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On the Borderlines of Genres and Languages: Paradoxes of Wilhelm Mach's Life-Writing²

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Introduction

The case study discussed in this paper is inspired by the archive of the Bulgarian writer and painter Vicho Ivanov (1901–1979), opened in January 2022. Ivanov's extensive correspondence includes letters from his close friend, Polish writer and literary critic Wilhelm Mach (1917–1965). Mach and Ivanov met in 1959 in Warsaw; at the time, Mach was the editor of the prose section in the government weekly "Nowa Kultura", as well as an author of award-winning novels favorably received by literary critics.³ Ivanov was director of the Bulgarian Cultural Centre in Warsaw. The success he achieved as its head should be attributed to both his talents as an efficient promoter and administrator of cultural activities and his numerous acquaintances with people in the culture-creating milieu. He was remembered as an attentive and sensitive listener who responded eagerly to the needs of others, a friend who never forgot his promises, and a person who was genuinely interested in Polish culture and the literary life of the capital (Стефанова 1981).

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³ These include *Rdza* ["Rust"], 1950; *Jaworowy dom* ["The Sycamore House"], 1954; *Życie duże i małe* ["Life, Big and Small"], 1959.

Undoubtedly, the relationship between Mach and Ivanov was also nurtured by the political circumstances. Cold War propaganda in the then socialist states promoted mutual relations within the Soviet bloc of people's republics. The two writers sided with the communist regime and supported the social and political changes which took place in both Poland and Bulgaria after 1945. However, not only did Ivanov and Mach share ideological convictions; the depth of their friendship also owed to Ivanov's acceptance of Mach's homosexuality. The letters they exchanged between 1960 and 1965 document how a community in which non-heteronormative desire was not taboo functioned and developed.

The private and the public

Although the law of communist Poland and Bulgaria was liberal in terms of moral policing, both states adjusted their policies towards sexual minorities in line with the homophobic public sentiment. In fact, homosexual people were repressed, concealing their orientation and living in constant fear of public disclosure (Fiedotow 2012: 272–292). In this context, I would like to draw attention to the way in which Wilhelm Mach enacts his privacy, a tactic which literary historian Ewa Wiegandt refers to as crossing the boundary between private and public communication that amounted to a political gesture. Unlike Czesław Miłosz, who arguably initiated the tradition of semi-private letters by writing to Kazimierz Wyka not necessarily for the sake of a private colloquy, but with the higher good of Polish poetry and its condition in mind, Mach reveals the more private facets in order to demonstrate their conformity with the publicly professed ideology:

While ordinary people defended themselves against totalitarian objectification by separating their private and official lives – which the propaganda stigmatized as duplicity – [...] the writers in government jobs blurred the distinction between the official and private domains. In practice, this meant being in two roles at once: the public and the private [...] (Wiegandt 2010: 158).

Basing on a stylistic analysis of one semi-private letter to Vicho Ivanov paired with an excerpt from Mach's novel *Góry nad czarnym morzem* ("The Mountains by the Black Sea"), I wish to demonstrate that the tactic of private disclosure for the benefit of official ideology (as identified by Wiegandt) was not motivated solely by political and propaganda considerations. Paradoxically, the communist Wilhelm Mach reveals his privacy

and underscores its conformity with the official cultural line of the socialist state in order to conceal his marginal position as a homosexual man.

Chronology of publications

In October 1960, in a brief message to Ivanov, Mach writes about the possible dates of his return to Warsaw as he had spent the summer holidays in Bulgaria. The letter brings no other news, no description of his stay or mentions of any mutual friends he had met. Mach must have anticipated that Ivanov would have been surprised by the brevity of the message and hastens to conclude with the remark: "I wrote you back in a long letter which will be printed in the next issue of the News Bulletin (in Bulgarian), from which you will find out what I had experienced" (ЦДЛ). By referring his friend to the newspaper, Mach equates the private and public spheres of communication.

The public letter to his friend mentioned by Mach in his private correspondence appears in November 1960 in Bulgarian. The name of the novelist is given, but no information about the translator is provided (Max 1960: 8–11). In May the following year, the letter is reprinted in Polish in "Nowa Kultura" (Mach 1961: 3). This publication offers neither any information about a possible translation or self-translation, nor as to whether the text had been reprinted from the Bulgarian newspaper "Полша". A comparison of the Bulgarian and Polish versions shows that the letter was rewritten and abridged prior to being published in "Nowa Kultura"; its content was adapted to the Polish reader's colloquial knowledge of Bulgarian geography and realities.

These details are important because the imagery used in, and excerpts taken from, the letter appear later in the novel *Góry nad czarnym morzem*, published in the spring/summer of 1961. The content communicated publicly to a friend, is re-worked to become a part of the fictional world and fictional journey of the protagonist. I will argue that the different redactions of the same text exemplify Mach's multilayered identity performance. The publicly available letter to a friend is merely an alibi for the private emotion which the writer confides in his novel: a work that, via an array of secret signs of the inexpressible homosexual desire⁴ (as described by German Ritz), tells the story of his love for a young Bulgarian. In Ritz's view, Mach's novels – alongside the prose of Iwaszkiewicz and Breza – illustrate

⁴ For the paradoxes of the queer autobiography see Loftus 1997. Discussing the issue of the unspeakable, the researcher refers to the logic of Foucault's repressive hypothesis, according to which what is prohibited returns in new and resignifying forms, shaping and recontextualizing the manifest content of the text (Loftus 1997: 33).

the way in which homosexuality, still lacking its place in the Polish literary discourse of the first half of the 20th century, completely transforms prose narrative strategies and opposes the traditional epic plot development. The autobiographical origin of the fragment of the novel revealed here confirms Ritz's thesis, but at the same time complements it with another aspect, that of Mach's multilingual creative praxis. The bilingual creation of the letter to Vicho Ivanov together with the attempt to subvert and displace heteronomy had undoubtedly inspired Mach to invent a stylistically bolder fictional narrative. In other words, the change in narrative strategies, made under the pressure of silenced homosexual desire as noted by Ritz, would not be possible without the multilingual experience on the part of the writer.

Self-translation of the letter

Wilhelm Mach is not a typical multilingual writer. He translates from German⁵, speaks French, English, and Bulgarian. He does use Bulgarian in his private correspondence with his friends in Sofia, but writes to them in Polish and German as well. However, apart from that one documented instance of the two language versions of the letter to Ivanov, there is no proof that Mach ever consciously chose to write an original piece in a different idiom than his native Polish.

Nonetheless, I believe the two surviving versions of the letter discussed here deserve to be approached due to the practice of self-*translation*, since this term is distinctive of a text that differs fundamentally from translation per se. First, there are no documents which would make it possible to determine the chronology of the texts analyzed here, i.e. the language and the style or genre of the original of the letter to Ivanov cannot be readily ascertained. It is certain that the Polish and Bulgarian versions were written while the writer was working on his novel. Thus, given this technique of text production, this may be seen as a "double writing process", as opposed to a "two-stage reading-writing activity" which is characteristic of translation in the traditional sense. The concurrence of the two language versions of the letters and the novel further obscures the distinction between the original and self-translation.

Second, the changes introduced in the Polish version of the letter and in those passages of the novel that draw on it, as well as the creative treatment of the linguistic norm in its Bulgarian version, suggest that all

⁵ Cf. J. P. Eckermann, "Rozmowy z Goethem", translated by W. Mach, *Twórczość* 1949, no. 8, 5–17.

three texts were subject to authorial interference. Assuming that the Polish or the Bulgarian version of the letter is a translation, we would have to demonstrate the presence of some equivalence which the translator is obliged to accomplish. However, the Bulgarian, the Polish, and the fictional version of the text constitute what Jacqueline Risset refers to as “a kind of extension, a new stage, a more daring variation of the text in process” (Grutman 1998: 19).

The simultaneous emergence and interaction of all the variants of the letter we know – the Bulgarian, the Polish, and the one comprised in the novel – is best described by Rainier Grutman’s definition of self-translation as “a kind of bilingual creation that develops along parallel lines” (1998: 20). Grutman also presumes the possibility of a simultaneous auto-translation during which the first version of the text is still in progress, remaining unfinished (1998: 20). The processual dynamics and creativity of self-translation are crucial factors in understanding the relation between the Polish/Bulgarian versions of the letter to Vicho Ivanov and the fragments of Mach’s novel based thereon.

The stylistic features

Although all three texts were written at the same time, I will discuss them staying strictly within genre boundaries. First, I am going to emphasize the differences between the Bulgarian and Polish variants of the letter, to subsequently focus on the relationship between the personal document and Mach’s novel.

As already noted, the Bulgarian and Polish versions of the letter to Vicho Ivanov differ in their degree of saturation with reality. Mach relates how his rest in the mountain village of Narechen was interrupted by an unexpected visit from Mirosław Nowacki and Dimitar Ikononov who invited him to an eight-day lecture tour. He then provides a detailed itinerary of the trip and characterizes each town and village where the delegation was hosted. The final part of Mach’s letter includes a short, very flattering report on Bulgaria’s achievements, which many might have read as eulogy of socialism. The Bulgarian version of the text not only names the places visited, but also mentions the organizers of the various meetings with audiences. The fact that the people they met are thus listed is undoubtedly an expression of the author’s gratitude for the hospitable reception of the Polish delegates. In the Polish version, this element is omitted altogether. The writer was aware that Polish readers would care little about the formal details, but would be keenly interested in his account of the trip itself, seen as a possible map of tourist exploration. For this reason, Mach

meticulously enumerates tourist attractions in the towns he visited, paying particular attention to monuments and natural landmarks. Conversely, places of interest in those particular locations are not highlighted in the Bulgarian version as they would have provided no novelty to native travel enthusiasts. Here, Mach more readily mentions public facilities and emphasizes how favorably impressed he was by the everyday material culture of Bulgaria. To exemplify his strategy of adapting content to his audience's levels of knowledge, I will cite a brief remark concerning the village of Narechen. Its Bulgarian version depicts the local reality in detail, while the Polish version states the general geographical name and the most important natural attraction:

BG: Седях си тихичко в Родопите, в необикновено гостоприемния нареченски Военен дом... Наречен (великолепната клисура на река Чая)...	PL: Siedziałem sobie cichutko w Rodopach... Narechen (cudowny wąwóz rzeki Czaja)...
EN: I was tucked away quietly in the Rhodopes, in the incredibly hospitable Army Holiday House in Narechen... Narechen (the picturesque gorge of the Chaya river)	EN: I was tucked away quietly in the Rhodopes... Narechen (the picturesque gorge of the Chaya river)

Beside those understandable editorial devices, what distinguishes the two language versions is the degree to which the texts feature emotionally charged adjectives, and the occurrence of collocations. The Bulgarian text is characterized by frequent repetitions of adjectives. One term in the Bulgarian version usually has two or three semantically diverse equivalents in Polish, for example:

BG: лъчезарна страна “radiant country”	PL: pogodny kraj “serene country”
BG: лъчезарен живот “radiant life”	PL: sloneczne życie “sunny life”
BG: великолепна клисура “wonderful gorge”	cudowny wąwóz “wonderful gorge”
BG: великолепна работа “wonderful job”	ładna praca “nice job”
BG: великолепно читалище “wonderful community center”	przepiękny Dom Kultury “beautiful community centre”

BG: великолепни беседи “wonderful talks”	świetne prelekcje “great talks”
BG: великолепни мъже и жени “wonderful men and women”	świetni ludzie “great people”

Furthermore, the Bulgarian version employs emotive adjectives, the abundance of which makes the text seem unnaturally pompous and exaggerated. The adjectives in the Polish version are positively charged but emotionally neutral; as a result, the text yields an impression of a favorably inclined report. For example, if vineyards in the Polish variant are “huge” (*olbrzymie winnice*), they are elevated to “boundless” (*необятни лозя*) in the Bulgarian variant. If the frescoes in the Thracian tomb are “sensational” (*rewelacyjne*) in the former, they are downright extraordinary (*необикновени*) in the latter. The work of the promoters of cultural life in the Polish version is simply “nice” (*ładna*), whereas in the Bulgarian version it is noble (*благородна*). Numerous other examples could be quoted.

The second part of the letter, in which Mach describes Bulgaria’s rapid economic development under the progressive rule of the socialist party, explains why the Bulgarian version of the text is so emotionally expressive. In his Bulgarian text, the writer employs formulations which had become established through propaganda. Those collocations had so often been repeated in the press, in the media, and leaflets and information materials of all kinds, as well as in contemporary handbooks of Bulgarian, that they could probably be acquired very promptly by a non-native speaker. Moreover, as the notable newspeak researcher Michał Głowiński observes, using the official idiom of the regimes was a skill universally developed by citizens of all countries of the so-called socialist camp, one which constituted a communicative code that they readily recognized (Głowiński 2016: 6). Stylistically neutral terms in the Polish version of the text become something of propaganda clichés in the Bulgarian. For instance, the outcomes of the economic development of the socialist state are “impressive” in the Polish version. The Bulgarian version employs the propaganda amalgam of *грандиозни резултати* (“sensational results”). Similarly, the involvement of citizens in modern industrial construction is referred to simply as “the nation’s effort”, while the Bulgarian version features the ritualized propaganda slogan: *огромен, искрен ентузиазъм на целия народ* (“tremendous, sincere enthusiasm of the whole nation”). The formal and artificial-sounding style of the Bulgarian variant of the letter possibly stems from the mere lack of fluency in a foreign language. The text clearly shows

Mach's limited inventiveness and his resulting dependence on the Bulgarian newspeak.

Głowiński, who for numerous years kept a diary describing the abuses and pathologies of the official party idiom in order to free himself from its influence, stresses the fact that under the totalitarian system everyone was a victim of the language of propaganda:

[W]e are often unconscious victims, because this speech, which the weekly *Po prostu* calls fudge, is something we have grown accustomed to, and even if we do not treat it as transparent and pertinent to the issue to which it refers, we succumb to the pitfalls, suggestions, and hints it contains" (Głowiński 2016: 5).

At the same time, documenting the reactions to newspeak – from the commentaries from various writers through popular jokes which brilliantly capture the grotesque facets of propaganda – the researcher demonstrates a widespread awareness of the importance of newspeak as a product and tool of the regime. Newspeak in Mach's Bulgarian text goes hand-in-hand with linguistic errors.⁶ In addition, the writer uses calques of Polish expressions as well as syntactic structures which are typical of Polish.⁷ This results in an alienation of the text. Left uncorrected by the editors of the newspaper, the linguistic errors disrupt the flow and automaticity when reading, making one realize that a standard – not only linguistic, but also ideological – does indeed exist. On the other hand, the calques may in some cases inadvertently yield revealing and original metaphors⁸ and be telling of a literary convention devised for the written text. Those elements of the Bulgarian variant of the letter may be presumed to signify Mach's distancing himself towards the constructed narrative, implying his

⁶ E.g. 1. повлякоха в пътешествие – “dragged on a journey” (erroneous verb prefix and, consequently, wrong preposition; this should be: ‘въвлякоха ме в пътешествие’ – “they took me on a journey”); 2. която ни подари здрав сън на луна [“which granted us a sound sleep on the moon”] should be “която ни подари здрав сън под луната”, i.e. “which granted us a sound sleep under the moon”.

⁷ E.g. *преседяхме* цял час точно в средата на Янтра [we *sat* for an hour right in the middle of the Yantra], работата говори сама за себе си [the work speaks for itself], за размаха и богатството на панаира всички добре знаем [we are all well aware of the scale and richness of the fair], which mimics the Polish syntax nearly exactly.

⁸ E.g. вкусна практика (delicious practice), молитва пред лицето на тази така съвършена, почти божествена красота (prayer in the face of such perfect, virtually divine beauty), плодородна активност (prolific activity).

awareness of the fact that his communication functions in official and public circulation where freedom of speech is restricted.

A game of privacy

The question remains why Mach opted for that specific mode of self-restraint in his correspondence with Vicho Ivanov. Why did he decide not to share his experiences in a private letter, instead referring his friend to an officially redacted account? The simplest answer is that writers were generally aware that their letters were being intercepted and read by the security services. Today, we know that the Polish Security Service assigned substantial manpower for the surveillance of private correspondence (Stanisławczyk, Wilczak 2010: 44–48). We also know that as a homosexual person and an acquaintance of Miron Białoszewski, Mach had been an object of interest for the services starting 1955 (as evidenced by the Institute of National Remembrance). The fact that Vicho Ivanov was the director of the Bulgarian Cultural Centre, and therefore worked at a foreign post, increased the likelihood of his private correspondence being intercepted and studied. In such circumstances, any broader accounts of holiday experiences and impressions, of the people met or the conversations held, involved a potential danger to third persons. The recurring topos of “I’ll tell you more when we meet” in Mach and Ivanov’s letters may be seen as a mutually understood code phrase, and indicative of their awareness that private correspondence between friends is not a space for intimate conversations, since in fact it is not really private. Paradoxically, it was safer to share one’s holiday experience in public, demonstrating compliance with the rules and norms of the regime to obviate potential suspicions on the part of the authorities and safeguard privacy. The content of the publicized letter is thus a kind of fictional account which silences the fact that Mach traveled to Bulgaria predominantly with the purpose of meeting the man with whom he was then in love – the engineering student Todor Dimitrov. Literary fiction, in turn, becomes a domain in which Mach can share his privacy more openly, especially with those close to him and initiated into his emotional life. In the letter, he states explicitly: “I inscribed the Bulgarian landscape and Bulgarian reflections into my new novel / *вплитах български пейзажи и „български размисления“ в новия си роман*”. In fact, excerpts from that very letter to Ivanov were incorporated in the novel as well.

The fragments in question include a description of the route. In *Góry nad czarnym morzem*, the scene where the protagonist’s two former companions – Smok and Dziadzio – abruptly invade the place where he

was resting in seclusion, is accurately recreated. Smok and Dziadzio invite Aleksander to go with them on a series of lectures. The exact itinerary of the trip is known from the previously published letter to Ivanov in Bulgarian and Polish. In the novel, however, the journey becomes a pretext for the protagonist to visit his new love:

[T]he arrival of Smok and Dziadzio, so absurdly unexpected, relieves me from all my resolutions and commitments to myself; ‘We will go to Smaragda!’ I exclaimed almost aloud and repeated her name again and again, ever more quietly, Smaragda! Mara! Mara! Mara [...] (Mach 1984: 317–318).⁹

The three characters set out on “a long journey through the wondrously mild and sunny autumn of the South” (Mach 1984: 320), “on a semi-tourist, semi-official tour” (Mach 1984: 319). Aleksander’s companions refer to the country which they are visiting as interesting and pleasant – to them, it is a strange and exotic land. The protagonist, on the other hand, feels a strong connection with the country, but does not reveal to his friends either his knowledge of the local people and customs, or the reasons why he suddenly finds the strange place familiar. Aleksander agrees with these designations of “interesting” and “pleasant”: “I nodded with abstemious approval, as if the[se] epithets could sufficiently describe the country where Smaragda was born, where she lives.” (Mach 1984: 320). The protagonist’s new feelings have altered his point of view on what is known, native, and established by habit:

We left — and again, like before, there was Smok’s Warszawa [brand of vehicle], again there were Smok’s angry growlings and his squabbles with Dziadzio about driving competence [...] and I had what was thanks to them quite paradoxical among the strange mountain gorges, on strange roads, at strange stops in strange towns and villages: a nativeness, a ludicrous intimacy of our petty homegrown habits, gestures, peculiarities. I am being imprecise. The strangeness there was no longer a strangeness for me. I experienced it secondarily, indirectly, through the co-presence

⁹ Several selected fragments of the novel were translated by Adam Turyn in 1962 (Mach 1962). Additionally, Turyn coined the English title of Mach’s text. I include this title here, although its literalness warrants a separate discussion. It is worth noting that while the Polish title does allude to the geographical area of the Black Sea, it is not unequivocal. The absence of an adjective in postposition suggests a metaphorical interpretation of the “black sea” in question. Turyn’s English title eliminates the potential for multiple interpretations. The fragments quoted in the article are translated by Szymon Nowak, unless indicated otherwise.

of Smok and Dziadzio, I shared their sentiments, their sensitivity to exoticism, out of necessary courtesy towards my compatriots, a little out of gratitude for their intervention in my loneliness, which released me from the self-imposed rigours and ushered in new hopes. I also pretended before them out of an unknowing, instinctive desire to hide my new feelings and attachments. [...] I thought: you will not guess that I am disassembling; you are the strangers here, I am no longer one; the land of escape, refuge, asylum, of defunct substitute identity, has become for me the land of new living feelings, of hope, love, suffering and longing; you know nothing of Smaragda [...]. (Mach 1984: 319)

The description of the journey is thus a record of the protagonist's feelings for Smaragda and simultaneously captures the way in which strange places are assimilated and familiarized. In the novel, all proper names known to us from the press publications are gone, along with the tips for the tourists; such obliteration is typical for Mach's prose¹⁰. What remains, however, is an accurate depiction of the landscapes seen on the way whose form emulates linear movement through space. The litany-like enumeration of the visited cities included in the letter to Vicho Ivanov became the substrate of long sentences composed on an additive basis. Mach adds successive images, colors, smells, and tastes without establishing any kind of subordinate order, as if subjecting the reader to a direct impact of sensory stimuli:

[W]e exchanged swiftly, almost in the blink of an eye, the menacing paths of ravines, gorges, the overhanging walls of rock, for the soft, multicoloured abundance of the orchards, for the golden-matt stretches of vineyards suffused with sweetness, for the white and brown, scorchingly dry panoramas of the countryside, criss-crossed by zigzags of stone fences, with festoons of vermilion peppers at the roofs, with blindingly yellow heaps of corn in the courtyards [...]. (Mach 1984: 320)

Again there were ranges of mountains and valleys, resounding with the rumble of picks [...] and suddenly from the clatter and din of labour we fell into the ancient silence of the forest, where on the slopes of the glades the monasteries — joyfully and naively coloured — sleepily imbibed the warmth of the blissful weather, all covered in frescoes replete with halos and spherical rainbows, whose courtyards were spanned by ceilings of grapes, heavy with ripeness, courtyards abuzz with trifling household bus-

¹⁰ As emphasized by Aleksander Fiut: "The tendency to blur connections with authentic geography can also be observed in the names and descriptions of places which always hold significance on the map of the writer's personal experiences". (Fiut 1973: 117).

tle, peasant and unsophisticated monasteries, earthily satiated, praising God through secular resourcefulness [...]. (Mach 1984: 323)

These consecutive layers of detail, the accumulation of impressions and the deliberate failure to organize them or establish any hierarchy reflect the astonishment and excitement felt by the protagonist. At the same time, one could risk a comparison by which on the micro level of syntax, these elements should reflect the pressure of the unspeakable homoerotic desire on the linearity of narration and its traditional causality, leading – as demonstrated by Ritz – to a disintegration, deconstruction, and ultimate cessation of the narrative (Ritz 2002: 177–195).

Following this logic of inexpressible homosexuality whose “significance lies in the event that did not occur, the change that did not take place, the meeting that did not materialize” (Ritz 2002: 181), Aleksander does not meet Smaragda. In her room, where her dresses should be, he finds the coat of her brother, Dejan. The protagonist’s visit to the house of his beloved – a symbolic enactment of the travesty of homosexual desire – elicits a sense of shame. Under the watchful eyes of the female neighbors of whom he is afraid, Aleksander rushes back to Smok and Dziadzio, embarrassed and humiliated. Shame, mortification, and fear are all feelings aroused by a difficult and impossible love, embodied in the substitution of a woman’s dress by a man’s coat. The function of disintegration or deconstruction of secret gender codes – Ritz claims – grows in strength when the latter are conditioned not by the tradition of images, but autobiographically. The concealment of autobiographical motivation reduces the Bulgarian experience to a mere empty sign, leading to multiplied semiosis (Ritz 2002: 189)¹¹. The impossible and unfulfilled intimacy with the beloved is replaced by a sensual union with the foreign landscape. Familiarization of space becomes the only viable path to romantic happiness.

Only in the light of the love story of Aleksander and Smaragda, described in the novel and informed by an autobiographical narrative about the authors’ love to a much younger Bulgarian man, does it become clear why Mach’s journey across south-eastern Bulgaria was important, and why

¹¹ In this context, Ritz points out that in the novel discussed, Mach refrains from resolving the family drama. The protagonist and narrator does not refer to Olgierd as to son (Ritz 2002: 189). Wojciech Śmieja revisits the theme of family in Mach’s works, but approaches it from a different perspective. The scholar highlights the writer’s critical attitude towards the institution of traditional family and his belief that the communist system would transform patriarchal relationships and lead to alternative ways of organizing social life not based on blood ties. Cf. Śmieja 2015: 378–403.

he felt the need to narrate it in three different versions. The story sublimates an impossible love, while homoerotic desire, suppressed by totalitarian rule, is expressed through the fusion with landscape. The propagandistic eulogy comprised in the letter to Vicho Ivanov conceals a love story impossible to disclose. Privacy thus played out in public becomes the sole guarantee of safety, whereas autobiographical truth may only be enacted in novelistic fiction.

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Summary

The article discusses the problem of private and public life-writing in state-socialist Poland and Bulgaria, on the basis of literary texts and a family-kept archive. The analyzed literary materials include an open letter sent by the Polish writer Wilhelm Mach to his Bulgarian colleague Vicho Ivanov, published both in Bulgarian and Polish, and later fictionalized and re-written into a passage of Mach's novel titled *Góry nad czarnym morzem* ("The Mountains by the Black Sea"). Both creative processes, that of translation and fictionalization, are discussed closely. It is argued that Mach's technique of private disclosure for the benefit of official ideology is not motivated solely by political and propaganda considerations. Paradoxically, the communist Wilhelm Mach reveals his privacy and underscores its conformity with the official cultural line of the socialist state in order to conceal his marginal position as a homosexual man and protect his beloved ones from homophobic policies of the state.

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