

Translation Project *Macedonian Literature in English*

Government of the Republic of Macedonia

Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia

St. Clement of Ohrid, National and University Library - Skopje

2011

Translation Project *Macedonian Literature in English*

**Petre Bakevski**

**CELESTIAL FIRE**

Translation from Macedonian  
Zoran Ančevski, Snežana Nečovska

CIP - Каталогизација во публикација  
Национална и универзитетска библиотека  
„Св. Климент Охридски“, Скопје

821.163.3-1(081)

821.163.3-1.09Бакевски,П.

BAKEVSKI, Petre

Celestial fire / Petre Bakevski ; translation from Macedonian Zoran Ančevski, Snežana Nečovska. - Skopje : St. Clement of Ohrid, National and University Library - Skopje, 2011. -234 стр. ; 21 см

Превод на делото: Небесен оган / Петре Бакевски. - The eternal flame of the celestial fire : to the poetry of Petre Bakevski / Ranko Mladenoski: стр. 11-17. - Bio-bibliographical notes on the author: стр. 229.

ISBN 978-608-232-105-9

1. Бакевски, Петре види Bakevski, Petre

а) Бакевски, Петре (1947-) - Поезија - Критики и толкувања

COBISS.MK.ID 88876298

Original title:

**Петре Бакевски**

**НЕБЕСЕН ОГАН**

## THE ETERNAL FLAME OF THE CELESTIAL FIRE

(To the poetry of Petre Bakevski)

Further to reading grandiose poetic works of Petre Bakevski, it should be noted for those who intend to interpret or explain his poetry, there remains no alternative but to launch into a search of microstructures, which within their semantic thread contain the deep inner meanings of the "heavy" verses - according to both their form and their content.

The Macedonian literary critics have already pointed out the basic provocations, aspirations and "original intentions" of the poet Petre Bakevski. Consequently, Venko Andonovski speaks of the three phases of the poetic creativity found of this poet of ours:

"Petre Bakevski made his debut in Macedonian poetry as the author of the poem "The Clean Lyrical Sensibility". With the book *Journey into Summer* he showed his interest in only, an only (in the exact mathematically sense of the word) lyrical sensibility... It appears to me that this struggle for lyrical sensibility, for the original metaphor within the general explosion of metaphors shown by his brilliant predecessors, in the case of Bakevski continued into the collection of poetry with the indicative title *The Ragged Map* (1984)... From this publication, from this year, in the poetical journey of Bakevski, may be observed an interesting transformation, greatly enjoyed by the naive consciousness of the ordinary reader as a natural expansion of his poetry...

With this, Bakevski takes his first step from the avant-garde (metaphorical) towards anti-modernistic (metonymic) poetry...

Finally, in this short diachronic examination of the poetic development of Bakevski, as well as the metaphoric (modernistic) and metonymic (anti-modernistic) phase, it is essential that we also note the third and final phase: the post-modernistic. David Lodge, as one of the faithful successors of Roman Jakobson claimed that the metaphor gave credibility to modernism, that constant oscillation between the metaphoric and the metonymic half of the discourses could define the phenomenon of the post-modern poem.

This third phase, in the case of Petre Bakevski matches to his trilogy project: *One hundred Sonnets, Elegies, and Ballads*".

Sande Stojchevski, again, registers two global characteristics found in the poetry of Bakevski. "Petre Bakevski in his poetry as a whole, draws two deeply complimentary lines: the longing for a firm grip, the desire for comprehensiveness, and simultaneously, nothing less than the strong and firm purpose of density and concentration, of definite and delicate frames, of total control over excited powers and matters, in nature as in the world equally balanced within all the areas covered by the poem".

The Poet Ante Popovski identified in the poetry of Petre Bakevski as a symbiosis between the mythical and the historical deposits, pointing out this method as one of the essential characteristics of his verses:

From the extremely rich and complex historical, mythical and philosophical materials which with both specific facts and indications are connected to the life and works of Alexander the Great, Petre Bakevski has opted for the most relevant historical, most authentic mythical, philosophical and associative overtones and exceptionalities of this material... Resulting in achieving the climax of poetical articulation and a synthesis of one of the most recognizable historical and imaginative writings in which the tragedy of the personality is penalized in the conscience and destiny of descendants, both before and after us".

The critics have also noted the poetic energy of Petre Bakevski which is directed towards concern for the rhyme, the

rhythm, the metrics of the verse found in his poetic works with a predominant epic character.

## **Identity**

In reading the poetry of Bakevski, the reader is as if under an everlasting impression that in every line, in every poetic phrase there is a sense of self searching, exertion for self-recognition, for self-identification. This however, is not the troubled questioning which always needs to be sought in the hidden metaphors and symbols, because within this poetry one will frequently come upon explicit poetic phrases. Nevertheless, of course, there are numerous "hidden places" in which can be discovered the traces of the individual "I", the excruciating journey to oneself.

The search for the individual identity, in the poetry of Bakevski unfolds in parallel with another, similar search – the search for National identity. It is generally well known that in times of crisis, wars and other disturbing upheavals, by automatism surfaces the crisis of identity – both the personal and individual, likewise the collective and National. This is when within the individual appears the need to identify firm guarantees for the location of, and consolidation of the identity for his own acknowledgement. Given that the present is unsure, unstable, that the future uncertain, the individual begins the journey towards the past in order to discover the secure basis on which the forefathers founded, affirmed, or again succeeded in preserving the collective identity. Precisely due to this fact, in the poetry of Bakevski such readdressing to the forefathers, or, yet again, searching for the route once taken by known and unknown forefathers is frequently observed.

One of the dominating elements in the poetry of Petre Bakevski is the return to the past, the journey in the shadows of past events and persons. And from where comes such an obsession with, or towards, the past? It is because in the past lie the answers to all of those questions by which today we are tortured, agitated, and for which in the present, naturally, also the experiences of the past, with all their failings and virtues which can direct us towards building the future.

The mythological and historical articulations in the poetry of Bakevski are already noted by literary critics. Therein it is indicative of this poetry to clarify the relativity of the borders between myth from one side, and history from the other.

There are a true wealth of mythological images and characters which here, in the poetry of Bakevski, are projected in deposits of the lyrical subject, therefore meaning that here also dominates that searching and wishing for confirmation of the identity. This again refers to, that so-called "historical layer", from which it can be concluded that as a whole, the poetry of Bakevski abounds with frequent returns towards historic events and characters which in one way or another are connected with us, with our Country, our people, with the journey of our forefathers through the centuries. And the search for victorious days, for heroic times, for noble events, though from a completely different aspect, a dislocated point of view. Here there is no domination of the scenes of battles, the global images of historic events, but an opening into the internal world of heroes, searching, and searching again for their yearnings, wishes, sadness and disappointment. This creates a totally different impression of those famous heroes, of those undefiant heroes of the battlefield. Their outer determination and bravery, on which history insists, is now transformed into inner restlessness, doubt, sadness and pain. Bakevski is not re-telling history, here he is remodeling, or, to be more exact, he is extending, completing, having before himself that quintessential question – were those warriors which history shows us as firm and irreproachably stable heroes really always that way, or were they beings of flesh and blood, full of anguish, sadness, regret, inner unease, with their own inner restlessness and disappointments, with weaknesses and with this left room for some kind of comfort for us ordinary mortals, for "insignificants", as they are called by Blaže Koneski.

Illustration the inner conflict of the lyrical subject is made through "monolithic dialogues" and "dialogical monoliths". There are the conflicts between belief and doubt, bravery and fear, joy



and sorrow, ambition and the unrealized dream. In the crude present reality, the identity and integrity is endangered, the security and the basic survival. Such a crisis breeds frustrations which inevitably lead to conflict, towards collision. Not to outer but to inner conflict. The conflict that is present both with oneself and within oneself. The lyrical attributes are pushed away into some epical place. Precisely because of this, amongst critics, one frequently comes across a thesis that the poetry of Petre Bakevski is lyrically epic or epically lyrical. Because of this, many poetic verses by Bakevski resemble poems.

### **Palimpsest**

The usage of citation is one of the most realistic characteristics of so-called postmodern literature. It was already established that the third phase of the poetical works of Bakevski is post modernistic. Reconstruction of "the old text" in his poetry unfolds into numerous planes. By "old text", it is not necessary to interpret "text" literally. It is like this because in the poetry of Bakevski "old text" is, for example Alexander the Macedonian. There, in his verses, "old text" also includes "Troy", "Homer", "Paler", "King Arhelay", followed by "Saint Naum", "Prličev and Koneski", "Stobi", etc.

But there are also "old text" which are really old texts. There is the poetry of Koneski, the poetry of Ante Popovski, numerous vintage historical writings... The most recent completion of "empty places" in those palimpsests have a totally defined objective and clear function – to express the unexpressed, to write the unwritten, to place the new over the old, solid foundations. Thus, in this manner, it is necessary to read all of those poetic works in which we are reminded of familiar places, events, characters from the distant or near past, in which the poet serves in the designation of new messages, new jeopardies, new falls and ascents, new searches for identity, for fortune, for realizing dreams.

The fundamental characteristics of the poetry of Petre Bakevski are in binary oppositions, up – down, sky – earth, Eros – Thanatos. That which is emphasized in this poetry is the

immortality of the sky, the cosmos, the galaxy, from one side, and from the other, the briefness and ephemera of human life, that is to say the individual. It is not by coincidence that we finally emphasize that one of the messages of this poetry is just that "briefness" life of the human is eternal, indestructible and consistent. His life is recorded, registered, saved in universal cosmic conception, in the eternity of the universe, in the eternal flame of the celestial fire. That universal cosmic conception eternally protects the code of human life and eternally renews the same.

Here is the flame, the sky, the stars, the sun, the moon, the earth, the water. All of these symbols of eternity, indestructibility and of consistency. All of these are symbols of life – eternal life. Accordingly, those in the poetry of Bakevski are "alive", anthropomorphically; therefore they are "life" which is memorized, memorizing life; they know and memorize the past, within themselves they encapsulate the code of the future; they conserve our roots from the past; they cultivate the deep roots of the future. The sky and the flame are symbols of male principles; the earth and the water are symbols of the female principles.

In the poetry of Petre Bakevski, particularly interesting, even strange and puzzling, is the symbolism of the bird. In all of his poetic works, there is almost no poem in which the word "bird" is not mentioned. We say that this symbolism is "strange" due to the polysemous usage of this symbol.

## **Conclusion**

The poetry of Petre Bakevski presents a comprehensive, imperial literary achievement. The quantity of his verse is substantiated with poetic quality. Bakevski creates enormous poetic projects which within them carry substantial meanings, symbols, morals and messages. The foundations of this poetry are myth, history, the present and intellectual conditions of the lyrical subject as seen in the future. The pivot around which rotate all of his verses are a ballad in search of identity (individual and

National), a search for the meaning of existence, a search of the securest and least painful paths which life bears in the future. In his poetry, the roots of the past are at the same time the roots of the present and of the future. Bakevski seeks just this – in the deep roots of the future.

With the poetry of Petre Bakevski, Macedonian literature is enriched with unusual, extraordinary and exceedingly valuable poetic works. In saying "unusual", above all we think of the numerous verses of which this work is created and the representation of different types of poetry within – from the most simple to the most complex. In saying "extraordinary" we think of the preoccupied state of the poet in relation to the past, with myth and with the history which even become an obsession. Again, in saying "exceedingly valuable" then we think first of all the positive appraisal given by the Macedonian literary critics to regarding the poetry of Bakevski. The countless translations of this poetry into numerous foreign languages serve as further confirmation of its great value.

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*Translated by Sofija Glavinova*