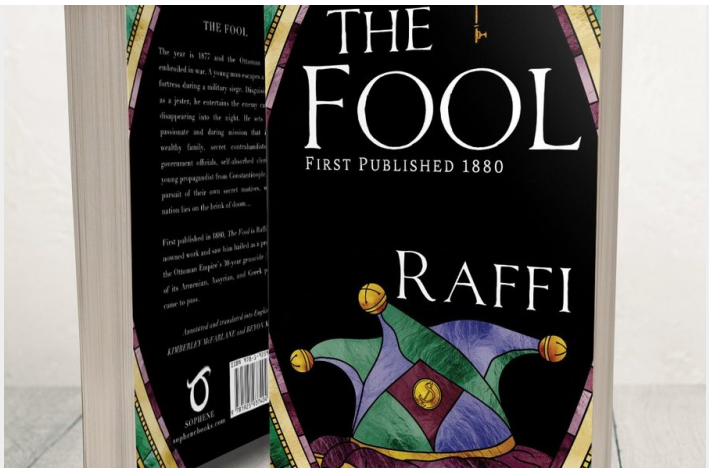
PROMISING TRANSLATIONS

Posted on September 13, 2020 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

"That which I gave to others returned sweeter."

—Vahan Tekeyan(Poet)

Dr. Minas Kojayan, Los Angeles, 10 September 2020

A phone call recently took me back 15 years to when I was taking the 11th grade class at AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian School on an 11-day field trip and pilgrimage to Armenia. Behind a pair of glasses stood an interesting and inquisitive student named Beyon. Happily, and sometimes indulgently, I would answer his questions. He graduated the following year and I heard no more about him, except when I would visit his honorable grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Noubar and Marie Agopian. That was how I found out that he had travelled to Australia to pursue a PhD in psychology. Good news, certainly.

The caller was Beyon Miloyan. Without delay, he explained that he had joyfully devoted himself to translating Armenian literature to English. Could a teacher—in this case, my wife and I—have received better news?

He spoke proudly about how he and his friend and former colleague, Dr. Kimberley McFarlane, had translated Raffi's works, *Jalaleddin*, *Harem*, and *Arable Land,* and had enthusiastically determined to enrich the libraries of English readers with many more translations to come.

"My heart would ache," said Beyon, "that the current generation (of Armenians and non-Armenians) knows nothing about Armenian literature, which has much to offer a broad readership."

Beyon was right. He had felt this pain himself, far away in Australia, where he met his talented Australian colleague who also treasured good literature. Their literary tastes converged. It did not take long for them to jointly found their own publishing company, Sophene, and their subsequent translations and projects elucidate different historical periods of the Armenian tradition.

Beyon and Kimberley have dedicated themselves to this project so ardently that the latter decided to drink from the spring, so to speak, by learning Armenian with AGBU Armenian Virtual College (AGBU-AVC), founded by the accomplished Dr. Yervant Zorian.

I looked over their translations of *Harem, Jalaleddin, The Fool,* and *Prohaeresius,* and their updated editions of Charles Neumann's 1831 translation of Vahram Rabuni's *History of the Rubenian Dynasty* and *The Near East,* which includes various excerpts on historic Armenia from Strabo's important 1st century historical work, *Geographica.*

"Nothing beats the original. We prefer that Armenians and those who can read Armenian to have the original text, which is why we republish these alongside our translations. Unfortunately, diaspora Armenians, especially the current generation, do not know about our rich Armenian literary heritage, and besides that, are not very interested. By translating these works, we hope to make them

available to those Armenians who do not read the language but appreciate the aesthetics of our culture and want to learn about our heritage, as well as to non-Armenians who have a love for classic literature."

Translating Armenian literature into foreign languages is an important initiative in the dissemination of Armenian culture. Let us turn back for a moment to the 5th century and imagine what would have happened if Mesrop Mashtots, Sahak Partev, and their pupils had not translated key works from Greek and Assyrian into Armenian, beginning with the Holy Gospels. Literature, as an important form of communication between peoples, civilizations, and epochs, brings itself palpably to the service of mutual understanding, friendship, and coexistence.

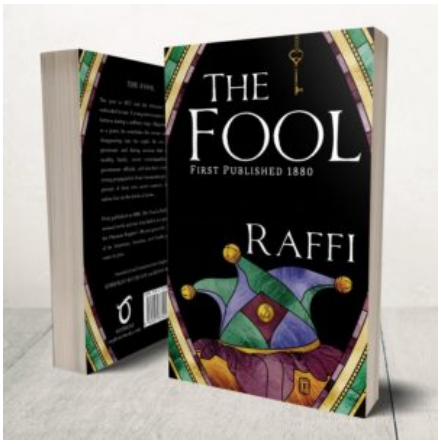
It is in this faith and knowledge that Beyon said to me:

"For over 100 years, people praise the literature of other nations (Russian, French, Indian, Nigerian, and so on…), because they enjoy them and take them to heart. Armenian literature one day may reach such lofty heights. Why not, if we Armenians can succeed in bringing our literature to light?"

Mashtots is the inventor of the Armenian alphabet circa 414, and Sahak Partev was the supreme head (Catholicos) of the Armenian Church. The whole project was sponsored by king Vramshapuh of Armenia.

PanARMENIAN.Net - 9 September 2020

A fresh and complete translation of "The Fool" by celebrated Armenian writer Raffi is coming in November, the Sophene Armenian Library said in a tweet.



"Very excited to announce our forthcoming translation of one of the best known works of Armenian literature, "The Fool". This is the one the people wanted, so we worked hard to be able to release on its 140th anniversary in 2020," the library said.

An earlier translation of the novel was rendered by Jane S. Wingate in 1950.

According to the Sophene Library, however, Wingate "altered part of the plot, omitted portions of the book and took other liberties, so an improved one has been sorely needed".

The new version of the translation is provided by Kimberley McFarlane and Beyon Miloyan.

"The Fool" is one of the best-known novels of one of Armenia's greatest novelists. Based on the last

Russo-Turkish War (1877–78), the plot tells a romance set against the background of the divided Armenian nation.

Comments

Vatche P. – 2020-09-17 13:17:56
Translating our Armenian literature into English, thus making it accessible to the new generation who cannot read Armenian (let alone distinguish between Eastern and Western Armenian) is a huge and a praise-worthy effort that should be encouraged by all: those of us who still read Armenian and those who do not. The Fool's translation must have been a phenomenal work and I would love to see it - hopefully - on the shelves of Amazon or the Book Depository. On the same topic, recently I made a very modest effort in translating one of Baruyr Sevag's poems (After Death) and posted it in my facebook page. The reaction I got from my non-Armenian friends was very impressive - not because of my translation - but how Sevag had woven his words beautifully on a topic which is so universal but yet expressed with the Armenian sentiment. All the best to the efforts of those take up such initiatives.

Vatche P. – 2020-09-17 11:17:17
So, do we assume this new translation has not altered the plot of the novel - something criminal as far as I am concerned?

Arusyak – 2020-09-14 10:45:16
How wonderful, this is great news and I cannot wait to obtain a copy!!