Bulgaria. Finally, I wish to note that insofar as we can speak of Balkan literature as Balkan and not merely 'world', *Bai Ganyo* has a

larger resonance that surpasses that of all his contemporaries, whether Caragiale or Sterija-Popović, or later authors in other languages. No other Balkan author has captured the combination of Balkan-specific and human-universal with the same combination of wit and poignancy, and Aleko's reflexive ability to critique state-authored violence, especially, in Part Two, is a part of what makes *Bai Ganyo* a novel of the global as well as the Balkan.

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