

WRITERS OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVNIA IN THE ALBANIAN LANGUAGE: THE ANTOLOGY “STORYTELLERS OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVNIA”

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Abstract: The Balkan Peninsula contains dynamic linguistic, cultural, and literary manifestations. We discuss Albanian, Serbian, Bosnian, Macedonian, Bulgarian languages and literatures, among others. Despite this natural dynamism and the linguistic differences, the Balkan region, due to its shared historical, political, and social experiences, forms a common backdrop. This does not imply unification but rather the interaction of diversities within a shared space. Such interaction can be observed, for instance, in the literary themes that various authors from the region address in their works. Thus, Homo-Balcanicus can gain a more comprehensive existential portrait by exploring the works of different authors from this region. The encounter with The Other—or what lies beyond Me—can be achieved either through a shared language or through interlingual translation. The former is less widespread, while the latter is more dominant. Understanding others through language involves translation, where the translator plays a crucial role not only linguistically but also culturally. Encountering others through translated literature means gaining a better understanding of both them and oneself, and also dispelling prejudices that arise from ignorance. The focus of our paper will be the translation of works by writers from Bosnia and Herzegovina into the Albanian language, aiming to provide an overview of these translations during the 20th and 21st centuries. In our analysis, we will concentrate on notable figures such as Ivo Andrić and Meša Selimović, among others.

Keywords: Balkan peninsula, writers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, translation, short story

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Introduction

The Balkan peninsula contains dynamic linguistic, cultural and literary manifestations. We talk about Albanian language and literature, Serbian language and literature, Bosnian, Macedonian, Bulgarian and so on. Within this natural dynamism (the languages are different from each other) the matrix of the Balkan area, due to the conditions of almost the same historical, political and social fates experienced, put a common curtain upon. It doesn't mean unification, but communication of diversities in a common space. Such a thing can be observed, for instance, in the literary themes that various authors of the region treat in their works. Thus, *Homo-Balkanicus* can get a more complete existential portrait during time if we read from different authors.

The meeting with *The Other*/what is beyond *Me*, can be realized either through the same language, or through the process of translation. The first is less extensive, the second is dominant. Knowing the other is made through language, where the guarantor of this process is the translator, who undertakes this initiative not only linguistically, but also culturally. But meeting the other through translated language (in this case through translated literature) in the same time means getting to know him and getting to know yourself better, just as it means getting rid of the prejudices that multiply when there is lack of knowledge. And, unfortunately, prejudice in this space has not been absent in the past, even in the recent one. Therefore, literary communication between nations is a very important cultural process.

In our paper, we will deal with the translations of Bosnian authors into the Albanian language. At the beginning, we will give a general overview of the state of translations from this literature into the Albanian language. We will see this divided into two periods. First, between the years 1950-1990, which coincides with the communist system in Albania, and the second, with the new millennium: years 2000-2020. We get the information for this part from the data found on the official website of the National Library of Albania, working especially with the annual indexes of translations, for the years 2000 and after.

The second part of the paper will be the analysis of the anthology *Storytellers of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, prepared by the researcher Vuk Kernjevic. We will focus on some special, original and modern aspects of some authors involved. In other words, some aspects of their poetics will be the objectives of our reading, since as Vuk Kernjevic states in his introduction, when he talks about the "Bosnian storytelling tradition" and its evolution through authors: "only the younger generation of storytellers, representatives of which are Llukiqi and Fetahagiqi,

introduced elements of essayistic prose and ironic narration, partially separating from the ‘Bosnian storytelling tradition’” (Kernjevic, V., 1971: 9).

At the end, we want to bring through our reading experience the reflection that the literature of our region appears full of linguistic richness, impressive figures, fantasy, full of life, vivid, expressive, intriguing subjects, and, above all, with rich human thought. A special world where the Balkan man lives, the common man of every country in this region. A world that, through great existential challenges, great political and social obstacles, alienating conditions from oppressive and dictatorial systems, and many, many other difficulties that have never spared the Balkan man, did not defeat him, on the contrary, made him stronger.

Translations of Bosnian literature into Albanian

It has come to attention that the translation of Balkan literature has experienced substantial growth in Albania since 2005. We have more Bosnian literature for the Albanian readers, more Macedonian, Serbian, Montenegro etc. This, of course, has its basis in the change of historical conditions and political philosophy in the region, which through policies supported in a special way by the internationals, but also as an expression of the internal spirit that the people themselves and the new national elites politics feel in the new millennium, therefore, for a need to communicate with each other more and more gave concrete support to cultural initiatives that bring these countries closer to each other and meet the literatures and national identities. In this context, can be mentioned the cultural projects undertaken through “Traduki” program and other cultural initiatives with regional cooperation.

Referring to official data on publications translated into Albanian, obtained from the website of the National Library of Albania (www.bksh.al), it turns out that Bosnian literature before the 1990s entered in our country almost through the publications of Prishtina/Kosovo, where very high-quality Albanian writers and editors translated representative Bosnian authors. Whereas, after the 1990s, especially after the 2000s, Albanian translators bring the primary authors of this literature directly into the Albanian language. In the first case, we mention Prishtina as the center of publications and translations, symbolized by the publishing house “Rilindja”, and as translators and editors stand out: Esad Mekuli, Fahredin Gunga, Ali Podrimja, etc. While in the second case Tirana becomes the center of publications and translations from Bosnian literature. As translators can be mentioned: Virgjil Muçi, Ben Andoni, Milena Selimi, Ajsela Koka, Urim Poshka, Migena Pengili, etc., or the poet and publisher of “Ideart” publishing

house, Arian Leka, who has a significant contribution to the oncoming of the two literatures through “Traduki” cultural programs. Even today, this policy is dynamic, sharing the best achievements between the two countries.

The information taken from the National Library of Albania (not pretending that it is exhaustive, but valuable enough to give the approximate image of a statistic in generalized values), it results that before the 1990s were brought to Albanian through the translations of Prishtina more books than after the 2000s. It is understandable because of the political configuration of Kosovo at that time, which was included under the former Yugoslavian federation. The language factor is the one that makes communication sufficiently easy and practically enables literary translations.

Therefore, a brief overview of translations prior to the 1990s reveals the following titles in chronological order:

1. *Collection of selected stories*, by Ivo Andric, published by Mustafa Bakija, Prishtina, 1954;
2. *The cursed yard*, by Ivo Andric, published by Miladin Popovic, Prishtina 1957; This edition will come again in 1975, this time translated by Esad Mekuli;
3. *Drini's Bridge*, by Ivo Andric, translated by Mehmet Hoxha, edited by Sulejman Drini, Prishtina, 1960;
4. *The story about Siman*, by Ivo Andric, translated by Xhevdet Basha, Prishtina, 1965;
5. *Little stories for big kids*, by Alekelska Mikici, 1966 edition;
6. *Chronicle of Travnik: the times of the Consuls*, by Ivo Andric, translated by Vehap Shita, Prishtina, 1967;
7. *Dervish and the death of Meša Selimovic*, Prishtina, 1968;
8. *Stories*, by Ivo Andric, translated by Nazmi Rrahmani, edited by Rifat Kukaj, Prishtina, 1976;
9. *The Castle*, by Meša Selimović, Prishtina, 1983;
10. *The impure blood* of Borisav Stankovic, translated by Hilmi Agani, edited by Rifat Kukaj, Prishtina, 1976. This edition is the third one, while the novel has known four editions. The first two were in 1964, while the fourth was in 1987 and was edited by Ali Podrimja.

11. *Ogursëzi*², by Nedžad Ibriaimovic, translated by Musa Ramadani and edited by Ali Podrimja, Prishtinë, 1988;
12. *Namati*, by Vuk Kernjevic, edited by Fahredin Gunga, Prishtina, 1986;
13. *Storytellers of Bosnia and Herzegovina (anthology)*, translated by Esad Mekuli and edited by Stathi Kostari, Prishtina, 1971.

In the new millennium, several Bosnian authors have been translated into Albanian:

1. Ivo Andric, *Bridge over the Drin*, translated by Ajsela Koka, "Dritan" publications, Tirana, 2005;
2. Ivo Andric, *Cursed Yard*, translated by Ajsela Koka, "Dritan" publications, Tirana, 2006;
3. Ivo Andric, *Anika's Times*, translated by Ajsela Koka, "Dritan" publications, Tirana, 2006;
4. Ivo Andric, *Stories from Sarajevo: stories*. Translated by Migena Pengili, Tirana, 2007;
5. Meša Selimovic, *Dervish and the Death*, translated by Ben Andoni, "Papirus" publications, Tirana, 2009;
6. Ivo Andric, *Chronicles of Travnik: the time of the consuls*, translated by Virgjil Muçi, "IDK" publications, Tirana, 2009;
7. Emir Imamovic Pirke, *The secret of the valley of the Pyramids: on the trail of evidence that intelligent beings lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, translated by Ben Andoni, "Ideart" publications, Tirana, 2010;
8. Enes Karic, *Songs of wild birds: a novel*, translated by Ben Andoni and Silvana Leka, "Poeteka" publications, Tirana, 2014;
9. Andrej Nikolaidis, *Son*, translated by Virgjil Muçi, "IDK" publications, Tirana, 2014;
10. Dzevad Karahasan, *Divan lindor*, translated by Urim Poshka, "Alsar" publications, Tirana, 2015;
11. Dako Tusevljakovic, *The abyss*, translated by Ben Andoni, "Albas" publications, Tirana, Prishtina, Tetovo, 2019

² We left the title in the Albanian language. Literally it symbolizes "a very bad sign, a very bad person".

As can be seen from the bibliographic information above, the most translated author in the Albanian language in both periods is Ivo Andric. From 1954 to 1976, it turns out that has been translated 8 times, while from 2005 to 2009, 5 times.

In 1961 Ivo Andric won the Nobel Prize in literature. A great event, which definitely influenced his presence in the literature of the region. However, we can't leave without mentioning the novels of Meša Selimovic, Borisav Stanković, etc., which also through their art have influenced the reception of Bosnian literature by Albanian readers.

An Anthology of Storytellers of Bosnia and Herzegovina

In 1971, Esad Mekuli, as translator, and Stathi Kostari, as editor of "Rilindja" publishing house in Prishtina, brought into the Albanian language the anthology prepared by the author Vuk Kernjevic, entitled *Storytellers of Bosnia and Herzegovina*.

The anthology contains 17 pieces of Bosnian writers who are represented by the short story genre. We also find the names of well-known authors such as: Ivo Andric, Meša Selimovic, Branko Ćopić, Erih Kosh, etc. The foreword of the book, written by its author, Vuk Kernjevic, helps to understand some of the stories. This, because some of them, thanks to the modernist techniques are not so easy to be understood in the first reading. Especially stories like that of Risto Trifković, titled "Selfishness", of Alija Isaković, titled "Cracks", etc.

Each author has his own literary poetics, so to talk about their features you have to stop at each one separately. But from the thematic point of view can be made some common observations, because everyone talks about the Bosnian man of the 20th century, about the simple one, who breathes and lives every day of his life in his small space, which can be part of a town, a remote province, a lost village, or a city. Sarajevo, for example, is a topic found in several authors, as the topic of the province is present as well. If in Andrić's, Jevtić's, Shubić's, Selimović's, Panxho's stories rural life is more tangible, more possessive in relation to the city, we can even say that it is an escape of the character, a departure from the village towards the city, to other authors, such as Ćopić, Trifkovic, Llukic, Isakovic, Fetahagic, the physical distance is not important. What matters here is the psychological treatment of the characters, who move and search within themselves. The situations that they produce and the situations they fall victim to build the narrative spaces of the characters. The psychological element and the breakdown of the allegorical, symbolic, even grotesque language takes on more significant space. For example, in cases like Vitomir Llukić's, "The story about the mouse", the big psychological conditions of the main character accompany

the reader throughout the text. The idea of surveillance, of following, of persecution, turns almost into paranoia for the protagonist, who comes to the reader in anonymity form. He has no individualized name to symbolize other people who, just like him, share the same fate, experience the same doubts. The narrative is put in the first person, singular, giving the idea of present tense in process.

The plot of the story is simple. A man who suspects that someone has entered in his apartment, and because of this, with the trouble caused by the process of finding and catching the other person, he goes through a lot of embarrassment and anxiety for many, many days. The character has to go back down the stairs several times to check if he has locked the main door of the apartment, because the fear that someone can enter in his inner space is very, very large. Even when his memory affirms that he did such an action (he has locked the door—he even remembers very well each detail of hand movements), despite this, he is not at all calm. Therefore, he had to “leave the company where he was and to run home” to check (“The story about the mouse”: 172). Or when, for the same reason he needs to disturb his night’s sleep, or be sleepless for whole night, just because he has to stand guard to protect the main door: inside his house he hears noises in the form of light rustling. He manages to build scenarios that someone: a stranger, an enemy, may have entered into his apartment and is hiding behind the toilet door. But all this is in his mind! In the end, he reasons that no one has entered in his apartment, but most likely a mouse is moving. He concludes that only a mouse can do this. Yes, the mouse, that creature of the underground, of the underground galleries, which as soon as it finds the opportunity enters and erodes the human space. Right here begins the psychological communication of the protagonist, who in the disgusting figure of the mouse sees not only the creature that comes from the underground, but the threat of a whole underground world, a real world, which is parallel to the overworld, unlike the human world.

What happens in this disgusting, but very threatening reality? The character is psychologically shocked, but he is able enough to formulate lucid and very logical syntheses: *“I could not resist the thought that those eyes had with them something determined and wise, and that they expressed a hidden purpose of the underworld to move and come out into the light of day, into pure homes, into our beds, dishes, libraries, and to fill them all with their gloomy movements along the edges, which resemble swimming in fine wavy eddies. (...) The future is theirs, they will remain after everything, after floods, fires and atomic wars, because much earlier than we who have started digging ditches and hiding in the ground from ourselves, they have chosen darkness for their kingdom”*. (“The story about the mouse”: 175).

This character, who could be anyone living in the 20th century, due to the great psychological burden he has, fights between the real and the unreal to tell the truth that only the sincerity that originates from the unconscious part can do. Not meaningless he closes the story questioning himself in a psychological monologue, which in the same time serves as the main key of the story: "Are we not dying of fear one day before anything happens? We will wake up frozen in our beds." ("The story about the mouse": 178).

The chaos and the loss of the character between reality and hallucination, this time of a special kind, which goes to the limits of a mental pathology, but however again caused by the great difficulties of existence, where human life is wasted in the province, can be found also in the story entitled "Selfishness", by Risto Trifković. A very interesting, impressive, modern story. Language is used according to the nature of the psychological experience that the character feels. A language that comes in pieces, with oscillations according to this state that character reflects. We see its traces in the frequent use of commas and conjunctions, in the use of short sentences that connect to each other in a long period, to show exactly the tiredness and psychological disorientation, that state of shock that character experiences from his own actions and thoughts. In the moments when he can't recognize if he is real or crazy: "All of this was unbelievable. Until yesterday he lived peacefully, but now he is in trouble, and life is not worth a penny", (Trifković, R., "Selfishness": 152), the reader encounters the rapid imagination of the narrator, who after taking us through the troubled days of this character (who in a winter night meets at the train station a woman, much older than him, ugly, but still necessary for him to spend a few moments of intimacy), suddenly puts the protagonist in bed with ... a cow! The metamorphoses woman-cow happen very quickly and are almost melted. Then, the sexual act between him and the animal that stays already in the big bed. All this happens in a messy and chaotic manner that is given only from the perspective of the protagonist. Between this craziness and "real ugly instinct behavior" lays the whole spiritual and mental state of the protagonist. At the end of the story, the narrator shows up himself with a solution that solves everything: The character, in fact, due to his psychological burden and already pathological signs, has killed the woman with whom he had slept for two nights in bed. The whole woman-cow metamorphosis was only in his head, a sick head and suffocated by hallucinations, which can be caused by deep emptiness, a life filled with vanity, much misery and spiritual dirt. This is the existential struggle of modern man in the second half of the 20th century, and not only.

The technique of character anonymity is also used by other writers, for example Alija Isakovic, who calls the protagonist of his story “Cracks” simply “Pale-eye-brow”. A feature of the portrait which rises to the status of name. Or Mladen Olac’s story, “His son” which places the figure of the father and son and the army officer in the role of protagonists. Here the familiar affiliation is used for naming the character: the father, the son, the officer, etc.

The difficult life, not only at the personal level, but also as a family portrait and social one, where the protagonist is being presented in relations of husband-wife/father-child/employee-employer/individual-community, can be found in the very beautiful story of Erih Kosh, titled: “The man who knew where is north and where is south”. A story that talks about man’s power to face difficulties, his persistence to achieve something more than his grand grandparents, the confusion and then the fall brought by the lack of understanding from the environment and from his closest people: his wife, the loss and appearance of his dark side that comes from difficulties and heavy existential conditions, etc. Finally returning to start over and rise again. But the moving curve of the vital character of this story, Jefto Stojan Çokorillos, is not so easy and simple. It undergoes with variables and multiples to underline the fact that these stories, that speak about the common Bosnian man, are not simple and linear, on the contrary, they are filled with psychological introspection, where human dramas happen every day and kill mercilessly, and yet, in the end the man is not defeated.

Conclusion

The literature presented in this anthology of *Bosnian storytellers* is impressive, diverse, longing and soul-stirring. These dimensions are not new and unknown, but, yet very enriching. The protagonist of the story does not lose the human dimension in his difficult existential and ethical journey. He does not stop at hate, but seeks love.

It seems to me that the Balkan man always knew how to rise from the abyss where he fell, and like the sphinx, is reborn, purified and full of life. The beautiful Bosnian literature had the ability and kindness to show me This Truth, which I met through the anthology of 17 distinguished storytellers.

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