

# LITERARY HISTORY IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY: GLOBAL MODELS AND BULGARIAN PRACTICES

Research Group: Bulgarian Literary History  
Research field: Bulgarian Literature

Head of the research group  
Assoc. Prof. Noemi Stoichkova  
Members of the group  
Prof. Milena Kirova  
Senior Asst. Prof. Kristina Yordanova  
Dr. Martin Kolev  
PhD Student Vanessa Palibatchiyska  
PhD Student Ivan Georgiev  
Student Preslava Peneva  
Student Daniel Asenov

## Project overview

The need to rethink the traditional model of writing literary history was being discussed as early as the 90's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – in practice however this only happened after the beginning of the new century. At that time important problems of epistemological and methodological nature begin to emerge: the essentialism of traditional literary historiography; the teleological approach, evaluating the past from the point of view of the victorious present; chronological linearity; the romantic approach to phenomena depending on the degree of their "importance"; the nationalist focus underlying the "grand narrative", etc. Attempts are being made to theoretically rethink the categories in which the literary-historical process is considered. Alternative models such as "world literature", "Eurasian literature" and others are being developed – self-described with categories such as globalism or multinationalism, such models account for living in an ever-expanding space of diasporas around the world. Even among those researchers who do not speak of a complete "deconstruction of the epistemological field", there is already an attitude of thinking about literary historiography under the sign of some urgent change that would make it relevant to the contemporary mentality and attractive for use in the wider cultural space.

The goals and methods of the current project are developed in the dynamic and diverse context of an upsurge in the making of literary history, and precisely in the field of "big histories", which cover entire eras of Bulgaria's development. Until the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was only one "big history" suitable for educational use after 1989, "History of Bulgarian Literature 1878 – 1944" by Sv. Igov, as well as one attempt to modernize the approach: "Bulgarian literature of the 20th century" (2003) by V. Stefanov. In the next ten years, a number of new projects appeared with authors Pl. Doinov, M. Nedelchev, M. Kirova, V. Stefanov, collectives from NBU and from IL-BAS. Despite their public existence, which fills an open empty niche, a serious dialogue on theoretical foundations and methodological models does not take place. The current project is aiming at the initiation of a broader debate: about the principles and manners in which literary history can be written, in such a way as to be adequate to the needs and attitudes in the modern man's thinking. This is definitely not a question of dismantling the tradition accumulated in Bulgarian humanitarian studies over a period of a century and a half, nor is it a matter of direct transfer of "global", "Eurasian" and other similar theories. In our opinion, the necessary changes should not mean a rejection of national specificity or a disregard for the intermediate, cross-border processes and forms characteristic of Bulgarian literature's historical development. The second key task of the current project is the development of hypothetical models for making literary histories that respect "glocal" principles and practices in a relatively balanced way.



Project logo designed by: Preslava Peneva.

## ЛИТЕРАТУРНАТА ИСТОРИЯ ПРЕЗ XXI ВЕК: ГЛОБАЛНИ МОДЕЛИ И БЪЛГАРСКИ ПРАКТИКИ

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September 6, 2023 3 минути

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Website of the project.

## Objectives and methodology

The specific research objectives of the project are:

A. Theoretical. To study and evaluate, in view of their applicability to Bulgarian culture, the new theoretical models that Western literary studies have developed and implemented as a literary-historical practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

B. Analyzing. To define and evaluate the approaches of writing literary history within the boundaries of Bulgarian literature in the 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

C. Heuristic. To develop and propose optimal variants that may achieve conformity and balance between European (in this sense, global) developed models and Bulgarian approaches to the writing (respectively teaching) of literary history.

The methodologies for the research objectives are:

I. Cultural-historical – the study of the cultural contexts embedded in the making of literary histories.

II. Literary-theoretical – (in)applicability of modern theoretical models for the development of national literary histories.

III. Literary-historical – systematization, analysis and debate of the existing Bulgarian literary histories from the last 20 years.

IV. Comparativist – comparing foreign and native traditions in the writing of literary histories in the last century.

V. Receptive – tracing the perceptive attitudes towards the different types of literary histories from the beginning of the XXI century.

VI. Pedagogical – specialized training of students from the Faculty of Slavic Studies in the various literary and historical projects.

## Accomplished project objectives

I. 5 publications, referenced in Web of Science, instead of the stipulated 2 for the period (3 in the first quarter and one each in the second and third quarters).

II. 3 team members participated in a conference related to the project topic, another team member delivered 2 reports at conferences related to the project topic.

III. 1 participation with a report at a round table.

IV. 3 publications in referenced and indexed editions in national and international databases outside of Web of Science.

V. By the end of the third quarter, 5 more articles have been accepted for publication.

VI. Preparation of a curriculum for the "Literary History: Retrospectives and Prospects" Elective course, part of the summer semester of the academic year 2023–4.

VII. 8 lectures have been prepared until the end of March. 5 lectures have been delivered until the end of March.

VIII. A bibliographic survey comprising over 180 bibliographic references of the Bulgarian literary histories from the Liberation until the present day has been organized and prepared by the PhD candidates and students from the project team.

IX. Based on the bibliographic survey, a bibliographic inventory model was developed and is currently being applied by the PhD students and students from the team.

X. A logo and short biographical presentations for the project participants have been created for its website.

XI. A specialized website has been developed for the purposes of the project, to reflect its activities, showcase publications made, and provide educational and scientific resources on the initiative's theme:  
<https://histlit21.wordpress.com/resources/>

XII. The project is presented on social media, with a Facebook page created for this purpose:  
[www.facebook.com/histlit21](http://www.facebook.com/histlit21)

XIII. Materials have been uploaded on the project website.

XIV. Regular working meetings have been held by the team members.

## Elective university course: "Literary History: Retrospectives and Perspectives"

The elective course aims introduce students to the models and methodologies of Bulgarian literary history in synchronous and diachronic perspectives. The course aims not only to present national literary histories but also to familiarize the students with current research in the field of foreign national literatures in a European context. The discipline aim to enhance the competence of young researchers, develop their critical thinking, and provoke debate on the theoretical foundations and methodological models through which literary history should be created in the conditions of the new millennium, so that it is adequate to the needs of the contemporary research.

The research and educational directions of the course are: To present and evaluate new theoretical models proposed and implemented as literary-historical practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with regard to their applicability to Bulgarian culture; to define and evaluate approaches to writing literary history within the boundaries of Bulgarian literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries; to discuss models that could achieve alignment and balance between European and global models of making literary history and Bulgarian approaches in writing and teaching literary history.



At the elective course: "Literary History: Retrospectives and Perspectives"

## Planned for the Second Year of the Project

During the second year of the Project, the following tasks are planned to be achieved:

I. To continue the publication activity in Web of Science referenced journals - at least three new articles.

II. To have published at least two more articles in nationally refereed journals.

III. To organize a national round table "Literary History Today: National Practices and Global Perspectives" with participants from other academic institutions.

IV. To conduct a discussion on "Modern Approaches to Teaching Literary History in High School" with young teachers, graduates of the Faculty of Slavic Studies at Sofia University.

V. To summarize and publicize the deliberations of the participants from the two discussion forums.

VI. To complete the bibliographic description (annotations) of literary histories from the late 19th century to the present day.

VII. To announce summaries of the work done on the project.

VIII. To maintain an official project page on the website of the Faculty of Slavic Studies.