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IN MEMORIAM



Miodrag Mića Stojanović
(1934–2020)

Miodrag Mića Stojanović, classical philologist, neo-Hellenic and Balkan studies scholar, senior fellow of the Institute for Balkan Studies, professor at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade and the first chair of its newly-created Department of Neo-Hellenic Studies passed away this August. Professor Stojanović was the author of a large number of works in the field of Balkan Studies and Modern Greek literature, and of literary translations from Modern Greek.

The passing of the dear colleague and friend brings back the memory of an unusual man of proverbially good humour, optimism and inexhaustible relish for life and work. Far from the stereotypical image of people from academia, the intellectual setting that marked his entire career, Professor Miodrag Stojanović – or simply Mića, the informal and endearing name most naturally associated with him – will also be remembered by a distinctive sense of verbal humour, a creative play with humorous possibilities of the Serbian language, which was an inimitable feature of his whole presence and manner.

Born in Malo Krčmare near Rača Kragujevačka, Professor Stojanović gained his first knowledge of philology and developed love of classical antiquity at the Gymnasium of Kragujevac, the school with the longest tradition of classical languages teaching in Serbia. His university studies of classical philology, a

natural continuation of his secondary-school interests, were marked by a powerful influence of Miloš N. Djurić, Milan Budimir and Franjo Barišić, doyens of Serbian classical scholarship. Noticed while still a student, Mića Stojanović published his first works even before graduation (1957), at the encouragement and under the watchful eye of his mentor, the great Uncle Miša, Miloš N. Djurić, who recognized in his talented student an inclination towards comparative studies and the specific question of reception of classical antiquity in the Serbian literature of the modern period. What therefore emerged as the most natural subject of research was the figure of Dositej Obradović – the understudied question of classical influences or the scope of the role of Greek and Roman classical antiquity in Dositej's Enlightenment-inspired programme. This largely pioneering research resulted in his master's thesis "The Classical Legacy in D. Obradović's 'Sobranije'" (1962) and the doctoral dissertation "Dositej and Classical Antiquity" (1965). His subsequent thorough study of domestic and foreign archival sources (Vienna, 1966 and 1967) resulted in the enlarged monograph of the same title (1971). The book on Dositej opened a new chapter in the study of classical influences on the work of the great figure of the Serbian Enlightenment and basically unravelled the concrete question of classical and modern sources of Dositej's collection of fables, establishing the exact measure of originality of the domestic adaptation, created as a hybrid of a number of classical and modern models.

In 1971, after ten years as a teacher of classical languages at Belgrade's 4th and 5th Gymnasiums (1960–70), Miodrag Stojanović joined the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, rising through all scholarly ranks from research associate to principal research fellow (1984). That was a period of his prolific scholarly work in the broad field of classical studies, notably the Hellenic, Byzantine and neo-Hellenic legacy in Serbian literature and culture (D. Obradović, Karadjordje, Vuk Karadžić, B. Radičević, St. Novaković, I. Andrić, J. Dučić). As director of the Institute's project "Linguistic and literary connectedness of the Balkan peoples" (1979–1997), Stojanović increasingly devoted attention to issues of literary and historical interaction between the Serbian and Greek cultural traditions of the modern period, the Balkan Enlightenment, mutual poetic influences of the two national cultures, and especially Serbian and Greek insurgent poetry, the subject-matter of his voluminous synthesis *Haiduks and Klephts in Folk Poetry* (1984). This book contextualized in a novel way the distinctive folklore genre of Balkan insurgent poetry born in the period of Turcocracy, shedding light on the hitherto little-known and little-studied links and analogies, as well as the differences between the two traditions of oral poetry created in two parts of the Ottoman Empire. A particular value of the book was its extensive Appendix containing the author's translations of klephtic songs, which for the most part were their first translations into Serbian. A revised and enlarged collection of klephtic poetry translated by Miodrag Stojanović appeared as a separate book, *An Anthology of*

Modern Greek Folk Poetry (1991; supplemented with further translations and re-published under the title *The Bridge of Arta* in 2002). One of the qualities of the translated *klephtika* is that they follow the original metre, the iambic fifteen-syllable verse of modern Greek folk poetry. Rendered in the supple and dynamic Serbian fifteen-syllable verse adeptly fashioned in the style of folk poetry – a pioneering experiment in the history of poetry translation into Serbian – the haiduk verses of Stojanović's translation, with their diction, lexis and rhythm, strike one as if they were created by an anonymous folklore lyre, as if they were native heroic poems. The *Anthology* was awarded by the Association of Translators of Greece as the best translation of Greek literary works into foreign languages in 1991–92. It should also be noted that Miodrag Stojanović organized three scholarly conferences: *Classical Studies among the Serbs* (Belgrade and Novi Sad 1987), *Svetozar Marković and Lyuben Karavelov* (Svetozarevo 1990), and *Rigas Velestinlis and the Balkan Peoples* (Belgrade 1998), and was the editor of the proceedings of the conference on classical studies among the Serbs (1989).

With the establishment of the Department of Neo-Hellenic Studies at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade in 1995, Miodrag Mića Stojanović assumed the position of its first Chair and Professor of Balkan Studies and Modern Greek Language and Literature. The complexity of designing and carrying out the new Department's curriculum brought new and specific duties. This period in his career produced *A Textbook of Modern Greek Language* (1997) and *A Greek-Serbian Dictionary* (1999), standard university textbooks which filled the gap in the body of Serbian technical literature in the field of neo-Hellenic philology, grammar and lexicography. With his proverbial enthusiasm and almost parental care, Professor Mića Stojanović devoted himself to the first generations of talented students, initiating them into, among other things, the secrets of the art of translation. As the moving force of the Department's translation workshop, founded at his initiative, he took part in preparing and stylistically and poetically editing the collective translation of the whole lyric oeuvre of the Greek Nobel-laureate Giorgos Seferis (2000), which is only one in a series of titles produced by the lively and fruitful activity of the neo-Hellenic translation workshop.

In our last phone conversation this spring, Professor Mića Stojanović showed his habitual cheer and enterprising spirit. In spite of his age and the increasingly angsty atmosphere of the pandemic crisis, the conversation was marked by optimism and revolved around literary and publication plans for the coming months. Like many times before, Professor was true to his sense of serene self-irony, referring in passing to his "last journey" – "via Šumadija", as he put it in his jocular manner – because, at his express wish, it was to end in his native village of Malo Krčmare. No one could know then that only a few months later the pandemic would hasten his last journey to the native country.

