

## **BANICA AND GLAMOUR**

Alek Popov is one of the most famous contemporary Bulgarian writers. So much so, that he is now translated even in Serbian - in magazines, collections and anthologies of Bulgarian prose. For the non-complete forty years of his life and work so far, Popov has found time to engage with a number of other endeavors, such as to spend time as the Cultural Attaché of Bulgaria in London. This biographical fact is important because of its bibliographical significance: Alek Popov's first novel (after several collections of short stories), "Mission London" would not be the same without the real life experiences of the author. This, of course, does not mean that the author has described "things as they are", i.e. "real" people and events - he shrewdly avoids this by the standard, "all events and people are...", you know what follows - more likely, the experience has helped him in the perceptive and very witty observation of the cultural and material (and from there the political and ethical...whatever) collision between the Island and the Sub-continent, not to repeat the worn - East and West or Europe and the Balkans.

Alek Popov demonstrates his unbelievable story-telling mastery, skill to create characters ( full-blooded, colorful individuals, and yet representing the "heroes of the day"), as well as the ability to observe without unnecessary wordiness, which probably comes from the experience of so many collections of short stories that he can sniff-out any potential "extras" from his novel, before even writing it...

What makes "Mission London" one of the most pleasant translations (at least) this season is the fact that Popov gives us all that the Serbian authors lack: the novel is a true lesson or an exhibition lesson in communicative writing, without this taking any away from the "aesthetic value" of the work; this is an example of a potential clever bestseller; breathtaking play with our well known "Self-Europesation" of the (South)Eastern men, but also the cold indifference of the West, and the pitiful naiveté of our "new reach", who in their search for the dream of imperial glory let to be led by the nose. Popov is not too merciful neither to the "indigenous" nor to the suspicious Balkan newcomers; his wit is not less forgiving when it comes to the overall "Balkan people," for example their bickering in entering the EU or maniacal obsession with their image as the "oldest people," centered in the idea that it is us that is the center of Europe (and not for example the bottom), only that those ... don't want to admit it. As a unbelievably funny book "Mission London" is not only an excellent choice for the hot summer days in Belgrade, but also for the beaches in Albena, Neseber, and Sunny Beach, easting banica or halva. If nothing else this book will help you understand, that there as well you are home.

**Teofil Pancic**

**Vreme, Beograd; "Време" 06. 08. 2004.**

*"Missia London", Alek Popov, Geopoetica*