

Poems by RISTO VASILEVSKI

GUARDIAN OF THE FIELD

the field must be guarded. the bread. the birds.
the flow of water from the source to the mouth. the harvest.
the autumn. one must become a greyhound, burrow under the earth,
take care of the seeds of underground crops. one must
soar into the air, catch hold of every ripple.

they appointed me keeper. they bought me binoculars
framed in felt. a noose. hides of a
skinned animal. (someone is to be tied
to a pillar. to an underwater rock). they gave me
a rifle. a knife. all powers. and said : guard the
field, take care of a plot of land (made of the
foam of the sea and the air). take care of yourself.

many tribes have passed (they did not touch it).
they took shots of it from below, from above, from
all sides. the last ones gave us beautiful maps.
they clearly show: our field, near it the
sea. the rivers, the lakes, the cleared forests.
they revealed all ; there's no place you can hide.

they commanded : guard the field. guard the pupils of your eyes.
they showed me the boundaries, the limits in the air.
now I watch them, I'm all eyes. by day and by night.
and I wonder : who needs them?
so often have I crossed them, in play and at work.
publicly and secretly. and I always returned as
to the finest source, as to the pillar of my consciousness.

I feel : the field is narrow for me. as for a stone
in the chest. I need breadth. space. the world.
but what can I do: I take the rifle, direct the sights
across the boundary. at someone's back. into someone's life.
I look out for everyone's skull. I threaten them, and answer their threats.
I bare my teeth, all of them.

No one is jesting. everyone is guarding his field.
from what? from whom ? (or else for whom ?). the centuries

have gone by and all has stayed in its place.
the hills and the mountains, the leaves and trees, the whole cosmos.
only men have grabbed, displaced boundaries.
with battles came the blood. with battles came death. I
still stand guard over the field. I know whose it is.
I also know why. but I'm only pretending...

Translation by
Vidosava Janković

UNBEARABLE DESTINY

Once the nether world was easily reached,
Hermes was unique
and the journey safe and know.
One could also return from there,
if Orpheus's blunder was not repeated
when rescuing Eurydice.

One had to know humble words,
clothe them in mellifluous tones
and with them melt the hearts of stone
that shut the gates of Hades,
And go on, never looking back,
till the boundary was crossed
between death and life.

Now many paths lead to hell
and all are thronged with travellers
over whom no angels guard,
nor saintly chants of earthly priests.

Now contemporary, brutal Hermeses,
lead travellers from afar,
from out their secret lairs,
from off their public stumps,
and in the general melée,
no bounteous voice is heard,
nor the cry of Eurydice,
long pleading for salvation.

Unbearable is this our fate,
forgotten as we are by life,
and so lightly left to die!

Translation by
Vidosava Janković

Bio-bibliography:

Risto Vasilevski - poet, novelist, essayist, anthologist, literary critic, translator, and academician - was born in 1943, in Nakolec, a village on the shore of the Lake Prespa, Macedonia. He received his formal education in his birthplace and, later, in Ljubojno. He moved to Skopje to complete his education in civil engineering and to receive his B.A. degree from the school of architecture.

His literary works have been published in both Macedonian and Serbian.

He has translated and rendered in verses - from Macedonian into Serbian and vice versa, as well as from Bulgarian, Slovenian, Albanian, Rumanian and other, mainly Slavic, languages - over a hundred and twenty works, including poetry, prose, essays, dramas, anthologies.

From 1965 to 1969 he lived in Požarevac, Serbia. In 1969 he moved to Smederevo, Serbia, where he has been living and working ever since. It is here that his literary and publishing activities became even more productive. He founded and for a long time served as the board director or president of the *International Poetry Festival "Smederevo Poetry Autumn"* (since 1971). He was editor of a number of journals and magazines, such as "*Braničevo*", "*Smederevo*", "*Moravska lira*" (The Morava Lyre), "*Sutra*" (Tomorrow), "*Mons Aureus*", "*Književne novine*" (Literary Newspaper). He is currently owner, director and editor-in-chief of the *Publishing House "Arka"* from Smederevo, and editor-in-chief of the *Publishing House „Makedonski informativni i izdavački centar“* (Macedonian Information and Publishing Center) from Pančevo, as well of the magazines „Makedonska videlina“ (Macedonian Views), „Videlo“ (Light) and „Dzunica“ (Rainbow).

Vasilevski is the recipient of a special recognition of the Government of the Republic of Serbia for his first-class contribution to the national culture.

Risto Vasilevski is a member of the Macedonian Academy of Art and Science, as well of the Academy of Slovene Literature and Art (Varna, Bulgaria). He is also a member of the International Writers and Journalists Association (Riga, Latvia), the Association of Writers of Macedonia, the Association of Writers of Serbia and Association of Literary Translators of Serbia.