

The occasion brought together two big names in Bulgarian literature – Vera Mutafchieva and Yordan Radichkov for a pre-Christmas book launch at the National Library on December, 10. Publishing house “Anubis” started the 10 volume “Selected works” of Vera Mutafchieva with “The last of the Shishmans”. And readers can now enjoy the second volume of Radichkov’s selected works.

The launch of the two books coincided with the 124 anniversary of the national Library St Cyril and St Methodius. Vera Mutafchieva often launches her books there, since the library department for Ottoman studies is her first working place.

The daily “24 hours” presents the conversation between Vera Mutafchieva and Yordan Radichkov at the launch of their books.

VERA MUTAFCHIEVA, YORDAN RADICHKOV:

HEAVEN IS A TOTAL BORE. HELL IS WHERE THE ACTION IS.

Vera Mutafchieva: I am very happy to be next to Yordan Radichkov and that I can express my best wishes to him. I am not one for literary analyses and syntheses and that is why I would not dare to express opinion or evaluations. Ms. Boryana Hristova (*Director of the National Library St Cyril and St Methodius and host of the evening*) said it so well and so affectionately that no one can do it better but I would like Yordan to live a long life and to enjoy what he has accomplished.

Yordan Radichkov: Thank you.

V.M.: I will thank Boryana at the end. For having us once again at the National Library. Second, I’d like to thank the audience which notwithstanding the cold and icy streets took the trouble to come here to see us like the two Samara flags....

(Laughter in the audience.)

I don’t believe you enjoy watching us, you’d rather read what we have written, no?

Y.R.: I think so. Should I speak now? I would like to thank everybody who is present here tonight. I would like to thank God for bringing me together with Vera. We have known each other for years, ever since the rule of the Shishmans...

(Laughter.)

....yes, we have known each other for ages and we love each other a lot. I can’t say this in your presence Vera...

V.M.: You can, you can...

Y.R.: May you live long!

V.M.: Not that long, it’s been long already (laughing).

Y.R.: This is not your business. This book launch has become very popular in Bulgaria....(Pause.)

V.M.: I would like to remind you something, Yordan...

Y.R.: Ok..

V.M.: I’ll remind you that both of us were born in the same year and that this young boy next to me is 6 months younger.

Y.R.: I am? (Laughing.) I didn’t know...

V.M.: Now you know. This sounds almost like the comments about the time of the Shishmans. But it is all the same, really. Distance in time is something indefinable, sometimes passing fast, sometimes slowly and sometimes falls asleep (smiling). When you read about the time of the Shishmans you are filled with optimism. Because we are constantly complaining, whining, and are mad at fate for placing us in the present, hard times. And when you read “Shishmans”, what is it?

Y.R.: The same.

V.M.: It is the same. And now when I was rereading it to edit one or two minor things – it is not true that it should undergo a major revision...but I said to myself: I was too kind when I wrote that book, because it was a long time ago. Somehow I found...a true pathos. And a justification for everything that happened in Bulgaria at the end of the 14th century. Well, it was all of our own doing, just like now, just like always. There is no-one to blame. It turns out no-one is to blame for someone else. You reap what you sow, my grandmother used to say.

Y.R.: True.

V.M.: But such books, like Yordan Radichkov's books, explain to a certain extent the Bulgarian character...and with this wonderful sense of humour. And about the arrangement of the world in a different system, which tolerates us, that is why man arranges it the way he wants it. I hope such books will bring comfort and solace during the otherwise boring holidays that are in store for us.

Y.R.: God grant.

V.M.: Let's wish! Sorry for interrupting you.

Y.R.: Thank you for helping me. I will comment on what you said and close the topic... A few years ago a devout Russian was visiting me at home. He was so religious that he made the sign of the cross all the time. And we talked about God. I said to him – we, Bulgarians, do not believe in God that much. And he says – what do you mean you don't believe in God!? What do you think about God? And I tell him, well, the Bulgarian usually says "I do not know God, I have never visited him, he has never visited me, I don't even know how God's door opens". The Bulgarian talks about God as if he's a neighbour or an in-law who comes for a visit and when he comes, he is met like an important person, he is fed and offered wine and then he goes home. This is how the Bulgarian wants to meet God.

And the Russian became very reserved. How can I talk about God that way? How can Bulgarians think about him in those terms...

V.M.: In Bulgarian folklore God is sitting at the table with the smaller gods, right?... There isn't one Father and one Son, but many gods who eat yogurt from the same bowl...

Y.R.: Yes! (Smiling).

V.M.: Everything resembles our way of life. Poor, but pleasant. And then you can somehow accept God. And also the Devil! Because the devil is the more likeable folklore character in our folk tradition.

Y.R.: That's right, that's right...

V.M.: The bowl...

Y.R.: Vera, when I go to church I see people who on entering the church they make the sign of the cross mechanically in front of the icons, because heaven is a total bore. Saint next to a saint. And when they go, they stop to watch hell with wide open eyes. What a sight!

V.M.: Hell is where the action is!

Y.R.: Yes, heaven is a total bore. I hope you may never go there.

(Laughter.)

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