

## **A Survey of Macedonian Literature in English Translation**

"If I had an eagle's wings  
I would rise and fly on them  
To see our shores, to our own parts..."  
From Konstantin Miladinov's, "Longing for the South"

Macedonian may arguably be the oldest written Slavic language as the basis for Kiril and Methodius' 9th century translations of Christian liturgical texts into what we today call the Old Church Slavic language. However, it is also the most recent Slavic language to receive official recognition and standardization after the establishment of the Republic of Macedonia as part of Yugoslavia in 1946.

The number of literary works by Macedonian authors in English translation today is only surpassed by translations in Serbian and/or Croatian during the existence of the former Yugoslavia. Particularly since the full independence of the Republic since the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990's, the pace of publication of English language translations has increased dramatically. This is due in part to the large concentrations of Macedonian immigrants, numbering in the tens of thousands, in major cities throughout English-speaking Canada, the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom, and a dramatic increase in communication and collaboration among members of the Macedonian diaspora and Macedonians in the home country with improved means of travel and the effective spread of internet communication worldwide.

I have participated in this process as the author of a doctoral dissertation published by the University Press of America in 1996, *The 19th Century Macedonian Awakening, the life and works of Kiril Peichinovich*, one of the earliest writers in the modern Macedonian language, and as the translator of a number of literary works, beginning with the short story "Tatko" by Zhivko Chingo, published in *Short Story International* in 1983 and most recently the novel *The Legend of Kalesh Andja* by Stale Popov, published by the Literary Association "Grigor Prlichev" of Sydney, Australia in 2005.

My presentation will trace the development of Macedonian literature in English translation from modest beginnings in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to its rich flowering during the 70's and the 80's to the present day, and I will provide a comprehensive survey of works available from that entire period, with a certain amount of attention given to the range and quality of those works.

The first English language translations of Macedonian short stories and poetry appeared in literary /scholarly journals in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. While I have not yet found it, it is a good bet that some immigrant group, somewhere in the English-speaking world, printed

translations of beloved old poems such as Konstantin Miladinov's "Longing for the South" in one of their émigré newspapers or journals as early as the teens or twenties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I do know for a fact that the Skopje-based journal *Macedonian Review*, beginning in 1970, has published hundreds of short works. It also published the first book-length English translations of works of Macedonian literature, beginning in 1973 with the *The Sirdar*, an epic poem inspired by the oral folk tradition, written in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by Grigor Prlichev and translated by Peggy and Graham Reid, and *White Dawns* published in 1974, a book of poetry written in the 1930's by Macedonia's most famous poet of the common man, Kocho Ratsin, also translated by Reid..

Foreign publishers began to offer works of Macedonian literature in English translation by the mid 1970's as well. *The Big Horse and Other Stories of Modern Macedonia* was published by the University of Missouri Press in 1974. Editor Milne Holton relied on literal translations of the stories by Alan McConnell for his selection of works by twenty of Macedonia's most prominent writers of the post World War Two era. In 1976 the University of Bradford, UK, published a set of selected poems by prominent Macedonian poet Gane Todorovski under the simple title, *Poems*. The translators of this collection were Ljubica Janeshlieva and Graham Reid. In 1977 the University of Pittsburgh Press published an anthology of the poetry of twenty six poets of post World War Two Macedonia entitled *Reading the Ashes*. The poems were translated by various translators and compiled and edited by Milne Holton and Graham Reid. A book of translations of folk poetry from Macedonia's rich oral tradition appeared in 1978 under the title *Songs of Macedonia*. The publisher of this book was Mid-Day Publications Ltd., Oxford, UK, and the translators were Andrew Harvey and Anne Pennington.

By the 1980's Macedonian literature appeared in an increasing number of foreign literary publications. The Indian publisher A K Dash of New Delhi published a selection of Macedonian poetry in 1981, beginning with folk poetry from the oral tradition and church Panegyrics of Kliment of Ohrid from the 9<sup>th</sup> century and including works of several 19<sup>th</sup> century Macedonian poets and some twenty prominent poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The editors Sitikant Mahapatra and Jozo Boskovski selected works by a number of translators for this collection entitled *Longing for the South*. In 1985 Leros Press of Canberra, Australia published a poetry anthology of the gifted Macedonian poet Radovan Pavlovski entitled *Road to the Mountains*, translated by R.G. A. DeBray. In 1986 the Yugoslavian publisher Stremezh of Prilep published an anthology of modern Macedonia poetry by some of Macedonia's prominent poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in a parallel text format with translations by Michael Szporer. In 1988 Forest Books of London and Boston published a collection of poems by Mateja Matevski under the title *Footprints of the Wind*, translated by Ewald Osers.

The first modern Macedonian novel to appear in English translation by a foreign publisher was published by Mercury House, San Francisco in 1987 in a translation by the author Meto Jovanovski, with Sylvia Holton. The novel *Budaletinki*, translated into English under the title *Cousins*, describes the impossible situation that the people of Macedonia found themselves in during the Balkan Wars and World War One. It is, in my opinion, a work that captures the essence of the Macedonian tragedy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and with such artistry to make it a

worthy choice for an introductory novel of modern Macedonian literature for an English-speaking world. Therefore, I have chosen to devote special attention to this work in the section that follows:

Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece had allied themselves to drive Turkey out of Macedonia, and then fell into bitter conflict over their division of the former Turkish province. *Cousins* describes the hazardous journey home of two cousins from Macedonia after working abroad in Romania during World War One. Like many Bosnians in the recent war following the break up of Yugoslavia, Macedonians at that time were forced into armies or detained in camps or plundered and driven from their homes as the war swept through their villages. For the Macedonians, whose lives were never easy under the Turks, life became truly hellish during the prolonged struggle that followed the end of Turkish rule. At one point in the cousins' journey home they meet an uncle who lays out the danger most succinctly, when he tells them:

"You're my blood and I hate to alarm you, but this spot is a glowing coal that will burst into flame again. They haven't yet finished dividing the world." (Holton and Jovanovski transl., 1987, p. 39)

It would have been hazardous to his health for a Macedonian to assert his separate identity during the violent struggle among his neighbors over Macedonia. Some, therefore, chose a side, while others chose to flee, or, as in the case of the cousins in Jovanovski's novel, many tried to simply stay alive by temporarily agreeing to the demands of whichever party held power over them at any given time.

This third course, however, was fraught with as many, if not more unforeseeable dangers than the other courses open to them. These are well illustrated in the experiences of the cousins Srbin and Shishman. They leave home as the war approaches in hope of avoiding military service by working abroad. But before they can reach the border they are forced into the Serbian army. At the first opportunity they desert and make their way to Romania, where they work for two years until they are called to the Bulgarian Consulate and recruited into the Bulgarian army. They then attempt to make their way home by agreeing to serve in the Bulgarian army on the Salonika Front near their home village. However, when the actions of one of the cousins leads to the death of a fellow soldier who didn't understand the Macedonian's warning of danger blurted in his native Macedonian, they flee and surrender themselves to the French forces who face them across the trenches. (The dialects of the Macedonian language have characteristics of both Serbian and Bulgarian, varying from one settlement to the next depending on proximity to the one or the other neighboring language center, and they also contain some distinctly Macedonian features that led certain Slavists to accord Macedonian separate language status among the South Slavic languages.) The cousins then enlist the aid of a Vlach (a member of a Romanian-speaking minority people in Macedonia) mayor of a nearby village under French control. The mayor attempts to explain the 'new' ethnic identity of their home village to the cousins:

"So you're from Breznitsa," he said. "From Breznitsa...from Breznitsa...", he kept repeating as he turned the pages. He slid his index finger from the top to the bottom of every page and then turned the page. Finally he said, "From Breznitsa. Here. Village of Breznitsa," he repeated in Greek. "The priest there is Hristos Hristomanos, Elenikos. That means that you're Greek. It all depends on the nationality of your village priest."

The cousins looked at each other. They remembered that nobody in the village could understand the language the priest spoke in church; he sang in a funny language the villagers used to say. The priest was from Breznitsa, but he had been educated in Greece, in Greek. On the cousins' faces there was a look of amazement, but of enlightenment as well, since they'd finally discovered why the priest was so important

"That's right," said Srbin.

"That's right," Shishman repeated.

"Do you see now?" asked the mayor, exulting.

"So we're Greek," said Shishman. "That's that." (Holt and Jovanovski transl., 1987, p. 104)  
The mayor agrees to write the cousins a letter that makes their Greek nationality clear to anyone who should stop them on the road. However, he warns them that this will not be easy. He tries to explain how hazardous writing can be in these dangerous times: "You make a mistake with a comma, and someone's head will roll. If a fly shits on a word, the whole letter means something else."(Holt and Jovanovski transl., 1987, p. 105)

After exploiting the cousins for free labor for a time, the mayor finally releases them. But he warns them: "Now is the worst time. You have just a short way to go. You have been lucky until now - somehow. But be aware that the last trap is the worst." (Holt and Jovanovski transl., 1987, p. 106)

And he proves right, because they are stopped by Serbian soldiers on the outskirts of their home village. Dumb luck and their carefully contrived appearance as fools or simpletons no longer carry them and their carefully hidden earnings from their work in Romania the final few steps home. Jovanovski describes what must have been a typical experience of the war and one that has been repeated in the war in Bosnia: "The soldier demanded no answers. He only looked at them as if they were tables filled with rich food. He was sure that these chickens were full of eggs. Every Serbian soldier in Macedonia knew very well that in spite of all the poverty in the area, there were pearls in the oyster shells." (Holt and Jovanovski transl., 1987, p. 117)

Outsiders often tend to blame the victims. But a novel such as *Cousins* points out how many victims of ethnic conflict are simply caught in impossible situations. Macedonia had its intelligentsia who sought to objectively analyze the situation at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to inform their actions and reduce or put an end to the suffering caused by Turkish colonialism. Their ideas fueled a revolutionary movement with lofty ideals, however, their own failed uprising against Turkish rule and the Balkan Wars that followed degenerated into a

vicious land grab by neighboring states when the victorious allies against Turkey fell to quarreling over the division of Macedonia among them.

Macedonia's people at that time were, as Jovanovski's novel describes, reduced to using whatever cunning they had merely to survive. A few, such as the cousins in his novel, imagined that they might even somehow manage to prosper during wartime. But it is clear by the end of the story that only a few people in privileged positions, some public officials, arms merchants and plundering armies have discovered any profit in the war.

Publishing houses in the Republic of Macedonia have experienced increasing difficulties marketing books for foreign distribution in recent years due to limited financial resources. However, the Skopje publishing house Detska Radost has an impressive list of English language books from the late 1990's. These include the poetry collections, *Baring the Soul* by Trajan Petrovski (1996), *Lonely Voyager* by Gane Todorovski (1996) and *The Forgotten Eye of the Sky* by Gligor Stojkovski (1997). Detska Radost also published the novels *The Miracle Worker* and *The Nine Centuries of Kerubin*, both by Slavko Janevski in 1997. The most recent works to my knowledge by other Macedonian publishing houses were an anthology of selected contemporary Macedonian poetry entitled *Songs beyond songs*, published by Stremezh of Prilep, Macedonia in 1997, selection and preface by Venko Andonovski and a small anthology of modern selected short stories by prominent Macedonian writers entitled *Changes of the System*, published by Magor of Skopje, Macedonia in 2000 and translated by editors Richard Gaughran and Zoran Anchevski, and the novel *Disappearances* by Tashko Georgievski, that was published by MANU in 2000. *Disappearances* continues the author's exploration in his several novels of the plight of Macedonian refugees of the Greek Civil War.

Foreign publishers continued to print a number of Macedonian works in English translation during the 1990's. These included *The Bandit Wind*, a collection of poetry by Slavko Janevski, translated by the accomplished American poet Charles Simic and published in 1991 by Dryad Press of Takoma Park, Maryland. In 1991 Forest Books of London and Boston published an extensive collection of Macedonian poetry selected and translated by Ewald Osers under the title *Contemporary Macedonian Poetry*. Forest Books also published a collection of short stories by Meto Jovanovski in 1992 under the title *Faceless Men and other Macedonian Stories*.

Macedonian literature has one foreign "asset" that is only in the most recent period coming in to serious play, that is the relatively large immigrant communities which are mainly located in English-speaking Canada, the US and Australia. Pollitecon Publications of Sydney, Australia and the Literary Society- Grigor Prlichev of Sydney, and the Brothers Miladinov Literary Society of Toronto, Canada have published a number of works in recent years. They sometimes feature works of Macedonian writers living abroad, such as Jim Thomev's collection of poems entitled *Fragments of a History*, and Dushan Ristevski's collection of poems entitled *Fragments*, both published by the Sydney-based Literary Society Grigor Prlichev in 1990 as parallel texts. Thomev translated his own book and Ristevski's collection was translated by R.G. A. DeBray, I was also recently told about a book of Cepenkov's 19<sup>th</sup> Century Macedonian Folktales that was translated by Jim Thomev's wife Fay and published by the Macedonian Studies Foundation at Macquarie University. The publisher Bozhin Pavlovski of Australia and

Macedonia is also a prominent Macedonian author himself. I am told that his novel of Macedonian immigrant life in Australia, *West Aust* is now available in English translation, however, I have been unable to obtain any information on the book so far .

The following is a sampling of the advertising of acclaimed novels by prominent Macedonian authors from the Republic of Macedonia that were recently published by Macedonian immigrants and advertised through websites in Canada, the US and Australia:

### **Black Seed**

by Tashko Georgievski, translated by Elizabeth Kolupacev Stewart  
Paperback, 113 pages, Celloglazed cover, Published by Pollitecon Publications, 1996, Price in Australia A\$15 including postage and GST, Overseas airmail A\$20, ISBN 0 9586789 0 1

*Black Seed* is one of the great political and humanistic novels of contemporary literature. It is one of the few books that examines life in the Greek prison camps during the Greek Civil War, providing a rare insight into a period when the State-sponsored persecution of political dissidents and ethnic minorities, particularly Macedonians, was at its most intense.

The main character, Doni, is an ethnic Macedonian from Aegean Macedonia (northern Greece). Conscripted into the Greek army, he is accused of being a communist and along with other political prisoners is taken to one of the concentration camps and forced to "confess" and pledge allegiance to Greece. But Doni has nothing to confess; his crime is simply to be a Macedonian.

Written in a direct and succinct style, *Black Seed* is a story of courage, compassion and truth which is universal in meaning. It will move everyone who reads it.

First published in 1966, *Black Seed* won the "13 November Award" from the City of Skopje. It has been made into a successful film and has been translated into a number of European languages. This is the first translation into English.

The author, Tashko Georgievski, was born in Voden in Aegean Macedonia in 1935 and left Greece as a refugee in 1946. He has published over 12 books and is one of Macedonia's most acclaimed contemporary authors.

### **The Big Water**

by Zhivko Chingo, translated by Elizabeth Kolupacev Stewart  
Paperback, 120 pages, Four colour celloglazed cover, Published by Pollitecon Publications 2004, Price in Australia \$15 including postage and GST, Overseas airmail A\$20, ISBN 0 9586789 6 0

*The Big Water* is the first English language translation of the prize winning Macedonian novel, *Golemata Voda*, by author Zhivko Chingo.

Set in Macedonia immediately after World War 2, it tells the story of a group of children orphaned by the war and their life in an orphanage. Full of characters and incidents, the book presents a child's view of life that is both humorous and bleak and, by its end, very moving.

At a metaphoric level, the novel presents a strong critique of the authoritarianism of both institutional life and the Communist system, and their inability to reconcile with the needs and nature of the individual.

At the human level, *The Big Water* is a very positive and moving story of the emotional development of children, and of the fundamental and irreplaceable role of the mother. Readers will remember this story and its climax long after they have finished the book.

The translator, Sydney lawyer Elizabeth Kolupacev Stewart, has previously translated another prize winning Macedonian novel, *Black Seed* (Crno Seme) by Tashko Georgievski. Both translations are notable for being true to the authors' direct, poetic and very readable narratives.

The *Big Water* is the seventh book published by Pollitecon Publications. It is available in Australia for \$15, which includes postage and handling. Overseas airmail is A\$20.

### **The Legend of Kalesh Andja**

A novel by Stale Popov, translated by Michael Seraphinoff

ISBN 0 9757332 1 4, Paperback 200 pages, Published by The Literary Society- Grigor Prlichev, 2005. Price: CAD\$15, US\$11

The author Stale Popov was born in a small, isolated mountain village of Macedonia in the final, turbulent decades of the Turkish Empire. From this background he is able to write a story for us in a voice of the traditional village storyteller that takes us on a journey into the heart and soul of the medieval Turkish Empire in Europe.

His story of the brave peasant girl Andja is based on an old legend and a documented peasant rebellion against Turkish rule in the year 1565 in the Mariovo region of Macedonia. Popov offers us a window into a world and a way of life that is foreign to us today. And yet, *The Legend of Kalesh Andja's* story of a struggle for freedom and justice, from far away and long ago, can still move readers, both young and old.

Submitted by,

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