

occasion. Indeed, one cannot help but admit that the reader has the opportunity to participate in some haunting and poignant moments when Ferk sheds the burden of *the principle of modernist experimentation at all costs*; at these times, he gets really excited and produces a moving personal account of the transience of human beings. It is in these plain yet intense renditions that Ferk's purity of language and intelligence generate truly original poems, characteristic for his personal style. His allegiance is, unfortunately, to modernist poetics and the corresponding belief that the poem is the whole world enough in itself, rather than a representation of symbolic and social reality as we know it. It is not difficult to see that what is, for the most part, omitted in this nexus is the growing complexity and significance of the interface between conventional ways of living and the deep-seated human "illness to death." Instead we find a good survey of modernist poetic techniques, ranging from ironic twists to juxtapositions of dramatically divergent words. Today this is however not enough, if one must set out to produce a truly moving poetic account of the human condition in a world which has, basically, seen it all. If the poem cannot offer a *unique interpretation* of either a radically genuine experience or render a generic perception of the world in a language that transcends run-of-the-mill expressions of drug store literature, then it is indeed hard to figure out its *raison d'être*. When in the dull decade of the eighties—which brought about only disenchantment with all conceivable concepts in general, and with postmodernism as an easy way out of the weighty legacy of modernity in particular—world (including Slovene) poetry is rapidly moving away from a compulsory defiance of traditional concerns and paying increasing attention to the issues of concrete characters of flesh and blood, Ferk seems to be perfectly content with philosophical, abstract, and ultimately anemic meditations that derive from reflection rather than as it were from existential, worldly experience. If one decides to stay within this mode, one must undoubtedly write against the high standards of poetic modernism, thus seriously taking into account the work of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, e.e. cummings, and others. This is not at all an easy task, for it does not suffice to acknowledge that these writers simply wrote. That is a fact. One must, instead, engage with their literary strategies in the fashion of critique, challenge, and radical re-interpretation, if one wants to remain on the level of the standards that they established. Janko Ferk has evidently tried to do his best. I fear, however, that his attempts are not quite up to the mark.

Aleš Debeljak, Syracuse University.

Janko Ferk, transl. Herbert Kuhner, *Buried in the Sands of Time*. Riverside CA: Ariadne Press, 1989. 62 pp.

This additional review addresses only the quality of the translations. Readers should be aware that I subjected Herbert Kuhner's translation of poetry by Milena Merlak and Lev Detela to severe criticism four years ago,¹ and that he rejected my criticism.² To his credit, it must be acknowledged that he is a poet in his own right, and that he has been in the forefront of the pioneers who have brought Carinthian Slovene (and other) poetry to the attention of the English-reading world. Neither of these facts can however excuse the sometimes deplorable quality of the translations that I reviewed. Indeed, the reverse: translators who pride themselves on their own poetic gifts must especially beware of 'improving' what they are translating; and if a body of poetry deserves translating, then the translations must surely meet some minimal criteria, or that poetry will be done a

disservice. With respect to the Merlak-Detela translations I maintain that, if only in a few instances, no translations at all would have been preferable to Kuhner's translations. Specifically, I not only found inexcusable omissions, additions, and errors in his versions of their poetry; I also pointed out that the translations were obviously made from the German versions and not the Slovene originals, without cross-reference to those originals (why should it need to be said this approach is so dangerous as to be ridiculous?); and that, in addition, Kuhner's competence in German appeared to be suspect (e.g., he translated the words *Gier* and *Geier* as if they were the same word). How, now, does *Buried in the Sands of Time* stand up to my perhaps over-critical gaze?³

Of the 27 poems in this collection, four are in German and English only, without Slovene versions. I restrict my remarks to the other 23. Since Ferk is bilingual, it should not matter if (as before) Kuhner translated from the German and not the Slovene versions; and this does appear to be the case (except occasionally: "Bolečina in bridkost," for example (44-45), is closer to the Slovene than to the German). Once or twice, however, it does matter; thus the last two lines of in "Mrtvo mesto" (24-25) are *träume sind / meine geschichte* in the German, and the last word corresponds to both "story" and "history" in English. This is the kind of notorious trap that translators must watch for: and Kuhner has fallen into it, with "dreams / are my story." If he had known enough Slovene (or if he had reached for a dictionary) he would have had the ambiguity resolved, for the Slovene version has *sanje so / moja zgodovina*. (And note: Kuhner cannot claim that "story" is more 'poetic' than "history" on either formal or contentive grounds in this instance). —It is clear that translators of bilingual poetry should know both of the source languages: how much closer to the poet's intentions can they come! Kuhner does not (to my knowledge) claim to know Slovene; he has however lived in Vienna since 1963 (according to the note provided (62)) and should be competent in German. All the less comprehensible, therefore, are lapses of the (*Gier/Geier*) kind mentioned above. There is one such in this book, in "Tihožitje po atomski bombi" (48-49): the German *unbewegliches grauen im spätherbst* is misunderstood as "motionless grey in late autumn" rather than "... horror ..." (cf. the Slovene: *negibna grozota v pozni jeseni*): the distinction between *das Grau* and *das Grauen* should have been obvious.

Errors of this magnitude are, however, very few. Of the 23 poems under scrutiny, only six (the above two and four others) may be said to have suffered from mistranslation. The others (in ascending order of seriousness) are:

In "Basen o angelu" (6-7): *sodil je / v hromo središče / vsega nesrediščnega :: er zählte / zum lahmen mittelpunkt / alles unmittelpunktlichen* is a really awkward stanza for the translator. Kuhner has succeeded, except in one word: "he was part of / the frozen focal point / of everything that could not be focused" is very good; but why "frozen"?

The first stanza of "Imenito gretje" (10-11) is misunderstood. *ležal sem / zvit / skrčen / z glavo in koleni / pri trebuhu / kot žival :: tiergleich / zusammengekrümmt / dazu verkrampft / lag ich / den kopf und die knie / an den bauch gedrängt* is rendered as "like an animal / i lay on my back / rigid / head bent / and knees / pressed against my stomach." A closer version would have been: "like an animal / i lay / bent / folded over / with head and knees / pressed against my stomach;" the idea of "rigidity" is in the German *verkrampft* but not in the Slovene *skrčen*; the "on my back" is in neither source language.

"Drugi otrok Device Marije" (56-57) is one of Ferk's rare poems where (cf. Debeljak's review, above) the ethnic problems of Carinthia are mentioned. The poem roams the world: Venice, Paris, New Delhi, Gdansk, and comes at last to Carinthia. The final significant stanza reads: *pod peco / jim boš / rodila / kralja :: unter der petzen / wirst du ihnen / einen*

könig / gebären; this should have been translated with care, even if the average English-speaking reader has never heard of Kralj Matjaž. Kuhner's version is not seriously astray, but (given the context) ought to have been flawless: "you'll bear them / a king / at the foot / of the petzen mountains;" this suggests that he did not find out what is referred to: Kralj Matjaž is sleeping beneath (not at the foot of) the Petzen mountain (singular, not plural). Incidentally, this is a perfect example of an instance where a Nabokovian explanatory note is required.

The very worst translation, of the six that fare badly, is the one provided for Ferk's last poem: "Slovenska balada" (59-60). First, the lines *vendar ne povzročaj / izgube ali težke poškodbe moje govorice :: verursache aber nicht / den verlust / oder eine schwere schädigung meiner sprache* themselves undergo injurious loss in their passage to English: "but do not / rob me of my speech." Next, the lines *ne prizadejaj mi / znatne pohabljenosti / ali pozornost vzbujajoče iznakaze / ali težkega trpljenja / hiravosti / ali poklicne nesposobnosti :: füge mir keine / erhebliche verstümmelung / oder eine auffallende verunstaltung / oder ein schweres leiden / siechtum / oder berufsunfähigkeit zu* is not only much abbreviated, but in part quite misunderstood: "do not / maim / disfigure / or injure me / or cause me to lose / my ability to think [sic] / or to work". Finally, the last section: *kajti blagor moje duše / bi bil že z bolečinami bistveno zmanjššan :: denn das wohl meiner seele / wäre schon bei schmerzen / wesentlich beeinträchtigt* surely means something like "for the well-being of my soul / would be essentially diminished by [bouts of] pain;" Kuhner's version is only vaguely similar: "since even the infliction of pain / leaves its mark on the soul." In this poem, he has allowed his own poetic inclinations to take over, and what we end up with is not Ferk at all, but pure Kuhner. It is a sad coincidence that here, again, it is one of Ferk's rare ethnically-oriented poems that suffers.

As mentioned already, however, my possibly hyper-critical eye has only found six poems — about a quarter of the whole — where the translations are inadequate; and in all but the very last poem (where the mistranslation is inexcusable), the errors do not spoil the general effect. Overall, Kuhner has captured Ferk and expressed his ideas in English very competently. Ferk writes poetry where the form is extraordinarily subordinated to the content, and the translator does not have to face many problems of rhyme, rhythm, or instrumentation; translation is not especially demanding, therefore, as long as the translator understands the poet's motives and intentions. In this instance, readers of the English versions can (except in the instances noted) rest assured that they are reading Ferk himself.

It should also be noted that better proof-reading was required: there seem to be serious omissions from one Slovene version (18) and there is at least one Slovene misprint (*mislim* for *misli* (26)).

NOTES

1. Tom Priestly, "Kako naj be ne prevajali poezije," *Celovski zvon* IV/13 (December 1986) 87-91, a review of Milena Merlak and Lev Detela, *Kaj je povedala noč / Was die Nacht erzählt / What night reveals*, transl. Herbert Kuhner. Celovec/Klagenfurt: Mohorjeva založba, 1985.
2. Herbert Kuhner, "O mojih prevodih Koroške Slovenske poezije," *Celovski zvon* V/17 (December 1987) 88-90. In this he quotes his letter to me (March 3, 1987), in which he wrote: "In your review ... you concentrate solely on the translation ... Nothing is said about the poetic element. You are obviously an advocate of the literal school of translation," a label which I reject; but in any case, not even advocates of the most 'non-literal' schools will allow the meaning of the original to be sacrificed in a quest for poetic expression. See also Silviya Borovnik, "Še o lepoti in zvestobi pri prevajanju," *Naši razgledi* 27 March 1987: 166-67.

3. I go into some detail in this review, detail which is only required because I am being so negative and because the translator did not accept even one of my earlier criticisms.

Tom Priestly, University of Alberta

Richard Jackson, ed., "Special Issue: Yugoslavia," [= *The Poetry Miscellany* 20 (1988)].

A copy of *The Poetry Miscellany*'s special Yugoslav number came into my hands quite by accident. That may be a comment on my ignorance of the field, but it is, alas, also true that literary contacts between North America and Yugoslavia are at such a pioneering stage that a volume like this is naturally a surprise. My friends in Yugoslavia find the news devastating, but Yugoslavia is not 'sexy'—the price of non-alignment, probably. Thus this volume is an immediate joy and remains a joy, even while we may complain about some aspects of it.

The issue offers contributions from twenty-five poets and includes, as well, short stories, interviews and essays. The section devoted to Slovenia is especially wide-ranging, presenting fifteen poets, both those one would expect and some surprises: new voices such as Aleš Debeljak and Milan Jesih and, imagine, even Božo Vodušek, right there in Tennessee! The rest of the volume may seem sparser and a little eccentric, but at this stage so much depends on luck, on the accidental contacts one happens to have. I know why, for instance, the "Yugoslavie" number of *La revue internationale est-ouest* (February 1989) had a Slovene bias: Georges Ferenczi, the indefatigable editor, arrived in Yugoslavia at a time when conditions in Slovenia were much more propitious than in Serbia. In Belgrade they censored him; in Ljubljana they fêted him. But such introductions to Yugoslavia are good precisely because they are so personal, so eccentric.

Interesting also is the insistence, in the preface, on the existence of a *Yugoslav* poetry. To speak of poetry in four languages (as in this issue) as *Yugoslav* poetry appears to me strange and naive. Certainly, the volume makes me ask again some old questions. *Yugoslav* poetry? Writing from Montréal, I can certainly imagine a "Canadian" issue of *The Poetry Miscellany*; but still I cannot imagine a preface to such an issue which would talk about Canadian poetry as if it were one in any but the most insignificant sense.

If I think that, in the service of the social sciences and of a sociological approach to literature, this issue performs yeoman work to introduce Yugoslavia to the reader—poetry is a much faster introduction than prose, though I have heard editors argue the reverse—I do however wonder what service to poetry and to the reader of poetry is indeed rendered. *The Poetry Miscellany* must prefer to publish poems which (as Frost has said) give us a wound from which we will never recover. So I asked myself: what was there in this issue—for all its being avidly readable, especially for the starved Yugoslavist—which at least might cut me to the quick? Well, the answer is: some Šalamun; a little Kocbek; some Popa; a story by Janjić. But: no wound; and that is not good enough, especially since the originals of some of these poems are arrows!

Vodušek's sensual sonnet "Tihožitje," for example, is rendered without the rhyme and without the sensuality. The original—some still life!—is dazzlingly, ecdysiastically decadent, but in translation the *rožnata halja* becomes a mere "bathrobe", adjectiveless. Maybe English is wanting when it comes to lingerie, and I do not necessarily want to see the *halja* frenchified as "peignoir", but why leave out *rožnata*? "rose", "coral", "fuchsia", "apricot", "peach", "salmon", whatever—but something! And surely "robe" without "bath" would have been silkier, less cottony. As for *povlekla*, it is not "crumpled", because