



BLAZHE KONESKI
POETRY



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THE POETRY OF BLAZHE KONESKI

Tracing back Blazhe Koneski's poetry from the first verses in *The Bridge* (1945) up to the last ones in *Poems Old and New* (1979), we find ourselves following a very particular voice in modern Macedonian poetry, an inimitable voice full of variety. With Koneski, Macedonian poetry took its first steps in a free country, expressed the first youthful exaltations of its liberated verse, and with him, too, it reached full maturity. The development of Macedonian literature, as well as that of the whole culture on a wide scale in all its complexity, are very closely linked with the name of Blazhe Koneski and his contribution has been of truly great importance in its advance from provincial anonymity and lack of development to full citizenship in the modern world. The various hooks of poetry, which accompanied and created those great changes, fully confirm this and the present anthology provides a fine occasion for me to express a personal view and experience of this important and unrepeatable poetry.

We can characterize Blazhe Koneski's poetry in various ways. In terms of its themes, it is a poetry of intimacy and love, of the recent and distant past, a revelation of the many-sided significance of the modern influence of folk songs and tales, of legends and myths, a vigil over the existential and philosophical ferments of mankind and the world. In terms of its sensibility, it is a poetry of restrained, deep pain, suppressed profoundly within itself, set into a destined crystallization in which we can identify individuals, the group and the universe, a modern, up-to-date projection of poetic matter with a marked awareness of the exalted and responsible nature of the act of poetry, striving

for complete harmony between the verse and the thought. If we consider its language, it is a poetry of simple, direct words in contexts rich in associations, precise with its words and sparing with their meaning, a strangely and wonderfully natural and accessible poetry, adhering to a purity, refinement and exactness of language in which vulgarity and simplification are just as alien as baroque ornamentation and artificiality. When we turn to its structure, it is a poetry of numerous verse forms, both classical and modern, a movement from a rigid framework through blank verse to free, always with his own mark, a poetry of richly associative images and restrained metaphors, of poetic combinations made to function absolutely in the poem, harmonious and rounded, with a strong, natural point to them, resonant with an inner music of their own.

In a poem of the fifties, Blazhe Koneski describes his yearning for love as the “move of a thirsting hand towards the realm of the stars”. As much as he defines his no longer very youthful striving for love, I feel that, with this image, this thought, this cry, in a surprising, unexpected and astoundingly precise manner, Blazhe Koneski is also defining his relationship to poetry, to his work, his life and his sublime and despairing aspiration towards the high and unattained ideal. That ideal is exalted and admirable, but high and unattainable, consigning him in advance to failure and defeat, to faintheartedness and resignation, to despair and pain, yet it is at the same time a living, unextinguished striving, which has the lasting power to excite, to drive the poet on towards it, through pain, suffering and defeat, with his eyes wide open and his dream still intact. Weaving itself as one of the fundamental themes into the poetry of Blazhe Koneski, the basic mark of his sensibility, the yearning for love — love in the wide human and humanizing sense of the word, in which the poet will be completely fulfilled, remaining always either a hopeless Sisyphus, a broken Icarus or a blinded Don Quixote — this yearning is left to smoulder in its own ashes, its own bitterness, its own defeat. This gives a sadness and resignation to his pain, the mark of the forsaken, of loneliness and bitter emptiness, reminiscent of the great tradition of the folk song, of Romanticism brought closer to us by Heine and of a Symbolism rendered through Blok, but always with a full, ever-present, rationalist core and sense of the tragic which leads deep into Shakespeare. Blazhe Koneski’s unhappiness is great, broad and despairing, but it is related in a restrained, suppressed,

muted and austere manner. The impenetrable compass of his inner turmoil, from the yearning for love to his childhood memories and from his discovery of the landscape to the metaphysical and spiritual turmoils of maturity and experience, is in fact one great metaphor of the depth of human suffering, which his poetry constantly reveals to us.

Blazhe Koneski's poetry is an open poetry. It knows nothing of the closed framework in which to shackle the poem, the book and the poet's inquiring mind. It is a dynamic openness, constantly in motion like an ellipse weaving certain themes in the poetry from one end to the other into a new vision and a new light, until it reaches the point of maturity, of crystallization and gem-like purity and proportion; until the simplicity of this poetic speech penetrates the many layers of the thought, until the whirlwinds that have raged for years are stilled before the bitter, resigned smile of wisdom and before everything which the poet suffers and everything which he understands. Blazhe Koneski's more recent poems that follow this thread in his poetry are the verse of a person who has been through the great experiences and temptations of life, who has exhausted the ellipse of his cry, as Lorca would put it: youth and love, the process of maturing, the feeling of fulfillment, of greatness, of loneliness and of defeat. And all of that, the successes and the failures, the moments of joy and of sorrow, all is a road of open wounds, which do not cease to smart, even when resignation underlies them. Tracing out the ellipses of his pain from his first poems up to those of *Notes and Poems Old and New*, Blazhe Koneski speaks openly about this pain of his, this loneliness and about the inevitability of time overcoming us and making its mark. His witness is completely open, direct and simple, the "bullet like a full-stop in the heart" from his poem entitled 'The Chaste Ones'. The knowledge he imparts is so full, varied and strong that there is no place in it for sentimentality. The pain is so deep that it becomes a destiny and Blazhe Koneski is one of the poets of this century who have succeeded in elevating his suffering and grief, his loneliness in the vanity of passing time, to represent his destiny, that of the modern human being and of the time in which we live. That is neither pessimism, nor despair, nor nihilism. It is genuine grief, suffering for a life, which passes, and a maturity that comes just when life is ebbing. A knowledge in which the verse and the thought have set in pain.

As time passes, Blazhe Koneski's poetry becomes more concentrated, the poems shorter, almost completely simplified and tight — sparing. The lyricism which was wants to take over the poetry from time to time is replaced with shorter verse-forms, with lines which are simple, direct and measured, without many images. Each word is measured and chosen, as are the form, the length, the weight and the function. Everything belongs to a harmonious structure, in which nothing is superfluous, nothing is artificial decoration: everything is directed towards the essential. A Classical purity is achieved, an austerity and harmony which shine with their maturity in ordinary, everyday themes, sometimes "prosaic" ones, sometimes "private", occasionally "anecdotal", or then again very "banal" and "concrete". Yet it is just these themes which turn into pure, harmonious and beautiful miniatures under Blazhe Koneski's pen. Pearls from the rock of ages, from a rock formed within the poet, which will ennoble, humanize and enrich us for as long as human beings and their poetry exist.

The second thread in Blazhe Koneski's poetry, which spans all of his poetry so far, covers themes from our national history, including the Second World War, the Fascist Occupation and the resistance against it, in which human destiny, that of the poet and that of the Macedonian people were forged anew. Preferring to use people as themes rather than events, let alone historical dates, using the intensity of a call or a cry rather than narration or description, this poetry suffers the centuries of evil and the grief stricken destiny of a people, the torments which they must endure in order to preserve the light from their wounded star, right up to the last war from which they were at last to emerge into the sunshine of freedom. The destiny of the numerous and the innumerable people, both unknown and known (and distinguished), from this country lies at the very heart of Blazhe Koneski's poetry, merging into a strong identification with his pain as a poet and a human being, with his destiny. This poetry knows nothing of pathetic gestures and appeals, nothing of sonorous patriotism, of slogans of commitment. Even with these themes, the verse is characterized by a quiet intimacy, accompanied by intense meditation. It could not be theatrical, exalted or pathetic if it tried. All kinds of things prevent it squeezing out an audible cry. A great tragic feeling throbs within the verse and the moments of ecstasy sing there quietly. Everything happens within the poem, in the poet's psyche and in

his intimate life, becoming an integral part of his poetry. It is a poetry of humanist messages given in simple and direct words, spoken through wounds and wrinkles of the achievements and failures of the past, of the defeats of war and of human persistence, words in which the yearning, the pain, the loneliness, the failures and the achievements of his predecessors ('Meeting with Zhinzifov' 'Grigor Prlichev', 'The Chaste Ones', 'Shaking Hands') are strictly his own in complete identification; thus, they are highly evocative, as if absolutely personal, and so, too, they are ours, human and universal. The poet's experience is strong, bitter and complex, while his relation of it is calm and serene, without loud words or self-indulgent gestures. His verse is so sure and sovereign that no ornamental displays are necessary. Blazhe Koneski knows how to find the real word from which the crystallized essence will speak out. Metaphysical and spiritual maturity and wisdom fill the horizons of this poetry and reach their zenith in *Poems and Embroiders*.

The second edition of *Embroiders* was supplemented with the 'Sterna' cycle of poems. It contains a number of poems ('Sterna') 'The Breaking of Strength', King Marko's Church', 'Sick Doytchin') which certainly mark the greatest step forward in Koneski's poetry. Themes which until then had been present but lone, were brought together for the first time and gave a deep, rich flow to his verse, which was to open up new areas for modern Macedonian poetry and lead to a highly significant field in the world of modern poetry.

Blazhe Koneski's interest in Macedonian folklore — the songs, tales, sayings and myths — attains full maturity and roundness in this cycle, although this interest had also been present in his earlier poems, such as 'Teshkoto', 'Embroideress' and 'Shaking Hands', as well as in the pain of 'Vee' and in the playful but desperate 'Game with a Child'. Being familiar with the folklore and having done research on it, as well as being even more importantly in love with it and so able to feel its depths and unfathomable regions, its secret thoughts and unattained longings, its riches and treasures, Blazhe Koneski found certain echoes of his own sensibility, of his own language and of that element of destiny which links the theme of the poem with the poet himself and, through him, with the people of today. Learning from the experiences of his great predecessors, Konstantin Miladinov and Kocho Ratsin, who with almost a century between them, had turned their attention to folk songs

and their language, Blazhe Koneski in his new research, feeling the pulse of modern art, dug our myths out of the fogs of the past so as to show their dark beauty and their old and new significance, to show their sources, the continuity of their presence in human beings and their senses and to give meaning to their present and future. It is for this reason that his 'Sterna' sounds so modern, like the poet's turmoil before his own failure and before the threat of annihilation, from the Biblical Flood to Alladin's genie and the genie of the atom. Thus 'Sick Doytchin' becomes a great cry of longing for the realization of the impossible, a cry of loss, pain and powerlessness and so much a cry of hope and of faith. Blazhe Koneski is not just recording the folk tale here — that was done long ago — nor is he retelling it, or interpreting it, for that is a task of mediation which he has gone beyond. He identifies the tale with his own pain, his own failure, his own loneliness, but also with his own hope, his visions. He filters it through himself in order to render it for his own time as the synthesized fruit of a modern imagination via a poetry full of reflection, emotion and drama. The poem is written as a monologue, preserving something of the style of the oral tradition with its directness and simplicity. His confessions resound with the secrets and highly evocative images created with the words, which nobody else in Macedonian literature knows how to use to such effect — words which acquire their true place, sense and meaning in his poetry. With this cycle, Blazhe Koneski definitively opened up the great treasure house of the past for the whole of our literature, showing the crucial significance of his discovery and of the modern paths of his enlightenment and linguistic fashioning. Today an entire school of our modern poetry moves along the furrows he made.

In 1979 Blazhe Koneski published his latest book of verse, *Poems Old and New*. It is a selection of his poetry, supplemented with new poems covering over fifty pages. This is typical of Koneski's approach — we have only to refer to the second edition of *Embroiders* mentioned above, which was supplemented by the 'Sterna' cycle, containing poems so important and characteristic for his work. The new poems could have made up a whole new book, sufficient unto itself, and some of them also represent a new stage in Koneski's poetry. Here we find the 'King Marko' cycle, which is a completion and consummation of the poetic world begun in 'Sterna'. It is not mere chance that this cycle should end the book, for here, as in the other new poems,

Blazhe Koneski is again still fighting his battles with himself, with the merciless time which amasses over him, with his ideas and with his poetry, marking and illuminating them with the tragic ending of Marko's monologue from 'The Hill of the Dog', which is yet also a renewal:

Shoe my horse backwards
Set the drums beating in the wind
Let my ghost still terrify them
Don't let them see me die.

All I want
Is that no-one should see me die
To be alone with my death
My bride on our marriage night

'Among the Trees', the first cycle in this book, seems like a continuation of *Notes*. 'The Pear-Tree' succeeds 'The Wild Pear' and widens the circle of past time, of loneliness which has caught up, of the changed years; all springs have dried up and only old age flows through the veins.

Two poems in particular give a strong stamp to this cycle: they are 'Recovery' and 'Revenge'. The first anticipates the 'Saints' Lives' with its human sympathy — for people, for loved ones and for the world. It is a poem of mutual love and pain — simple, intimate, close and given vent in a mild, tender and muted elegiac melody. The second poem seems to be an ending to *Notes* with their philosophical core, their wisdom, their persistence in the face of suffering, loneliness and the ageing of mankind and of time.

"Oh, tyrant, beware the man in chains!" — cries Blazhe Koneski at the end of this poem, as if he is announcing a new approach to his poetry, a new form of resistance to the fetters of time, to ageing, to powerlessness and to things which disappear. His power is in defeat, as in 'The Sunny Procession' and 'The Chaste Ones', as in 'Don Quixote', 'Sick Doytchin' and 'The Breaking of Strength'. The spiral of Blazhe Koneski's poetry climbs constantly higher, attaining the strength and brilliance of a diamond.

The theme of self-sacrifice, begun (anew) in 'Recovery', continues in some of the 'Saints' Lives', in 'Life of Bona', 'Life of Taska Boyanoska', 'The White Aunt', 'The Dormition of Aunt

Menka' and 'St. Spiridon the New'. Blazhe Koneski tells us about the lives of these few people of his close acquaintance, from his childhood, his memory and his imagination in the language of the oral tradition and with the feeling of a modern poet, who is striving to bring the world of everyday things, happenings and destinies closer in a part of modern poetry to the traditional method of story-telling, or rather to make the oral tradition function in the new sensibility. We suddenly have several life-stories which can be taken as modern ballads, as songs of today, in which the story lies in the roots of memory and of the past, while the ideas and the feelings blend in the poet's consciousness and fill him with tenderness, sweetness, sympathy and bitterness. An emphatically humanist thread which appears in the first poems ('The Bridge'), flowing and rising in all of Blazhe Koneski's work ('Shaking Hands', 'The Chaste Ones'), and a theme which is a strong one of sacrifice and of suffering for others, whether dear ones or the group, reveals the full scope of its elegiac nature in different contexts in these poems. And gradually, from poem to poem, the impression of his identification with the destiny of others, a feature so characteristic of his poetry, again comes out and takes shape. The people from his private life and their destinies go beyond the limits of memory, making us aware of our collective destiny. The individual lives intensely with his painful and sad existence, but from it the destiny of the wider group, and even more of humankind as a whole, shines forth, returning via identification to the poet himself, in order to light up both his memory and his poem with a lasting glow. This shows how far-ranging and free Blazhe Koneski is in his choice of poetic and linguistic material and how well he masters it, rising above the traps of romantic socialism and sentiment which such a choice of subject might easily entail. A tender, sweet sympathy and human solidarity in sacrifice, suffering and pain unite as one — the poet, his memories and time past, both the time in which he lives and the time for which he lives.

This leads us to another feature, which always marks out his work. From just a glance at his poetry from the early poems up to today, Koneski is revealed as a poet of constant change. This is seen in the shifts of his sources of inspiration, of "themes" and "ideas", as well as in the changes of approach, language and genre. The cycle of poems about Zhinzifov is no longer 'The Bridge', just as 'Shaking Hands' is neither one nor the other. A

great deal of around has been covered between *Land and Love* and *Notes*, for a great change is already apparent in *Poems* and then gushes forth in *Embroideress*. It is a long way from 'The Sunny Procession' to 'The Chaste Ones', as it is from 'Teshkoto' to 'Sick Doytchin', 'Sterna' or 'Fortress'. Yet at the same time all of these poems are firmly linked and arise one from the other, so that we cannot imagine them without each other.

Blazhe Koneski has a feel for the changes in literature, but is also critically objective about them. He accepts the path of innovation, but not of loud and spectacular experimentation. This is expressed in the broadening of the field of vision of the poet's inquiring mind and in his deep penetration into the essence. It is seen in his constant examination and discovery of the possibilities of language, in his constant creation of a varied and rich, yet simple and direct, communicative language. It is shown in his going deeply into himself, into his identity, his experiences and those of the group, through which a personal, stern, crystallized image of the world is projected. Thus all these changes, which are discreet and subtle, but constant and persistent, reflecting the scale of his disquiet, reflect still more the oneness, wholeness and inalterability of his spiritual identity.

Of Blazhe Koneski we can already say that he has a complete, shaped and rounded poetic opus behind him, which is deeply set in the core of his sensibility and his language. Yet he continues to follow the paths of our time, seeking new ways for his own poetry and that of others. Those roads constantly assail and break up the core of his poetry and flow away on several sides, opening up new areas in which he and all our poets may explore with excitement and a sense of adventure. At the same time they turn back to him, constantly creating the integrality and integrity of his poetry. Thus Blazhe Koneski's work lies permanently open to inquiry and love for his future changes, to future discoveries in his poetry, his thought and his language.

Mateja MATEVSKI
(Translated by Patricia Marsh-Stefanovska)

MY EXPERIENCE

Every writer, whether or not he is inclined to make generalizations, has certain, what we might call working views of his artistic approach and of his art, or trade, if we put it simply. I have myself taken the opportunity to express my opinion in writing on certain questions of theoretical interest, but the occasions for this have usually been of a casual nature, in interviews, and so it has all been rather sporadic. The only matter, which I have been able to work on with greater attention, has been that of the contact with oral poetry in the period of the emergence of a modern national poetry (as was the case in Macedonia) in my book entitled *The Language of Macedonian Folk Poetry*. Yet these observations, too, were limited to a sectional view, as can be seen.

Now, when the need arises, I feel how difficult it would be for me to expound my thoughts on poetry in a stratified system. Thus this text will not be set apart, either, by a purely theoretical exposition; rather it will mainly set about communicating just impressions from my individual experience and will be more of a commentary on one kind of poetry and on one poet's biography. It will consist of various parts, each of which can be taken as an integral whole.

ON TRADITIONS AND INNOVATIONS

I was born in a village near the town of Prilep in central Macedonia into an environment, which still lived under the suggestion of oral poetry, and of the old folk tales. I did not get to know the legends, which I was later to work on in some of my texts, from books; I heard them from the old people in my house

in the village, in early childhood, so that even now I feel a kind of thrill in my bones when I remember the stirring voice with which they would tell them and the highly meaningful gestures they used to accompany the telling. It was as early as then that *Sterna*, the terrible underground stream, flowed into me.

Here an intimate connection had already been made in my individual experience with tradition, and this at a time when the process of modernization was inevitably directing us, too, towards other means of expression, distancing us from the heritage of words fashioned in artistic ways in our oral poetry. This was also the source of my great esteem for those anonymous poets, who rendered the old themes with their own expressions in the oral tradition, so that they could come down all the way to us. I have used these themes in 'Sick Doytchin', 'The Breaking of Strength', 'Sterna', 'King Marko's Church' and other poems. Naturally, this has been the way I have found of expressing my philosophy of life, my dilemmas, and the things that have moved those and me that have embittered me. I made an innovation by fitting the old messages into a modern form of expression and giving them a variation, which suited the interests of people today. Nevertheless, I was convinced all the time that I had not in any way surpassed the depth of understanding of the problems involved, in the philosophical sense, possessed by my predecessors, for they had given expression to the same themes in a manner which suited their time. I just want to say that they were aware of the deeper layer of their artistic message, and of the problems of human existence from which that message springs, just as much as we modern poets are. This is where my great respect for them lies. If the poet can feel the traditional themes in this way, then the process of innovation is facilitated from him. Since the themes are already present in the collective conscious, the poet can communicate with his public more easily, finding a spontaneous echo there, while at the same time the public can better gauge the extent and value of the innovation made.

The relationship towards tradition and renewal can also be assessed on the narrower plane of poetry in concrete historical situations. If we take modern Macedonian poetry, no great period of time has passed since it began to detach itself from what we might call its folklore phase, in which it had still been very closely connected with the form of expression of Macedonian folk poetry. Since the traditional oral poetic

language differs from modern Macedonian in a number of features, many of these, though out all, were reproduced in the poetry of the folklore phase. When I was doing an analysis from this point of view of the texts of one of the founders of modern Macedonian poetry, Kocho Ratsin (1908 - 1943), in my book on the language of Macedonian folk poetry, I was able to state that there is still present in this poetry a productive model of the traditional language, although reduced. Further developments led to the use of only certain separate elements of the oral tradition when some particular stylistic goal was to be achieved by this means. The transformation of the language of poetry in its separation from the oral folk tradition was a gradual one.

These observations enable me to propose a special model for explaining the phenomena connected with tradition and renewal. Included in this model, like the three sides of a triangle, are the three factors of *tradition*, *the collective conscious* and *the poet*. Although it has been constructed on the basis of research into the contacts shown in the means of expression, this outline can also be expanded easily to include other levels and serve, I hope, to demonstrate the relations between tradition and renewal more clearly and in an efficient manner. For the poet brings in innovations with the approval of the collective conscious (assuming that they also come about within the collective conscious itself) by constant correlation between these two factors and that of tradition. This approval cannot be dispensed with, for the tradition lives in the collective conscious, as well as in the poet himself. A poem which does not reflect this law, i.e. in which there is a disbalance between the factors mentioned, may provide an interesting experiment and be 'modern' in the sense of its being fashionable, but such a poem will not be a work of art.

In so far as all this refers to my own poetry, I would say that few of my poems are linked in their use of metaphor, or metre, or of any of the features of expression alone, with Macedonian folk poetry; in other words, few of my poems are written in what is usually called the folklore idiom. From the very beginning I have paid a great deal of attention to colloquial speech and sought to incorporate it in my verse. Yet I often think of myself as a person who has only just left the shores of the oral tradition. I am encouraged in this belief by the role that improvisation plays in my writing, for it is not a small one. I say all this without shame of those who like to simplify and who

may well like to call me a traditionalist. It is possible to be a modern poet in various ways and by various means. Each poet just has to find his own way.

ON DISCOVERING THE POEM

I have often spoken of discovering poems and of the fact that we discover them rather than write them. I have the impression that people have not really understood what I mean by this. They have probably taken the expression, 'discovering poems' as nothing more than a rhetorical device.

Yet for me personally it all began as a real experience, a kind of physical sensation. After writing certain poems, such as 'Teshkoto' and 'Sterna', in an extraordinarily easy manner, I suddenly became obsessed by the feeling that I was not actually writing the poem, but rather discovering it. The thought immediately struck me that it was not possible that I was among the first to have experienced such a sensation and that, therefore, the whole phenomenon required a rational explanation.

For some time I read the accounts of poets and other artists, looking for anything which might spring from the same kind of vision. I was thinking of writing an article on the matter. But the article was never written and my notes have got lost in the meantime. I remember that I encountered very illustrative formulations for what I was seeking in Gerard de Nerval and Charles Peguy. Perhaps Michelangelo's words bring us close to the same experience, too, when he stated that he made his sculptures in such a way that he simply removed from the stone whatever was not necessary.

In fact, the new things I read kept reinforcing my early conviction. Nadezhda Mandelstam's impressions bear me, out in this, too. She had the opportunity to follow her husband, the great poet, Osip Mandelstam's, approach to writing poetry. "I have a feeling," she says, "that verse exists before it is composed. (M. never talked of 'writing' verse, only of 'composing' it and then copying it out). The whole process of composition is one of straining to catch and record something compounded of harmony and sense as it is relayed from an unknown source and gradually forms itself into words. (N. Mandelstam, *Hope Against*

Hope, translated from the Russian by Max Hayward, Collins & Harville Press, London, 1971, p. 71).

I wanted to find a rational explanation for this phenomenon. This shows in itself that I was not in the least inspired by Plato's theory of the world of ideas into postulating some kind of world of poems, where they await discovery, with all the risk of imperfection that human discovery entails.

Thus I had to explain my discovering of poems as a particularly sharp ear in poets for what is going on in the speech activities of the collective conscious, which, like the poets, remembers the old poems, but prepares material for the new ones with every new day. It is hard to imagine the complexity of such a language-creating laboratory, let alone to demonstrate that it exists. From combining ideas and crossing content there are fine details in linking the phonetic and lexical material, and all of this must be appropriate to what the collective conscious and the poet want to say at a given time, leading at a given moment to a kind of focusing and discovering of the poem. I do understand that the expression "discovering the poem" can suggest a diminution of the role of the poet as creator, according to the Romantic image of him. Yet just think how complicated the ways are and how many hands have assisted the process at various phases in order to make such an ordinary product as a handkerchief. Can the making of a poem be considered a less complex process? This is not to say that I surrender the primary role of the poet in the act of discovery itself, or the creation of the poem, if you prefer; I merely wish to point to some preconditions, without which such a thing would not have come about, by which I mean the creation of important poetry and not an artistic exhibition.

In favour of this way of thinking is the indisputable fact that the significant poems in certain genres do not appear at the poet's wish, but have occasions for their birth, determined by a host of factors in the wider sense of society and history. Such is the case with what is called patriotic poetry, as well as with other kinds of particularly socially committed poetry. If the occasion is missed, then so is the discovery of the poem and there is small hope that such an omission can be repaired at some other future date.

I am myself aware that I would not be able to write a poem like 'Teshkoto' today, even though I am certainly a more skilful poet than I was in 1946. The whole atmosphere at that time was

appropriate for such a Macedonian poem to emerge. It is easy to recognize in it the general trends and certain ideas and catchwords of the day.

I have noted that Russian poetry was to wait until Blok's 'The Twelve' for a peak of perfection to match Lermontov's 'Borodino'. I was convinced that not only was a new high-point being prepared in the collective conscious, which would inescapably require a suitable form of expression, but that the linguistic material which was to give unrepeatable power to that expression was also being prepared piece by piece. It can be supposed that if we painstakingly took excerpts from the stock of Russian writings of the early 1800s we would discover how the elements of the testimony of the collective conscious, which were to echo powerfully in 'Borodino', were created. Furthermore, we can conjecture that the same approach, simply transferred into the new time, would provide information on an important component in the genesis of 'The Twelve'. It is hardly necessary to mention in all this, apart from writings, the great importance of the everyday colloquial element, for which great poets have a sensitive ear.

We have mentioned Michelangelo. A very common method in modern sculpture can again bring us closer to our idea. Modern sculptors often take some natural object, such as the root of a tree, and make a work of art which still allows us to recognize the original object easily, or, to use our own term, they discover the sculpture in that object. It is a well-known fact that poems coming about in an analogous way is not a rare occurrence, either. Some statement or unexpected conjunction of words in a concrete situation in life, some rudimentary fact marked by a shade of emotion, — in a word, something natural may serve as the basis of a poem. It is like an archaeological dig, when a part of an object appears and then the earth is carefully cleared from around it, until it is completely uncovered. Allow me to quote as a typical example of what I am describing my poem entitled 'At the Anniversary of My Father's Death'. The Mother's words in that poem, her lament, are almost a direct quotation from something said in real life. Yet, although they are at the beginning just the original natural form, they are also as such the nucleus of the poem. Everything else is the poet's commentary, which should accentuate the artistic potential of the words, seeking a framework for them which will dissociate them from a rudimentary piece of information, just as the setting

should highlight the sparkle of the precious stone with whatever frame it finds. When we think about it, it seems that discovering a poem means to a large extent elevating a rudimentary piece of information, which yet has a potential for emotional shades, to a higher level, to the poetic plane, reached by way of the poet's commentary I have mentioned.

It remains for us to conclude that the feeling in question remains a phenomenon in itself which will interest the psychology of creativity, but that the rational interpretation of that phenomenon leads us into the realm of the reciprocal action of the factors expounded in the previous passage — the three factors of tradition, the collective conscious and the poet. Without being so bold as to claim that our supposition contributes to the explanation of the genesis of all poems, we will be so modest as to state with certainty that it does genuinely explain the genesis of many.

THE FUTURE OF POETRY

Under this heading I shall be discussing poetry. But this term is just a kind of abbreviation which we use at the same time for wider concepts — those of *literature* and *art*. I take this as understood.

Our time is characterized by the increased need for prediction. We are even seeing the creation of a new science — futurology. It is symptomatic that the question of the future of poetry should be raised quite often. This kind of futurological theme was even the subject of discussion at the Ratsin Meetings. In accordance with the saying that one should break things where they are thinnest, dark predictions are now directed primarily towards this field of human activity, probably owing to the subconscious conviction that it is the most naive, innocent and unnecessary. Here there emerges the old underestimation of art as compared with the other activities of the human soul.

Some bad predictions for the future of poetry in fact spring from a deeply pessimistic view in general of the future of humankind. When Eugenio Montale announces black days for artistic writing, he is simply giving the result of his overall image of the profound decadence towards which he considers mankind to be moving in blind breathlessness. Yet such a vision throws

all human activity into question, not just poetry. With this view, poetry is not unjustified, so that we would be forced to seek some specific justifications for its place and function in life. Since we intend to do just that, we are free to exclude from our further field of vision such total pessimistic diagnoses.

Thus statements such as Hegel's always remain interesting, which actually start from the assumption, even though implicit, that poetry is inferior to the other spiritual activities, primarily to science and philosophy.

Hegel, of course, ranks poetry on a somewhat low level, declaring the kingdom of his own philosophy, where he believed the primary role in the self-development of a world spirit would belong in the future.

What could be said in confutation of this assertion? An equally sweeping statement, which was particularly dear to the Romantics, that true cognition is not in the logical exposition of a scientist, but in the intuition of the poet, which penetrates to the deepest bases of the world. Nevertheless, only too great a bias could lead one to hold to the bitter end that poetry can be placed on the same plane as science and philosophy, if not a higher one, a specific kind of cognition.

In recent times a more elegant solution has been found in holding that poetry is a specific kind of modeling of the world, in the same way as science, religion, myths, and so on are. This, however, is only to sketch the general framework in which spiritual activities are contained and it still remains to specify what the features of these different ways of modeling the world are, how we recognize them and consequently which features give each activity its autonomous status and its place and function in life and in historical development.

Time itself has defended poetry from Hegel's sally to a certain extent. The word 'philosophy' unfortunately does not sound as fine as in Hegel's time. Philosophy, which once believed it could give an answer to the essential questions of an ontological nature, has today come to the critique of language as its primary domain, having approached it via the critique of the cognitional abilities of the mind. This has given certain linguists the opportunity to assert with self-esteem that linguistics now gives the greatest contribution to logic and the theory of cognition. This may be so, but it should not be a source of self-satisfaction, rather of sadness, for it is evidence of the fact that a

great ascent has met its limits and that now it has stopped to perch on the lower branches.

In this kind of situation there are times when poetry looks to have its own back on its exhausted and perplexed opponent. An excellent illustration of this is a poem by the Soviet poet, Viacheslav Kuprianov, entitled 'Doroteenhof Cemetery, Berlin', which we will quote here in full:

Having turned dialectics upside down, Hegel
is resting, as is only right:
under a fitting memorial, beside
Meta-Fichte; almost no
hope of resurrection
for idealists well and truly led astray.

Above Brecht's grave
the stone's askew; I know
that the abode beneath
is insecure and temporary;
the owner has long since gone
to turn the pages of our complex books with us,
to underline the unnecessary places in them,
and, in defiance of the testament, to talk
forever with the people of trees
and of people.

The point is clear: the real corpse is the man who predicted the death of poetry. Its champion, Bertolt Brecht, is alive and so is poetry.

All the forms of spiritual activity have cognitional power, of course, but not in equal measure. Pride of place, in this respect must belong to science. If we make an assessment from this point of view, poetry will always have a lesser place. We only have to think of the repetition in it of what we call eternal themes in order to get an absolutely lucid typological picture. If we raise the question of which is more necessary to humankind in the future, poetry or science, on this basis, it is clear that the answer must favour science.

Yet perhaps poetry, as a different way of modeling the world, has its own particular characteristic power, which ensures its lasting presence in human life. It would certainly be more correct to seek out several such components, but here we will

dwelt on only one, which in any case occupies an uncommonly important place in the determination of the function of poetry. It is the power of actualization which we shall now be examining.

This idea is borrowed from the Prague School, where it was applied to linguistics. According to B. Havránek, spoken statements are subject to *automation*. The striving towards *actualization* emerges in opposition to this: statements gain a kind of freshness and expressiveness when they diverge from the routine. It is clear that this occurs especially with writing as art.¹ Here I wish to expand on this idea of actualization, going beyond the boundaries of linguistics.

The need for something fresh, new and relevant is a basic one of humankind, which knows what a sip of cold water means in a drought. Since we are suggesting an extension of the idea of actualization, we shall illustrate it primarily with examples from outside linguistics.

Saturday evening in Prilep during my childhood. It's market day, the liveliest and noisiest day in the week. But in the evening, when the hubbub is fading, the women come out of doors with brooms and dustpans. Each one sweeps in front of her own door and collects the rubbish into a little heap on one side. The dustmen will pass by early in the morning and take it away. The following morning the town looks as if it's been washed; the dust which had held it down has been swept away and it is beautiful again. There is a feeling that we have detached ourselves from everyday life for a moment; our hearts are happy because of it and we expect the simple activity of Saturday evenings to be repeated forever and that it must always cause us the same satisfaction.

¹ Cf. B. Havránek, *Studie o spisovném jazyce*, Prague, 1963, p. 41: "Under *automatization* we understand the kind of use of linguistic means, whether in isolation or conjunction, which is usual for a certain speech task, i.e. where the actual means of expression are not of interest, where the statement with regard to its linguistic form is made and understood as conventional and becomes 'comprehensible' as an actual element of the linguistic system and not at all from the situation and what it depends on, even when complemented by the concrete linguistic occurrence..."

Under *actualization*, on the other hand, we mean the use of linguistic means in such a way that the use itself attracts attention and is understood as unusual, as free from automatization, deautomatized, as for example in living poetic metaphors (as opposed to lexicalised or 'frozen' ones which are automatized)."

You go into a small restaurant, or rather a café. You sit down at a table. The waiter comes up, says ‘Good evening’ with a clean new tablecloth already in his hands. He takes off the old one and puts the new, clean one on the table. Another moment of ‘actualization’. Again a pleasant feeling comes over you, even greater if they also put a vase of flowers on the table. However many times this small scene may happen in life, it will always remind us of what is beautiful. We might be reminded of Tin Uievich’s wonderful poem as confirmation of our words, where he awaits, as the ultimate form of happiness, “A bunch of flowers in a glass of water”.

Finally one more example from the non-linguistic sphere, this time one which contains the possibility of differentiating in the same action between a practical situation and a situation of actualization. If there is a chance power-cut, we are forced to light a candle. The flickering light bothers us and we are impatient for the electric light to shine forth once more. How different it is from this experience when we deliberately turn off the lights and use candles in order to set some moment apart as particularly solemn for us. We again come close to the beautiful and want everything to be beautiful for us. The gesture itself is linked with a host of associations of customs and our memories. We are renewing an experience which would otherwise vanish with the grayness of routine, automatized behaviour.

In its task of ‘actualization’ poetry simply connects itself to such manifestations in various fields of life. It carries out actualization in language, saving it from grayness, dust, words, syntagms and sentences; it is expression made relevant. Yet we also have actualization in the sphere of language on a much lower level, starting with accidental linguistic mistakes, or unusual combinations of words which come about by chance, as in a language game.

A little girl in the street staring up into the sky asks her father: “Daddy, are those jackdaws eagles?” A combination has been created which might in another context sound proverbial in its irony.

At the grape picking the older ones are remembering certain incidents which happened once in our village. All of a sudden somebody mentions a man called Traiché. He had been sent to invite somebody to be best man at the wedding but by mistake he had said: “Please come and be the bridegroom at our wedding!” There is laughter and then an interesting comment:

“Poor old Traiché. He really made a monument for himself with that.” He would never be known for anything else, but God had taught him to make mistakes with words. This shows us at the same time that village people well understand the power of words, that is, expression made relevant.

Thus, if poetry bows to science in its cognitional might, it has its own realm, where science cannot reign supreme, or that is where the power of actualization rules. As long as human beings live on Earth, they have the need to drink their fill of that power, for it brings them emotion, surprise and pleasure, making their lives more beautiful. This may be a lesser manifestation of the spirit than is scientific knowledge, but it is just as lasting and inevitable. The themes of poetry have already been numbered. Yet this does not represent any kind of limit in the sense of expending them. The power of actualization explains why these themes, from Homer right up to the present day, always sound new and alive (remember the examples of ‘actualization’ from the non-linguistic sphere which we quoted). There is no essential component in common between science and art which would allow us to compare them on the same level, with a view to evaluating them. Poetry can only be properly compared with other activities which spring from the power of actualization. If we now consider poetry in the narrower sense as a purely linguistic activity, or as literature, then we are able to say that it can theoretically be limited only by those other activities. Nevertheless, activities involving words so occupy human beings and are so important for us that we are free to state that poetry will remain our eternal companion, sharing with us both the good and the bad.

Blazhe KONESKI
(Translated by Patricia Marsh-Stefanovska)

BLAZHE KONESKI
P O E T R Y
MACEDONIA.ORG

SELECTED POEMS

Translated from the Macedonian by
Andrew Harvey and Anne Pennington

SWALLOWS

Dawn and the noise
Birds
Day and night divide over
Quick shuttles
Weavers of mystery

Dusk is our element
All that is
Momentary
Frontier

You have seen us Sewing water and a

Tracelessly

DREAM

Don't strain to see me
I am running my own course
You'll scarcely grasp me
Underground river
Under the days' white limestone
Source
In a distant night of childhood

THE SONG OF THE VINES IN VODNO VINEYARD

If we are silent at noon
When time is quiet and the grasses quiet
It's not because we are lost in lonely grief
But for beauty's sake

If we sway at the first wind
Bend excitedly towards each other
It's not fear shivering us from our roots
But for beauty's sake

If we spread our shadows in moonlight
When there is no one to see us
It's not for the glow-worms to shine more strongly
But for beauty's sake

If we are meek under the vinekeeper's hands
Who prune our branches and stroke our shoots
It's not to bear grapes and wine
But for beauty's sake

We are strange
He who has begun to know us
Earth becomes closer
People distant

RYE

Calm of old women stooping
Resignation
A sort of talk, quiet, monotonous, thrifty
Quite ordinary words
From dry lips
But when the wind gets up
Heads shake
Hands wave clumsily
A sort of singing begins, deep, prayerful,
Sad like music
On a noon in summer
In a village station

THE BEAUTIFUL WOMEN

The beautiful women of my people
Their flower died soon
Like apricot-blossom
Like lilac in May

They belonged to men they did not choose
By day their hair was braided
By night loosened over breasts and hips
Their quail-like steps were soon hobbled by an apron
Their youth passed
Like lime-blossom on the wind
Soon they're old women
Sitting in a doorway
With bowed heads
With a noiseless sigh

The beautiful women, the unhappy women
How soon their flower died
Like apricot-blossom
Like lilac in May

THE OLD WOMAN

She stops by the gate
She can't hear she looks round fearfully
She keeps thinking someone's mocking her

She stops by the dark gate
She can't see she curls up early on the rush mat
Calling out in her sleep to the dead

THREE BIG WOMEN

Three big women swam out into the lake
Three smooth fish under transparent water
Three big women trace three wakes
Their arms glistening in rhythm
With the sweet thrust of their hips
The secret touching of their breasts
Making the water chuckle
I follow each stroke
Back and forward
The quiet rhythm of ankles
Two feet, two thighs under the water
Though time has stopped while I watch them
Already they're far away
Where I can't reach them
Three big women turn on their backs out there
To get their breath
They're looking up at the sky
Their bodies shiver to the rhythm of the ripples
Fish-scales in sunlight
Even their laughter reaches me broken into beads
How can I hold out the invisible net that far
Hardly surprising, then, I'm waiting their return
Afraid

KUMANOVO

I thought we'd often go to Kumanovo
At least in winter for the salami
And March for fresh tripes
For the Gypsy Fair on St. George's Day

Because we'd something definite to go for
I thought we wouldn't be stopped
By the fogs that roll down from Karadag in November
By the car queues in season
By flesh, fowl, or stormwind
I really thought that

I had one comfort at least
Something to look out for
I thought that and no longer understand myself
With no desire at all to go there
Just a secret desire for Kumanovo

Friends
I don't know which I regret more
My will weakening
Or yours

CINDERELLA

I was first dreamed up by a village orphan
Persecuted by his stepmother

Mother, how far, how close we are!

I was suckled in a cradle on the meadow
Under the shadow of an elm
At harvest under the shadow of a stook

Mother, how far, how close we are!

I carry you as you carried me
I still hold one crumb of village air in my breast
So it should hurt

Mother, how far, how close we are!

DON QUIXOTE

On the infinite front line in this world
They gave him a sector too
To hold and defend — A dump
A field irreconcilably split
One side was him, a pitiful Hector
No battle-shot cracked
In that grass and slime
Pigs
Trampled him with small hooves
Pounded him, garlic with a pestle — Swine ground him to dust
So others, in other battles
Could make history — With glory?

DROUGHT

My eyes are withered springs
In a drought
In a baked abandoned landscape

As earth burns for one drop of rain
In the burning summer
My soul burns for one tear
These eyes can't make it

It's a sign, it must be
It's not just chance that plants shrivel without water
The world dies hungry

Burnt-out cases don't get
The gift of tears

THE LAKE

You always leave the house in the same gloom
Startled at the door
Suddenly you find the world yet again
The lake under the pitch-blue veil
Of Belassitsa
In the green hoop of planes and cypresses
It takes one human moment
For this beauty to become banal again
To drown in you as in ash
For you to be again a normally unhappy man
Like most of the others —

How precious
Still
That interval is

MOUNTAIN

There's a film on my soul
I want to scratch at it with my nails
I want to scrape at it with a file
I want to scrape it with a knife like lichen on a rock

If I happened to
Fight with a wolf
Cut its throat
Be made wild
I'd still have that film

O mountain, o plateau,
Huge-flanked mountain,
Nothing cures
Just strips us

To deepest pain

SICK DOYTCHIN

(A Macedonian folk poem describes Doytchin as a warrior who rises from his deathbed to fight against tyranny.)

When I was in my strength that rushed like a swollen river
When I felt fit for my labour
Worthy of glory
When my voice was strong enough for the deepest word
My arm for the heaviest sword
My feet for the surest steps
Then I was broken
I fell like an overladen cherry tree

A mocking shadow marked my tracks
A snake into a hollow grave
It haunted my laughter, it blenched my sorrow
So I should look about me suspiciously and reflect
Then I felt myself funny absurd mean
My strength melted from me
My arms became tired
My sword fell
I fell ill

'I have been ill for nine years
I have worn out nine beds'

I cannot feel my joints
I am scattered over hard turf
Over a hellish noon hill
I am dismembered
Through my bones grass has sprouted
Through that grass snakes are hatching
I long for a dark cool grave
There is no end without my appointed labour

O unknown woman
Sister, mother, you who have suffered much
You who have known every anguish

Come, my golden sister

Gather up my mouldering bones, don't shudder

Put me together

Bind me with three hundred ells of linen

Speak a soft word

Set me upright

Teach me to walk again, mother

Give me my sword in my hand

That I may kill the Black Knight

That I may die

THE ANGEL IN ST SOPHIA

So many years you have lain
Under the plaster of the darkened wall
Now you are free in pure space again
Child of the deepest blue thought
Once again your eyes are blazing
And the wall is dawning like the sky.
But there's another hidden face
Beneath the plaster of my heart
The joy of my youth
Your sister in her beauty — No, there's no artist that can save her
With my life she'll fade forever.

THE PASS

The women who loved him had no time
No way of meeting him

They're watching now
He's leaving
Soon he'll be over the pass
They're losing him forever
He is beautiful against the late sun

Only he knows what he feels like
Worn out
Dust in his hair like ash
Dust gritting his mouth

Going down
Into a dark valley

They won't be able to see him

SHTIP

Two grey lowering crags
Clenched cold smile
Dry noon on the rocks
Don't talk of those old houses down there
Falling apart
Tell me
About a beautiful love
That stopped here briefly

LOVE

They drove a dry spear into my heart
Many hands thrust it in
To make it firm
Then they said
Wait for it to flower

THE BUTTERFLY

You don't care where I come from
What you care about is your status, your beauty

You don't care where I come from
What can my attitudes offer you?

My need leaps to you in a stream
You can't help sensing longingly its freshness
Yet whichever furrow it runs along you won't front it
Wild for your status, your beauty

How did your fear sense the depth of those dark roots
Which feed my shade even in summer
And how did you see
My branches rustle
Not only at the will of the wind?

What does your love mean?

Butterfly on a withered tree

LOVER

She doesn't come when you call
She comes when your blood
Sweeps her ashore
She didn't ask much
All she wants
Is to hide in your blood at noon

How could I let her go by?
Her body brought me back to life
Which is betrayal

Last night in a dream
An old love shouted her down

Awake
The next one puts in her claim

So it goes

THE LONE STAG

Vultures track him
Spy on him
Does can't lure him
With the silver ring of their hooves

His horns tangle in the branches
When he wants to dance
At night
And he looks up at the moon
Out of the corner of an eye
And only feels life more senseless

Still he must go on living
Flowing like a spring
Until he bends his right knee

Not for sleep

APART

That quiet flow of your shawl
That black sudden shine in your eyes
Still

 apart
 everything happens just by chance

Yet why does black lightning break out in my heart
As in the knot of a lonely oak?

ANXIETY

Stop, please, don't come close
I'm shaking
However light your steps are
You're trampling my heart
That road is sorrow's and autumn's
Dropping leaves like quiet tears
Since I still have no first love
Please stop, don't come close
Please

GIRLS IN LOVE

They have faces gently shaded
As if by shadow of transparent leaves
Their face looks longer
They have larger eyes, pensive, moist,
As if they were afraid of every surprise
They bend their forehead so slightly
To touch the lips of their lover
Butterfly wings
Poised on a grassblade — a moment before flight — And the
grass bends slightly
Then they stretch out their arms in an embrace
Desperately bold, blind, inevitable
Oars in a swinging sea
We can't help blinking at

God, have I really been through all this, too?

THE CLOCK

They turned off the radio across the road
In the odd silence
I heard the clock in the window
Like the steady click-click
Of a sewing machine
I knew all the time
It was hemming a handkerchief
Like the one the lads used to wear
In their top pocket —
So **that's** why I shivered

PARTING

We love for a while
We are sad at parting
We say to each other 'Don't forget me'
Yet perhaps we'll never see each other again.

Broken bridges block our way
Burnt cities
A bullet —
We part again
We are sad
We say 'Don't forget me'
Yet perhaps we'll never see each other again.

AT THE ANNIVERSARY OF MY FATHER'S DEATH

Her only lament for him was this —
Whenever I saw him in the distance
His white shirt against the green field
I thought a white banner fluttering there
Was beautiful.
My mother moans in her sleep.
Her cry moves no one.
Mother, we are so much alone,
All we have is the strength of our helpless love.

CHRYSANTHEMUM

Now the chrysanthemums will bloom in the garden.
Slowly, the yellow intensity of their flowers breaks out
Like a child's clenched fist.

My chrysanthemum,
You have waited tremblingly, hesitatingly,
For this man
Who is walking towards old age.

It was I who discovered the beauty of your forehead
The soft curl of your hair on your two temples
But you are erect, consciously dignified
What purity your soft yellow petals have!
Your face is traced in the autumn's transparence
And I have no right
Even to touch
The pure soul that has outgrown me.

So this autumn's beautiful days have passed.
I have grown to love you so much
But I cannot even hold a pretence of happiness
Useless to promise to stop my sad singing
Through all my veins autumn is rustling, fading.

GAME WITH A CHLID

(To my daughter)

Your hands please.
Touch fingers.
Begin our game.
It's an old one, it's simple,
but it's fun:

Knock, knock!
Who's there?
A man.
What does he want?
A match.
Come in.
Take it.

Sallywag, you pounce,
with a smile as sly as silver,
with a laugh like a spring!
Suddenly — why now? —
a shadow stops
at the door of my heart,
icy fingers tap:
Knock, knock!
Who's there?
Sorrow.
Come inside.

I am sad greyness falls,
a cloak of ash
on the memory of your games.
I was the only one who saw them,
and shall I be so unfaithful?
I've no strength to hold

what you'll search for in hidden feelings,
what I'll search for with bitter thirst.

Prodigal!

Each night you bury treasure in the ground.
Corned day, you've forgotten where.
The mind is like a Christmas bonfire,
abandoned at dawn,
the heat whines and dies,
snow covers it,
the embers are a memory.

Where, tell me, is that first gleam
of the first tooth?
Where that voice as it was,
the first sweet babbling?
I know! I know!
Why is it I suddenly see so clearly
this spring morning
two turtle-doves in our garden
on the apricot tree?

2.

Never mind.
That's how it is.

Darling, you laugh like silver,
you laugh like a spring,
your laugh flows in a shining stream
over the green grass,
it sings a happy song
a hopping game about
your toes:
This toe — a little pig.
this one — a little pea,
this one — a little plum,
this one — a little berry,
this one — a little cherry,
a little bird will peck it up,
a little dog will snap it up.

Your toe hides,

ready to hop, full of tricks,
perhaps — shrieks of delight —
it will pop through a hole in its sock
like a mouse.
I'll catch it, you'll see.
Your laughter rings like silver,
your laugh like a spring.

Her eyes! Her eyes!
I talk to you — I am happy,
I talk to myself — I am sad.
We play simply as beasts —
but where's the lion's calm,
who, striped with the cage's shadows,
still keeps a wide smile,
a wise calm gaze,
as he watches his children play with his tail?

You, my darling,
admire your big father.
But I —
when some phrase
shadows your face
a kind of shudder I think mine alone —
I am afraid
that at some moment,
some time,
you may go through
what I did.

At the door of my heart
someone stops
and knocks
and asks:
can the heart — a breadcrumb —
satisfy anyone,
can that fragile armour
shield anyone?

3.

Your father, my darling,
is fighting dark battles,
you are his faithful warrior,
the only one,
you follow his power.
If I fall today
my darling, you must stand upright by yourself,
with your own small strength.
Because it's a proud thing to be a child!

For all that's black and cruel in this world
I have a father's smile,
and with it an unquiet horror,
but you have terrible trust,
my darling — come, give me a hug,
don't be cross if I squeeze you tight!
Everything can find a place in the game:
laughter and pain may hug each other.

A CHILD ASLEEP BY A LAKE

You are sleeping
The lake is lost in thought
The lake is preparing your fate
You are sleeping, but it
Laps imperceptibly into your soul
Creek with white pebbles
Where each pebble is distinct.
You are sleeping
Its smallest ripple
Leads like a thread to the loud breakers
Which will one day be born, weep, and bear you away.
Go on sleeping, child
The lake is shaping your soul
Thinking of all the trouble that must come.
A CHILD ASLEEP BY A LAKE

CONVERSATION WITH A CHILD

Seven years my clear stream has been running
It grows
And I a traveller who has been walking for so long
All the time beside it
What can I say
Carried away I listen to its voice
Only occasionally throwing in a word
To keep the conversation alive
When it seems to be slowing
I remember the happy noise of the waterfalls
I guard this memory
There's no going back upstream

ODYSSEUS

That old but still dashing pilot
Sea-wolf, with quavering jaws,
Of course, he wasn't always true to you on all his journeys.
And you, Penelope, didn't always wait for him
Purely, meekly — So what?
You still love each other
And you've known how a great ship comes
Slowly
Like a peacock
Into quiet harbour
God bless you!
Good on you!

TREETRUNK

The leaves that have fallen call
Those which
Still afraid of falling
Shiver on the tree
'Come down and let us die
Run free of the wind
Into the quiet of earth
Let that charred skeleton stay bare
wringing black hands
Let its trunk be a runnel
For autumn rain
We will throng round it
So it cannot step out of the ring
Of its gold memories'

KING MARKO

Translated from the Macedonian by
ANDREW HARVEY AND ANNE PENNINGTON

These poems are written around the character of King Marko. a historical figure of the fourteenth century, who has become the hero of many South Slavonic legends and poems. King Marko's church still stands outside Skopje with the fresco of Rachel in the dome and a portrait of King Marko on the South façade.

Four of the poems were written in the 1950s, and Koneski has just completed the cycle, after a long interval, with The Fortress and The Hill of the Dog. (Translators' note)

STERNA

“But the old folk, aren’t they afraid of Sterna, which King Marko made under Marko’s towers, when he blocked the water with I don’t know how many bales of cotton, fastened with nails an ell long – he blocked up the water and saved the plain of Prilep from becoming like Lake Ohrid.”

Marko Tsepenko

I blocked up Sterna with cotton
Rags
Sand, gravel
Stones, rocks
I heaped them over the hole
To make it fast

Just in time!

I couldn’t sleep
At dead of night
I went to listen to the water in spate
Gurgling and writhing and groaning underground
It was angry with someone
— you couldn’t catch the words —
It was ready to stride out
Like a grey bear from its cave
To hunt its prey
By night

I knew: it
Was just biding its time —
It’ll wait until the mother has lulled her child to sleep
The cradle has stopped rocking
The reel has stopped spinning,

It’ll wait until the ploughmen have eaten

Unwound their leg wrappings
Filled their shoes with chaff
It will wait until the last ember's died down
Beneath the ash
The last bell in the sheepfold stopped tinkling
The birds quite hidden themselves
The old men with their coughs and insomnia
Become quiet
In the hush and the peace and the darkness
It will suddenly snarl
Sterna —
Yes, it's only biding its time

Everyone's asleep
I'm the only one awake
A kind of bandit on the lookout —
I'm waiting
Filled with its underground rumbling
Alert for the moment when it falls silent —
For then it's planning the worst and is remembering
I want to scream, to wave my arms, to wake everyone up

And then I resolved —
I blocked up Sterna with cotton
Rags
Sand, gravel
Stones, rocks
I heaped them over the hole
To make it fast

How I exulted!
I was strangling it
Its voice came weaker and weaker
As if it were moaning
Begging for mercy

I strained harder and harder, frantically
I scabbled with my nails, shovelled, kicked
Pushed and piled up the rubble
Furiously — so as not to feel any pity for it
But when I stopped, panting and sweaty
And wiped my forehead with a muddy hand

When I stood quite upright
Breathed in with all my soul the still, pure air
I could hear
Someone, underground, far, far away, was tittering
As if with a hand over his mouth

And now it's night again and the dead of night
Everyone's asleep, but I shall never be able to sleep
Sterna's rumbling in my ears as never before
As if it had streamed over into me
Here, in my breast
Through my temples
The dark underground waters are in spate
Restlessly
As if I were creating Sterna
And shall have to speak its word

I listen —
It's swelling
It's only biding its time
In the hush and the peace and the darkness it will
suddenly snarl

It will burst through
It will gush out
Submerge, drown, sweep away...
And then spread out, and be finally at peace

THE BREAKING OF STRENGTH

“Disguised as a beggar, the Lord waited for King Marko at the roadside. He had gathered the weight of the whole world into a hag. ‘My son, help an old man, lift this bag on to my hack. Marko picked it up on the end of his spear, and the earth trembled. ‘What have I done?’ said the Lord to Himself. And He left him only a third of his strength.”
(Folk tale)

You who gave me unimaginable strength
God
To grow muscular like a knotted oak
To joy in my young branching and leafing
To rampage in my innocence
You who let me fee! I could move even the world
As a ploughman shifts a stone with his harrow
God
Why were you afraid of me
Why in unthinking fear did you shift your first purpose
Why did you take my strength?

I used to come to you in thought as to a father
I stepped into your house with a child’s pure faith
Running in from play to take a crust from the larder
I knew you as my defender, who would smile at me
Pleased with the transparent whirlpool of my soul
And I could not think of you differently —
You, the Almighty
Turned yourself to a beggar
Dressed in tatters, filthy with your begging-bag
Scouring your face with the pain of a tired old man
Making yourself blind
So I should not see the cunning in your eyes —
And all to test me better
To buy me, to try me on the weights
Then to flaunt your cruel power over me

God

Why did you stoop so low
Just to destroy me?
Did you think that a man
Would not testify to your moment of base weakness
Would not look with bitter mockery even at the
splendour of heaven
On a spring midnight when the stars are clear
And hopeful in quiet prayer?

Merciless

Your humbling of me knew no bounds
You broke me
But left me the memory of my strength
I am a dry underground river
Whose dark is not yet quiet from the beating of waves

Mocking

You made me first in a failing empire
In a ship sinking with its cargo of pain and sin
To strengthen, to save
But the murky waters suck us down
Go on then, make the most of it

You who bore me to be great
And then gave me such a gift

God

The brand which burnt my wings is smoking in your hand
My whole being rises up against you
My heart curses you
In humiliation
I feel that in me which puts me above you
Which once you had, perhaps, but put from you
When you created us to flee your anguish
Alone
Through mists I must search out the path of my life

THE FORTRESS

“When he was building the fortress in Varosh, Marko collected a huge labour force, men and women, young and old. From Pletvar to Varosh they passed the stones from hand to hand. Seventy babies died in their cradles for lack of suckling”.
(Folk Tale)

My fortress soars into the clear sky
With its strong walls and slender towers
It is a hawk spreading its wings
On a steep cliff
Sweeping its gaze over the plain from end to end

I was born to build
This shield
This threat to Evil
I was called by Destiny
To know
A stronghold must grow here
As a pine shoots up in a steep place
Against the wind
That Evil must be waited for
Here
So its designs might be shattered
So it might not go any further

I gathered the young and the old
Men and women
Dust and chaff
Who just walk along life
Without seeing anything
I didn't bind their hands with chains

I bound them with white stone
They passed it from hand to hand
From Pletvar to Varosh
It flowed like clear water
Along the furrow of calloused hands

Glistening in the sun
I could not
Even if I had wanted to
Watch those hands weaken
Those faces twist with effort
Those lips split with thirst
Even if I had wanted to
I could not
Listen to the mothers' heavy curses
While their children screamed in their cradles
On the empty stubble of the burning plain
Stretching their hands out
For a nipple to suck
Finding none
I knew I had to make a fortress
I had to
Against Evil

Look
The fortress soars
Into the clear sky
Look
Like a hawk spreading its wings on the proud rock
Its strong wings

But night is falling slowly
Darkness is shrouding the white towers
The lights are going out in their windows
Silence is taking everything over
My power is fainting
Dying
As if everything were sinking slowly into the earth
As if there was nothing here at all
As if I had never made anything
Sleep comes to me like a jackal
Passing the last fences of consciousness
Loosing all my bitter doubts
Leaving me alone with my sin
And out of the dark

A nameless crowd of people is coming
Young and old

Men and women
Dust and chaff
Who just walk along life
They are holding their curses out to me
Like heavy stones on calloused hands
'You didn't watch us dying King Marko
We died
You didn't listen to our children screaming
Our little birds
Your hair would have fallen out
We listened
Your truth is damned
King Marko
Your truth that brought us
Where we couldn't even wish any more
That dried up
Even our despair
Like a well in the summer heat'
The children scream in my shattered sleep
They accuse me like sad angels
I am left alone and helpless before my sin
Feeling there might be some other
Black justice
Other than my own
That in life all is levelled
In the tides of Good and Evil
Like a muddy and a clear river flowing together
Like the waves on the sea falling quiet

Already I can hear in the distance
The inevitable approach of Evil
Who can foresee all its paths?
Who can count them?
Its paths
Its tracks
The furrows that lead it forward
My fortress won't stop it
Can't stop it
But will only force it
To ruin

KING MARKO'S CHURCH

“For his sins, for the seventy children that died when he was building the fortress, King Marko built seventy churches.”
(Folk tale)

I built a church in a hidden place
To stand for many years alone
To speak of me to the future
You'll find no gold or silver here
Only the chill half-light
Of sorrow

When I first crossed the threshold into the church porch
The stones echoed, groaning under my steps
I stopped short — Silence ran black through my veins
Two saints, on either side of the church doors
With fearful faces
Their hands outstretched
Warned me to go no further

But I went on, eagerly
As if to a tryst with myself
Until under the dome
I looked around
And the walls stirred —
Vague shapes, shrouded in half-light
Were waiting for me
Advanced on me, silent, threatening
Faces, hideously suffering
Dark warriors with crossed spears and swords
Mourners at a death bed,
Bodies pierced by spears, at the point of death
Writhing in final agony
Children lost in the crowd
With palm-branches in their hands

I went on, in a trance
The whole crowd pressed about me

Tied me into knot after knot of nightmare
Followed me silently, expecting something

'Speak', I said
But my voice broke the silence of the dome
And hid in the walls again
For they withdrew, noiselessly
And hid in the walls again

I stopped in front of the altar as if to pray
Yet still unhumbled
And then, clearly, I heard a woman's lament
From the dome
Rachel, her arms flung up in despair
Wringing her hands
Weeping for her children who are not
Wailing her grief to the world

I was numbed, I left the church
I walked away
My legs turned to pillars as I went
As if I were vaulted with a dome
As if I bore within me the chill emptiness of the church
I know that now, always
The black shapes in my dark are silent
There is no escape, no forgiveness, no memorial

I shout 'Light up the lamps'
But I am a spent fire, a hearth of scattered ashes
I walk on —
I shall bear the church to my grave

EPILOGUE: THE HILL OF THE DOG

“On the Hill of the Dog near Prilep Marko fought for days. Each time he cut an enemy in two the two halves became two other men. Marko saw that all his fighting would come to nothing, shod his horse backwards, set drums beating in the wind, so no-one should know the castle was empty, and disappeared into the night.”

(Folk tale)

This battle too
I had to fight
For days
Arms up to elbows in blood
Legs up to knees
Fight it
Beyond my strength
To come to the end
To dry up like a well in summer heat
To come to know
The only thing I want at the end
Is that no-one should see me die

I go out early on the Hill of the Dog
Raging at my enemies
I pursue the Evil
And swing
And crush
And hack
As you hack thick forest to make a path
But evening falls
I return exhausted
Everything comes up again behind me
As it was
As if I had ploughed dirty water
As if the Evil had spread

Like rank weeds after clearing

And now it is night again
The dead of night
And I am listening
The Evil is coming
Muddy water spreading
It seems
As if everything is sinking into the earth
As if nothing had ever been
As if I had never made anything
Shoe my horse backwards
Set the drums beating in the wind
Let my ghost still terrify them
Don't let them see me die

All I want
Is that no-one should see me die
To be alone with my death
My bride on our marriage night

SAINTS' LIVES

Translated from the Macedonian by
ANDREW HARVEY AND ANNE PENNINGTON

In these poems Koneski is drawing on a long hagiographical tradition, the first outstanding example of which is in the thirteenth century: St. Sava's life of his own father St. Simeon. The characters in the poems are real people, known to the poet, most of them from his own family.

(Translators' note)

LIFE OF BONA

She'd make five spinach pies at a time
For that large household
So everyone
Should have enough to eat
And because she was weak
She left five orphans
Others
The strong ones
Did the harvesting and threshing
The forced labour
And she
Would bend
Like a lime-branch with a basket hung on it
Like a trodden blade of grass
Like an ear of corn under the wind
She was weak
She left five orphans
Without understanding anything
O God
And she was weak
How much she paid for it
She paid
With her youth

That great saint

THE LIFE OF TASA BOYANOSKA

Why don't I believe
Lord
Why don't I pray?

Haven't I done all the proper fasts
Lord
Thirty years
Winter and summer
Still You gave me no child

Grief orphaned me
I too in an orphan
To calm my grief
Looked after him cherished him
More than a mother
As if he had sprung
From this body

I brought him up
I had him married
I said to myself
Now I'll be happy
Not only didn't you give him a child
Not even him
You took him from me
Before his time
You ruined me
Utterly

How shall I believe
Lord
How shall I live?

THE WHITE AUNT

They married her off
Those brothers of hers
Those three rough brothers
Into a rich house

To a no-good husband
They blackened her whole life
Ruthlessly
As if they wanted to punish her
For being so beautiful

Her brothers were outlaws
They took over land from the agas
The only thing they knew
Was hunger for land
Tracks led them over old paths
They did not want to understand
The pain in her heart

As if they were ashamed of her beauty
They married her off
Buried her
Ruthlessly
Pushed her down into darkness

But when terror came
She would know it
From a distance
And even at night run through the forest
To come
When houses were burning
Bullets screaming
To come to her father's house
To be with her brothers in the evil time
To give her strength to strengthen their hope
To suffer whatever came
With her brothers

And on days of peace
With her beautiful face
Her smooth waist
Her slender body
She would come like a swan
Bringing joy
To feel her family about her

That's how the children remembered her
Now in old age when they talk
Strange and distant in memory
Flashes the face
Of the white aunt

She was a shelter for everyone
They showed her no kindness
So no-one like her
Is ever born again
In our family

THE DORMITION OF AUNT MENKA

Her whole life
Was a stilling of her own breath
An honouring of light and air
So nothing would escape her
That sounded like sighing or cursing or shouting
So no one would be wounded
The bread she baked was a smile
She made it her duty to live a long time
To keep us from any thought of death
Now I am looking through the window
Knowing she is no longer
Knowing she died this morning
Nothing is moving outside
Everything is still
On this sunny February day
Leafless apple trees
Stretch out fingers to each other
Without touching
I can just feel
The sprouting of new grass
The only movement
I can feel
Some people struggle all their lives
For a peace like this
So the absence of their last breath should leave no trace
So everything should be as if they had never been

And yet I feel
That I must now
Find a new way
To gather together the world
That she
Who knows how

Kept whole for me

ORDÉ

They broke him as a child
Cutting him back
Like a young tree
So his soul filled
With fear
Like a whirlpool
And he saw all life
In its twisting mirror

He grew crooked
In a chrysalis
Crippled
In walking
In laughing
Without calm sleep
With no hope of friendship
No one wanted to hear confession or lament
From such a hoarse ugly voice

And only because his roots went deep
He endured so long
Shadow of a clownish bird
Over cold winter water
Soaring
Before he plunged
Into the cold dark depths

His body at peace
Shows
He was born for something
In a turbid whirlpool
A ribbed shadow
Stays in our memory

ST SPIRIDON THE NEW

Born to a good family
Mother Dosta Father Elijah
They called him Spiro simpliciter
So he would flow with mirth

Orphaned early
He found no wife
Recollected and virginal
He lived
Ringed around with aunts and uncles

When harvest came
He stayed short
He gave himself
And everything he had
To St. John Bigorski
Under Abbot Partenié
The ex-ataman
The Russian

After that for years
When harvest came
He'd leave the West
To wander the East
Where as soon as harvest started
And corn was on the threshing-floor
They'd look out for Father Spiro
He'd come
Smaller than an ant
Covered with his kamilavka
Shorter than a haystack.

Day by day
Threshing by threshing
He'd say
The prayers
He'd collect only wheat

For his Saint
'As for barley and rye' he'd say
St. John's mill doesn't grind them

All his prayers
All his singing
Didn't lead to piety
People laughed at him
Girls giggled at him
Behind his back

Gossips mocked him
So his harsh words against women
Are still remembered
'They're only fit for burning
The clap-trappers'

But at evening in some small room
As soon
As he'd stretch out on his rush-mat
The little priest
Would see the dark
Slowly
Dissolve around him
And before the eyes of his heart
Would appear
Wonderful buildings

Stretching to heaven
The outhouses of St. John's
The beautiful church the bell tower
The gilded icons of Zograph Dicha
With the most beautiful of them all
The icon of the Virgin
He was amazed
He felt as if the river Radika
Was thundering through him
None of those Easterners
Who bleated as they laughed at him
But walked neck high in grossness
None of them had ever
Seen such a wonder and beauty

And he knew
Though he was sinful
He was not absurd
Not small
Not alone
But a foundation stone in God's church

One autumn mules arrived
Sleek smooth-sided mules
With empty sacks
Sent by his abbot with a message for him
To go back
Work and fast a full year
While Partenié was visiting
Years passed
Fickle as women
He lived to the evil days

When the monastery guards came back
Left alone
Like a bat or an owl
In the terror and the hard days
In the blind darkness
With only his weak hands and shoulders
To uphold God's church
He waited and waited
To hand the precious burden
To a new time

Again and again
He spurred time on
Year after year
And then at last
His soul went down into the deep pit
Father Spiridon was more than ninety
When he died

For his pure life
For his work for his words
They buried him
In the most honoured place
In St. John's courtyard

After only a while
He appeared in a dream
To a an old woman from Tresonche or Mogorche
Cross and bitter
He was
He complained
No one lit a candle to him
God's own command
He said brought him into her dream

It was the women of Reka then
Who were first to know
That like a beetle
A small cockroach
A saint had walked among them

And from then on the fame grew
Of St. Spiridon the New
And by God's willing
He gives healing

BLAZHE KONESKI
P O E T R Y
MACEDONIA.ORG

NOTES IN PROSE

Translated from the Macedonian

BY PATRICIA MARSH-STEFANOVSKA

ROOTING THINGS OUT

I was rooting out the ambler rose today. I dug away the earth around it with a spade, and with a pickaxe I kept hacking at the roots which had branched out on all sides deep into the soil.

I was all out of breath, sweating. In the end I managed to wrench the root out of its deep bed. But many tendrils, big and small, still remained in the ground; I rent them asunder with heavy blows.

Those tendrils will be cursing me in the spring. For there is still life in them and yet they have no air. They will pine for their leaves before they wither away altogether.

In the same way I rooted out love, too, from the dry soil of my heart.

BEGGARS

And so at last we painfully become aware that for us, who are now suddenly growing old, love is so precious that there is no hope that it can be ours at all, if we have once lost it or have never even come across it. We even have to beg our own children for a little affection, a sweeter smile, a bit more attention, a note more intimately phrased — we are become beggars of love. We catch ourselves wanting to stand on the corner at dusk when the shop windows are lighting up and people hurrying by. We hope for an encounter, although that hope is a complete illusion.

A MAY NIGHT

I've been dreaming of her all night. I wake from time to time just to be reminded that it's true she isn't here, that reality is mercilessly simple and clear. My heart is unprotected on such a night, bared for suffering. I talk to her in my dreams; I go to her; I can't cross some damnable boundary-line between us. I wake and feel immeasurable grief — it lies heavy on the left side of my breast. It's a May night, rainy. I can hear a bird singing in the garden now. Like a tear the song trickles down. I whisper her name and surprise myself with the strength of my agitation. And only a terrible extreme loneliness touches me with the palm of its fleshless hand on this night.

MEMORY

1.

There exists a terrible moment when memory, too, breaks down, falls apart. It's not that I'm asking you to restore any of my life to me, but just to redeem my memories.

Preserve your memories yourself, if you can!

2.

— I can see the shadows better than you. I can see their patterns more clearly under the vine on the grass, under the chair on the sunny ground; the dense plaiting of the leaves is more comprehensible to me than it is to others — so, after all, you'll often regret not being with me.

A MOMENT

A sharp revelation that one should take advantage of the moment, this very moment. That this walk at dusk in the streets of the old town is irreplaceable, this view of the shop windows, of the sky and of the mountains in the distance, this breathing of mine as I walk along. A certainty that this is happiness! How can any other considerations matter to me at this moment?!

COLD

It's bitterly cold outside tonight, bleak and icy. The sky completely clear, the snow freezing in the streets. I'm on my way home late. The cold pierces me in the shins with fine needles. Here I am now in a warm room. I take down a book to read a few pages before going to bed. I'm still not quite warm and the cold sparks off me. And suddenly the thought — abrupt, clear and cold — that it is so natural that I should be lonely, that nothing is more logical, that everything had to be the way it was. The blood is freezing in my veins tonight, for everything around is freezing.

THE ROSE

It's the first of January today, deep winter. Yet the monthly rose under my window has by some miracle bloomed again. Besides two or three buds, one flower has opened up completely and its blush is so intense against the white of the snow! That same rose bloomed in the spring, too — it bloomed all summer and autumn. Why should it not also bloom now, when frost has gripped the ground? Perhaps the whole point of that rose's existence has been to show that such a thing is possible. I watch that red flower. It sways in the biting wind. It is superbly alone, hopeless. Yet it is real — I haven't made it up. I am simply lucky that it has been mine to see it and to tell of it.

KAMIKAZE

They assured me that the Japanese are set apart by their extraordinary rationality, that they are not sentimental folk, but upright and proud. Yet I thought to myself then that these same rationalists are those who have chosen the famous kamikaze — at the same time an extremely irrational act and an extremely conventional one. They probably devised that feat so that their pride and uprightness could not be doubted. I reflected that this is still a way of clinging to a form and that it requires a great deal of courage to put one's pride and dignity to the test. Any fool can then spit on the man who has taken on himself the risk of not acting in accordance with the conventions.

FISHERMAN

I set off like a fisherman with a net along a river with no fish in it. And I am lost, at that, — ragged, old, ridiculous. Don't think I didn't grasp your attitude straightaway. I simply forgave you at that same moment, as the poor man forgives the rich, who lie can always despise.

CONVERSATION

Monologue does not exist. Monologue is a fabrication. I am writing this because I need to continue the conversation. I have probably failed to grasp all the human depth of that need.

It startled me terribly when Mother said of my late father: “And so they butchered him on the operating table. If only they’d left him alive just one more day to say a few words more.”

We care a great deal about ourselves, our honour and reputation. Yet is it shameful, after all such experiences, to crawl in the dust to hear just one word more from the person you love?

THE WILD PEAR

It was my late father who chopped down the wild pear-tree in our garden. It had a luxuriant crown and made a wondrous shade on the grass on summer days. But caterpillars beset it and spread their gossamer nests everywhere. It was hard to clear them away and the other trees round about would have suffered from their presence. Then axe came and nothing remained of the tree but a mutilated fragment to attach one end of the clothesline to.

Evidently the tree had had a great life force. The first spring the crippled stump even had a few green shoots around its top. Time has passed. Now it's spring again and now I can see clearly how death is paralysing what had joined this live body to the earth and its lymph. There are no more twigs around the top. No sap pulses there any longer and the miracle of transformation is not being performed. Only around the base does the poor blackened stump show signs of life. Nothing seems to matter to it any more. One or two little leaves show green. Everything else has been clamped in stony oblivion.

BLAZHE KONESKI

Some Biographical And Bibliographical Notes

Blazhe Koneski was born on 19th December, 1921, in the village of Nebregovo near Prilep (Central Macedonia). He attended primary school and junior high in Prilep and senior high school in Kraguevats. He studied Slavonic Philology at the Universities of Belgrade and Sofia.

He began his academic career in 1946 at the Skopje Faculty of Philosophy, where for more than thirty years he taught the history of the Macedonian language and other subjects in the field of Slavonic studies. During this time he published over three hundred articles, specialised studies and separate books, particularly in the field of the history of the Macedonian language and literature. Especially worthy of mention, owing to their synthetic nature, are *A Grammar of the Macedonian Literary Language* (two volumes, 1952 and 1954) and *A History of the Macedonian Language* (1965). He was the editor of the three-volume *Dictionary of the Macedonian Language* (1961, 1965, 1966).

He has held important posts in academic and cultural circles. He was Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy. Rector of the University of Skopje (1958 - 1960), President of the Association of Macedonian Writers and of the Yugoslav Writers' Union (1960 - 1964). When the Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences was set up in 1967, he was elected as its first President, a position he held until 1975.

It is poetry which takes pride of place in his literary activities. In 1945 his long poem, *The Bridge*, came out. The following collections succeeded it: *Land and Love* (1948), *Poems*

(1953), *Embroideress* (1955; new expanded edition 1961), *Notes* (1974) and *Poems Old and New* (1979). His short stories appear in the collection, *Vineyard* (1955) and his essays in *Speeches and Essays* (1972). He has also distinguished himself as a translator of poetry, notably with Nyegosh's *Mountain Wreath* (1947), Heine's *Lyrical Intermezzo* (1952), Shakespeare's *Othello* (1953), Blok's *Poetry* (1966) and Presheren's *Baptism by the Savitsa* (1980).

In 1967 a collection of his literary and academic works was published in seven books. This collection appeared in a new and expanded edition in 1981. In 1982 a collection in four volumes came out in Serbo-Croatian. His works have been published several times in Yugoslavia in Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian and Albanian. The following collections of his poetry published abroad are particularly worthy of note: *La Picamatrice*, A cura di Giacomo Scotti. Maria, Sienna, 1967; *Poeme*, Antologie si traducere de Dumitru M. Jon, Editura Albatros, Bucharest, 1974; *I Kentistra*, Metafrási Vasili Karadza, Aimos, Athens, 1979; *Poems*, Translated by Andrew Harvey and Anne Pennington, André Deutsch, London, 1979; *Marko temploma*, Vátogatta és az utoszót Irta Paszkal Cilevski, Europa Könyvkiado, Budapest, 1980; *Jildizlari ormek*. Türkçesi Necati Zekeriya, Cern Yayinevi, Istanbul, 1981; *Hafciarka i inne wiersze*, Przekład Bogdan Drozdowski, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow, 1982.

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In 1966 he received the highest mark of recognition in Yugoslavia with the AVNOY Prize. He has also been awarded several literary prizes, including the Yugoslav Writers' Union Prize for *Embroideress* (1956) and the Prize of the Writers' Union of the USSR for his translations of Russian poetry (1968). In 1971 the University of Vienna awarded him the Herde Prize. *Notes* brought him the Miladinov Brothers Prize, the 11th October Prize and the Kocho Ratsin Prize (1974), as well as the Yugoslav award, the Nyegosh Prize (1975). In 1981 he was awarded the international prize of the Golden Wreath at the Struga Poetry Evenings. In 1982 he won the Branko Milkovich Poetry Prize.