

Literature as the Other Side of Science



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ABSTRACT: This article discusses prominent Bulgarian physician-scientists known for their significant contribution to the Bulgarian medical sciences, who apart from pursuing their scientific careers authored numerous literature works like poems, sketches, essays, etc. They are scientists whose poetry, prose and journalism carry a message and have no less artistic impact than their scientific achievements; they are doctors for whom writing fiction is a way to communicate easier with their “audience” and present the conclusions from “their science” in a more simple and comprehensible way. The authors of this article dwell on the mediating role of the literary texts that transfer the names of physician-scientists from the strictly scientific field of familiarity and fame, and facilitate the perception of their scientific developments, bringing them closer to a wider circle of readers. The article discusses methods and means of carrying out communication between the “two cultures of the modern society” – natural sciences and humanities and art, as well as ways of popularizing scientific achievements.

The article covers the activities of humanist doctors who lived and worked in the period from the end of the 18th century to the present day. It examines medical achievements in the context of the historical and political setting and that are accompanied by quotations from literary works and analysis of the works.

KEYWORDS: Literature, Bulgarian Medical Sciences, Education, Bulgarian Physician-Scientists

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, popularizing science was considered as a controversial and less than prestigious activity. Thus, scientists who sought ways to increase interest in science through fiction or popular science books, journalism or various media were mentioned as eccentric exceptions and “black sheep” in serious academia. Moreover, for those who do not write and is not tempted by science, the creation of an artistic text is a mystery no less inscrutable and complicated than “doing” science. Somewhere between the two mysteries, there exists a considerable group of scientists who seek and manage to discover the mediating role of the literary text, which brings them closer to a wider circle of readers, transfers their names from the strictly scientific field of familiarity and fame, and facilitates the perception of their scientific developments. Scientists for whom writing fiction is a way to communicate easier with their “audience” and present the conclusions from “their science” in a more simple and comprehensible way, to popularize their names in circles that considerably exceed the circle of their colleagues. But mostly – because of this inner need and ability to go beyond the mystery of creativity.

Is it possible for a person to be both a scientist and a writer, a scribe devoted to the art and the literature? On May 7, 1959, the Cambridge Professor of Physical Chemistry, Sir Charles Snow, gave a lecture entitled “The Two Cultures” that started a debate that continues to this day. In his lecture, Sir Snow argued that communication between what he called “the two cultures of modern society” - natural sciences and humanities and arts - had become separated, and this separation became an insurmountable obstacle to solving the problems the world was facing, rather than helping to resolve them, which is actually the societal role of both science and culture. And yet, a significant number of leading scientists manage to “separate” their focus and efforts from their scientific work and exercise their creative thinking in another direction, which is fiction, proving this way that people who can explain the second law of thermodynamics can also write, as well as vice versa. This publication is dedicated to scientists whose poetry, prose and journalism carry messages and have no less artistic impact than their scientific achievements.

DOCTORS WHO WRITE – WRITERS WHO HEAL

When one talks about a parallel between a scientific text and fiction, we usually come up with the names of writers who, under the pressure of parents, public opinion or who are yet unaware about their talent, graduate in specialties that, by presumption, do not allow writing. As a rule, or at least in most cases, they “give up” their profession after graduating and manage to develop their writing talent independently. There are numerous examples of such artists. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s medical teacher Joseph Bell

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had a great impact on him and became a prototype of his famous character Sherlock Holmes, and this predetermined his path as a writer at the expense of the medical profession. Similar case was with Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, who, after graduating from the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics of Rostov State University, managed to get the academic title of “research associate II degree”, which gave him the right to pursue his education or teach at a university. Fyodor Dostoyevsky had similar fate. He graduated as a cadet engineer at the St. Petersburg Military Engineering School, but abandoned his profession to create his masterpieces. For the Bulgarian reader, such names are Theo Bukovsky, Kalin Terziyski and a number of other graduated doctors.

There is another group of scientists, however, who successfully managed to combine their professional development and writing, for whom journalism and fiction were not an obstacle to scientific development and achievements. On the contrary, for scientists writers, literary plots and characters had become an opportunity to communicate directly with readers and at the same time to make both their achievements and their own names more popular, without it affecting their career and professional growth or their achievements in the field in which they worked. Among them, one special role belongs to doctors with degree in humanities – one unique category of individuals who enriched their humanism and medical training with their knowledge in the field of humanities (ancient and modern languages, literature, history, philosophy, art). In a creative aspect, medicine as a science enriched them by giving them a deep understanding of the human being and represented another angle that enabled them to create unencumbered by the canon. Among them there are names significant for the Bulgarian revival (from the second half of the 18th century until the Liberation of Bulgaria in 1878), such as Dr Petar Beron (1795 – 1871). He graduated in medicine in 1831 in Munich, defended a dissertation in the field of obstetrics and gynecology, and invented a pelvimeter – a special device to secure safer childbirth [9]. He was the author of medical, natural science and philosophical works and wrote more than 20 major scientific works. In the spirit of the Bulgarian Revival, Dr Petar Beron enriched not only Bulgarian science, but also Bulgarian culture and education. The proof of this is the “Primer with various teachings” compiled and published by him in 1824, which gained popularity under the name “Fish Primer”, which was basically a small encyclopedia used for years by Bulgarian students [4]. For this reason, it had had 6 editions within only 20 years. A notable figure who devoted himself to literature and medicine was the revivalist Nikola Savov Hadzhiiliev known as Nikola Pikolo (1792 – 1865). He was a polyglot, who taught and translated from Greek and French, participated in staging ancient Greek plays. Nikola was a poet, writer, translator, theater assistant, also a philosopher, who apart from everything engaged in politics. In the meantime, he also graduated in medicine in Italy, worked as a doctor in Bucharest, then in Paris, where he remained until the end of his life. A person with versatile interests, Nicola Pikolo was the antithesis of the boring office scientist buried in thick books. On the contrary, as a typical representative of multifaceted personalities, apart from being a doctor, he was the manager of a theater in Odessa, a participant in the struggle for Greek independence, a doctor of literature and a professor of philosophy. Nicola Pikolo participated in activities to control the plague epidemic that broke out in Romania in 1830-1831. Author of plays, articles and poems, in addition to his literary activity, he had an extremely good reputation in medical history not only in Bulgaria.

In the spirit of the revival traditions – to serve comprehensively and with full devotion to the people, artists with degree in medicine continued their scientific and poetic work in Post-Liberation Bulgaria. A perfect example of those was the life and work of Dr Georgi Mirkovich (1825 – 1905) – one of the most brilliant minds of the Bulgarian National Revival. Georgi was born on March 10, 1826 in Sliven to the family of well-known Valko Mirkovich. Georgi studied in the Kyiv Theological Seminary. The bright young man graduated from Greek and French schools in Constantinople, as well as medicine in Montpellier. An interesting fact from his educational development is that, along with traditional knowledge, he also intensively studied homeopathy. For his actions as a doctor, during a cholera epidemic in France, Napoleon III himself awarded him a silver medal. Despite tempting offers to stay in France, Dr Georgi Mirkovich returned to his hometown, where he began working as a doctor. It was here that the not so unique, as it turned out, fate of a doctor and an artist who left behind a rich literary and scientific legacy began. Thus, next to his medical research and development, there is also a “Short Methodical Bulgarian Grammar”, published in 1860 in Constantinople. He actively cooperates and publishes his works in the magazine “Balgarski Knizhitsi” (Bulgarian Books) and in the magazine “Bulgaria”, whose editor-in-chief is Dragan Tsankov.

Because of his varied interests and free spirit, Dr Mirkovich accepted the revolutionary ideas that gripped the Bulgarian population in the middle of the 19th century. For that, in 1869 he was arrested and sent to exile, where, according to his cellmates, he treated the sick with homeopathic remedies extremely successfully. After his release, Dr Mirkovich participated in the creation of the first Red Cross society in Bulgaria, established in Sliven in 1878, and published the first printed newspaper in Sliven – “Balgarsko zname” (Bulgarian Flag) (1879), in which he was also a correspondent [8].

Along with his educational and literary activities, Dr Georgi Mirkovich did not abandon his medical practice even for a day, applying what today is considered as an innovative method of homeopathy. Moreover, he gathered his knowledge in this field and in 1885 published his work “Healing at Home with Homeopathy”, in which he explained and defended the basic principles of this type of treatment. Dr Mirkovic was also a representative in the Great National Assembly (1887) and in the 5th Ordinary National Assembly. In 1903, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the sanitary work in Bulgaria, the State Sanitary Inspectorate awarded him with an Order of Civil Merit.

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A writer – representative of Daskal poetry, translator, doctor – an author of a number of articles and books in the field of health care and public figure – mayor of Varna for two terms – all this is about Dr Angel Dimitrov Piskyuliev (1845 - 1935).

Born on August 15, 1845 in the town of Shumen, Angel Piskyuliev initially studied under Dobri Voinikov. He continued his studies at the Military School of Medicine in Constantinople. From 1871 he was a military doctor and also worked in the military hospital in Shumen. During the Russo-Turkish War, he was a sanitary captain in Senica, Bosnia. After the Liberation of Bulgaria in 1878, he was appointed as a district doctor in the second-rate hospital in Gabrovo, where he was also the first manager. He settled in Varna, where from 1884 to 1892 he was the manager of the Varna first-class (state) hospital. From 1882 to 1894 Angel Piskyuliev became the director of the Civil Sanitary Directorate at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. From November 1885 he was the head of the military hospital in Lom, and from 1895 for the rest of his life he was a freelance doctor in Varna. He served two terms as the mayor of the city and being a truly progressive and ambitious forward-looking political leader Dr Angel Piskyuliev saw the future of Varna as a centre for recreation and tourism.

Dr Angel Piskyuliev was a person who managed to preserve the Bulgarian revival spirit, a doctor with broad outlook and desire to implement scientific achievements in medicine for the better health of the Bulgarians like many of his predecessors. Along with his medical practice he wrote poems and was actively involved in the literary life of Bulgaria.

We can find his first steps for his literary aspirations during his years Constantinople, where while being a student, he became a member and participated in organizing and conducting initiatives of the Bulgarian community centre – an institution that had established itself as a centre of Bulgarian literature. The love for literature threw a bridge to his aspirations for theatrical performances and Dr Piskyuliev joined Gidik Pasha theater as an amateur actor. He wrote poems and articles for “Vremya” (Time) newspaper, “Macedonia”, “Pravo” (Law) and “Chitalishte” (Community centre) magazines.

Sharing similar views with Ivan Bogorov in the fight against xenomania – both in the language and in the everyday life of the Bulgarians – Dr Piskyuliev expressed his thoughts about the vanity in life in his poetry (“Sonnet to the girl X...”, “Dreams of a student” etc.). He encouraged his compatriots to protect and preserve the traditions and moral values of the patriarchal Bulgarian society. Familiar with the examples of world literature (Dr Piskyuliev had an excellent command of French and Turkish), he shared his views on the poetic word in verse, following the example of Nicolo Boallo:

Let thought be in a measured order
In a measured order to be thought
the clearest, the best; and healthy is the goal,
when in short verse there is a broad mind.
“To the Poets”

He translated Chateaubriand, whom he considered one of his teachers [13] he revealed his views on the art of translation in the article “A few speeches about translation”, published in the magazine “Macedonia” [7].

The work that entered the history of Bulgarian revival literature was written in response to Petko R. Slaveikov's poem “Don't sing to me”. Dr Alexander Piskyuliev did not understand the artistic philosophical meaning of Petko R. Slaveikov's “Slaveykov's Elegy”, nor its significance as an artistic assessment of the end of a literary generation. Therefore, he wrote his poetic response, in which he instructively invites the poet: “Sing, Slaveykov, sing!” The poem was published in the magazine “Chitalishte”, ed. 3,1870.

The strongly moralizing lyric of Dr Angel Piskyuliev will surely remain only in the review studies as an example of how a scientist with an awareness of the social significance of his life tried to impose, including through the means of literature, some of the principles he believed in. The belief that the artistic word can be the force that directs public attention to significant problems of young Bulgarian health care, as well as the desire to be part of the newly developing Bulgarian literature, are the motives that drive the scientific developments and literary works of Dr Piskyuliev. But the thing he will definitely remain in the Bulgarian history of medicine for is his professional foresight. In the years when Bulgaria still did not have its own higher medical school and acquiring specialized medical education was a complex process and investment, nine doctors, one of whom was Dr Piskyuliev, founded the Varna Medical Society on 10 December 1883. Dr Piskyuliev originally was vice-president, but from 1884 he also became its president and as such he took an extremely active part in writing the official paper of the society – “Medical Journal” [10].

Perhaps it is the traditions established over the years that are the reason why the Union of writers with degree in medicine has existed in Bulgaria for years, bearing the name of the veterinarian, professor of vertebrate anatomy and brilliant fiction writer – Dimitar Dimov. Functioning with some interruptions, the Union is currently comprised of medics who, often after issuing prescriptions and sick leaves, write down their secret, and sometimes born precisely in the course of their work, poems, stories and novels, thus naturally combining the broad knowledge of man and the world around them with that spark called philanthropy and humanity. Today, thanks to the media and the ability to publish relatively easily, it is not difficult for their works to be published and reach their readers. Many authors did not have such fate and their good works remained unpopular and unknown to the general public for many years. One of them was Dr Georgi Hristov Tishinov (1902 – 1966). He was born on 16 November 1902 in Kukous, where he studied until the age of 10, after which the family moved to live in Thessaloniki. After the Second Balkan

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War, when the Greeks captured Thessaloniki, his mother sent Georgi to Varna. In 1937, Georgi Tishinov graduated medicine in Sofia. There he met his wife Tonka. His first poem in a naive-lyrical style he dedicated to her:

“Dear Tonka!
So sad to be alone in this life,
So hard to be alone!
And even in a county town -
You're still an orphan by yourself...”

He worked in Gradeshnitsa, Sandanski and Gorna Jumaya, today's Blagoevgrad. When he started work in Blagoevgrad, Dr Tishinov opened his private office at home. According to the memories of his daughter-in-law, “he mostly examined poor people. Not only did he examine them for free, but he also gave them money to buy medicine. ...he was very fair and devoted to the sick. He visited his patients several times to check on how they were doing. An extremely humane doctor.” [6].

He was one of the most popular jumalia of the mid-20th century as a physician, supporter of a healthy lifestyle, patriot and poet. Dr Georgi Tishinov pointed out the advantages of toughening up your immune system by swimming in the dams – an activity that took place in two environments – water and air and happens among the nature, under variable natural conditions. The activity made it an extremely suitable means for the prevention of various diseases. He was one of the doctors who “promoted” cold-water swimming as a way to increase strength and endurance, and also as a way of active recreation. Dr Tishinov was familiar with sources from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance that described the healing and toughening effect of water procedures. He himself explained and demonstrated that people need to overcome the fear of getting sick and contact with cold water. To reach his patients more easily, he used literature. Dozens of his poems, epigrams, aphorisms, riddles, letters of recommendation for his colleagues, etc. undoubtedly contributed to his popularity. He often gave his medical advice to lead a healthy lifestyle, maintain good hygiene, follow healthy diet, etc. through verse, but also by his own example. He wrote of the dams on the Bistritsa River, built after the great flood of 1954, where he himself swam and sunbathed and where he took his friends and children.

Best doctor's advice -
Take a swim in the near barrage,
But to get the best result,
go there more than once or twice.

In memory of the doctor and public figure Georgi Tishinov, a year after his death in 1966, his followers built a fountain near the dams of the Bistritsa River, and activities related to a healthy lifestyle continue to be held at the site every year.

One of the brightest people who left the mark in our modern history was doctor, public figure, politician and writer Dr Aleksandar Popov (1927 – 2021). He was born on September 25, 1927 in Pazardzhik. Having graduated from the Pazardzhik Boys' High School as the top of his class, Aleksandar Popov studied medicine in Sofia. The reason for his future professional choice, according to the memories of his daughter Anna Popova-Francis, is very clear and definite. He wanted to become a journalist and writer, but when he graduated from high school, he found himself a victim of an established regime that required you to serve and obey it. The bright young man realized early on that without freedom of speech he could not be independent – and what kind of journalist would he be then? That is why he chose medicine as a politically neutral field. However, every day of his life he defended the right to be faithful to two things – the truth and the Hippocratic Oath.

He graduated in 1952. Initially, he worked as a district doctor in the village of Lenishte, Ardina district and the village of Dorkovo, Velingrad municipality. In 1958, he settled in Velingrad and forever connected his destiny with this city, where he lived until the end of his life. He specialized in X-ray diagnostics. From 1972 to 1984, he was the head of the X-ray department at the Municipal Hospital. He continued to work after his retirement in 1984 as a consultant at the General Hospital of Velingrad and the “Health” Diagnostic Centre until 2016. After the political change in 1989, the Union of Democratic Forces nominated him as a candidate in the elections for the Grand National Assembly, and on July 12, 1991, Dr Aleksandar Popov was among the deputies who put their signatures under the new Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Dr Aleksandar Popov was a respected and authoritative author of novels, short stories, essays, documentary prose, and journalism. The beginning of his literary work dates back to 1957, when his story "Gadulka" won the first prize in the literary competition of the “People's Youth” newspaper. With the money, he bought the works of his fellow Russian writer and doctor by profession – A.P. Chekhov. He is the author of the short stories “The Best Years” (1962) and “Drops of Resin” (1973), the memoir-nonfiction books “The Great Struggle” (1995), “The Unspoken” (1997) and “The Land of the Dumb” (2001). In 2004, he published the collection of short stories, essays and journalism “Reflection”, and in 2007 the collection of essays “The Land of My People”. In 2011, “In the depths of the past” was published – an assessment of his entire conscious life [12]. His articles and comments were published in the local and central press. All this in mind, he did not abandon, even for a moment, his professional development and never deprived his patients of timely and competent medical assistance. “Fellow radiologists, when you have difficulties with diagnosis, invite your patient to sit next to you. They can tell you things that the picture might hide” – the words of Dr Popov, preserved in the memories of journalist Elena Baeva [11].

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As an example of high professionalism and ethics, Dr Aleksandar Popov remained faithful to medicine, even in his advanced age. At the same time, he preserved his intransigence in the face of untruth, and the aristocracy of the spirit. For him, freedom is a right and a responsibility and in the spirit of his ancestors in 1990 in “St. George the Victorious” church he gave a speech during the midnight Easter service. His word remained in the memory of his contemporaries, a word that showed his unceasing optimism: “Truth will rise in our tortured homeland! Justice will rise! Freedom will rise!” [11]. In the name of this truth and freedom, the humanist and doctor ventures into the wilds of the uncharacteristic at first glance right, to convey his uncompromising civil position, described in the book “Doom” (2009) – a documentary attempt to restore justice from a hasty trial in 1986, resulting in the wrongful death sentence of a young man.

He came to the painful truth: “Democracy is a great blessing, but also a great test for each of us. Let us hope we prove worthy of it. If we spoil it, we will lose it again.” Among the titles of the legacy he left behind are the collections of essays, short stories and non-fiction “Reflection” (2004) and “The Land of My People” (2007). His works are “not just a memory, but a summary of how he lived, how he worked, how he dealt with difficulties and successes. Loyal admirers of Dr Popov's prose know his calm and confident narration of past events and his ability to be both a participant in and an objective critic of the events described”. [1].

Dr Popov's work defends life as a unique value and moral duty. “For a long time, I wondered how to begin my speech. In the end, I decided that this would be longevity” – this is how in 2017 he welcomed the audience who came to honour him on his 90th anniversary at the community centre in Chepino district. Having encountered thousands of human destinies during his long medical practice, having passed through the lessons of three Bulgarian eras, Dr Aleksandar Popov sent an extremely timely warning of our present: “Our innate urge to freedom must be civilized, transformed into mature democratic culture. Otherwise, it will degenerate into arbitrariness.” To conclude “Neither the toga makes the judge a judge, nor the crown the bishop. Dignity and honour do not come with an accessory.” And to bequeath to us through his books the message of everyone's personal responsibility for deeds and words: “If you are literate and already grey-haired, take a moment and put on paper something of your experience – either your own, your parents', or your grandparents', whatever you remember. Add your own pebble in the multi-coloured mosaic of time, on which history will step – the real and not made-up one.” (“In the depths of the past”).

“Science and poetry are the two eyes of one person” – the words that the multi-faceted scientist Nikola Tesla bequeathed to us. I never met a reliable source that would confirm the truth about the creator of the phrase, but regardless of who the author is, this sentence can become a slogan for the work of Prof. Dr Georgi Edrev, M.D. (1944 – 2021).

Georgi Edrev was born on April 2, 1944 in the city of Silistra. He graduated in medicine in 1969 at the Higher Medical Institute – Sofia. In 1973, he acquired a specialty in otorhinolaryngology and as such worked in Silistra, and later in the Department of Otorhinolaryngology of the Medical Academy – Sofia, “Tsar Boris III” National General Transport Hospital, Medical Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and “Lozenets” General hospital. In 1987, he obtained the scientific degree of doctor of medicine, and in 1990 – professor of otorhinolaryngology. He specialized in middle ear surgery in Moscow and at Stanford University in California. For 10 years he worked as the director of “Tsar Boris III” National General Transport Hospital and became a national consultant in otorhinolaryngology. Georgi Edrev was a university lecturer and author of more than 130 scientific works, rationalizations and inventions. The name of Dr Georgi Edrev appears in a number of magazines as well as on the covers of poetry books.

He started dreaming of poetry in his childhood years. His desire was to study literature or journalism, but under the influence of his father, the lawyer Edrew Edrev, he applied and studied medicine. Although he sometimes wrote secretly, his real debut in poetry was at the age of 64 – in 2008 with the collection of poems “Na chisto” (In the open). Shortly after that, the second collection appeared – “Tochen spusak” (Precise Trigger), for which his fellow citizen from Silistra, Georgi Chapkanov–Chapa made the illustrations. The third collection – “S mnogo led” (With a lot of ice) was published in 2012. Followed by “Nevidim bryag” (Invisible Shore), which was published in 2014, and four years later, in 2018, “Prozrazchen oblak” (Transparent Cloud).

The titles of his collections of poems express that vitality and immensity that would have been unthinkable to remain locked up only within medical editions. Therefore, in the whirlpool of hospital duties, scientific discoveries and the endless series of administrative commitments accompanying his daily life, Dr Edrev forged the lines of his poems. Because it had the power to heal not only the bodies, but also the souls of people.

Like a lone wolf
I hide in the shadows.
I survive and again
Keep on, moving my way.
Though feeble and sick,
And my journey is ending
I'm not thinking of bread, ...
Only praying to God to lift me up.

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He persistently searched for those words that caress the ear and the memories, which would bring us back to the human in us. Yet he never called himself a poet. Even in 2012, when his name had long since left the friendly circle of colleagues, students and acquaintances, and his third collection of poems was published, Dr Edrev continued to stick to his profession – doctor. And the poetry? Poetry remained that unchanged particle that accompanied his life and spiritualized his works.

Heavy, gray fogs
the wind spread far away.
A white miracle rains —
as if God touched us all.
“Snow”

“When you are a doctor, you face many things that you don't think about at the moment, but they stay with you and then crystallize...” – said the surgeon-poet in one of his interviews on Bulgarian National Radio [5]. And in his works, we can feel this everyday touch with the invisible threads that make our lives. Threads that both in his professional and poetic path grow into a clearly realized worldview and a built value system that life is a priceless gift and we must walk through it purified. This is also a poetic dream of his life:

To the Devil and the Lord God
I have not vowed my soul.
My only wish`s my children
Play outside and have fun.

Prof. Edrev reached the highest peaks of scientific achievements, specialized in Moscow, St. Petersburg and San Francisco and became recognized not only in our country, but also in the world as one of the best specialists in the field of microsurgery of the ear, (for many years Prof. Edrev was a national consultant in otorhinolaryngology). However, the pictures from that Silistra, where he and his classmates, among whom was the dissident Dimitar Bochev, dreamt, fell in love and made their first poetic attempts, did not fade in his memories. It was Bochev who recalled with a smile and a wink about their lyrical “circle writings”, with which they filled the pages of the “Silistra Tribune” newspaper [3]. It is precisely these clumsy but youthfully sincere poems that are the core of Dr Edrev's mature, nostalgic and meaningful poetic return to his hometown:

Old and purified man,
and my hair all grey,
Dreaming of Silistra again.
in the Sofia neighbourhood.

None of the readers of Dr Georgi Edrev (friends, colleagues, patients or connoisseurs of Erato) tries to see him as just a creator or just a scientist, just an expert of the heart matters or just a man of science. Because the scalpel and the poetry go hand in hand. And in this unstoppable marching of time, his poems were born – an entrance to intimate stories and deeply emotional connections.

Unexpected and paradoxical, Dr Edrev's poetry “grabs you imperceptibly, because somehow from afar and quite unobtrusively you talk about your impossible other life that you hoped to live, about your impossible other hometown, another hometown, another real world, another old friend – for what could have been different for you. (...) Well, someone always has to live this sweet and sour life of mine, and this book helps me to do it myself, and not someone else imagined by me” – this is how the cultural researcher Vladislav Todorov not only describes, but experiences the poems of Dr Edrev [2].

In his work – a suffering art of treatment, Prof. Edrev tells about life and seeks his refuge from the vicissitudes of existence.

There`s a church in the neighbourhood garden.
Across the street — a pub with wooden walls.
Men come here to have a drink in the evening.
While their wives speak to God in the church.
“The Garden”

For his contribution to medicine, Prof. Georgi Edrev was awarded a gold medal by the Ministry of Health. And for his poems – the love of hundreds who in their rhythm and rhyme had recognised their own lives.

CONCLUSIONS

Physician-scientists, whether writers or not, are the people who deal with human suffering on a daily basis. Compassionate and full of suffering, their artistic messages are more than a confession. Along with the emotionality of sharing, their works also carry that measured dose of rationality that makes them ambassadors of science in the world of sensual words. Whether and to whom their works will be needed and whether certain author will be included in the list of exemplary and well-established artists that the institutions use to form and confirm national values and ideologies, is a matter of time. Hardly any of the authors mentioned here wrote with the pretense of this. But today, when the possibility of reading is more than accessible and available, the threat that a work or an author does not fall into the literary canon does not necessarily mean that they are not noticed. Because the literary

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canon is provoked and changed by non-canonical authors and works. And when they represent creativity, when they have their “different”, a non-canonical and less conservative circle of readers, when they are accompanied by the halo of dedication to science and public commitments – then they are destined to become and remain part of the nation's literary and cultural memory. Because what makes us read and write literature is the inner need to reach other worlds. And that need of the spirit to wander in the unfathomable paths of the universe, is doomed to eternity.

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