

povlekla still has movement left in it. And why omit *izzivalno* (“temptingly”, “teasingly”) altogether? Sometimes, sadly, we have to decide that something is untranslatable. Perhaps I will be able to manage Golia’s “Ribice” in the next life.

One wishes this issue were bilingual—or, indeed, quinquilingual. It is difficult for a reviewer to track down the originals in order to try to judge the quality of the translations. We do, I trust, share the belief that the ideal is to bring a poem over as close to whole as possible; this means, of course, that compromises are allowed—but not because the translator is ignorant of something. Since I happen to know Kocbek quite well, having tried my hand at translating him myself, let me say a little about the Kocbek in this volume. If I point out mistakes, I want to emphasize that the responsibility must be shared by the editors as well as the translators. Although we cannot expect them to know the original languages, we can expect them to ask for appropriate second opinions. Editorial help for such ventures is available—at least, it is now, and from the Society for Slovene Studies.

Here, for example, is a mistake in “Žene grede z dela [Women break off work]” which I myself made; this is a tricky business. For a very long time—because the *SSKJ* has not yet reached Volume V—I, like Michael Biggins, thought that the *vratéh* in *po vseh jesenskih vratéh* meant “door”. But it is *vratéh* “clearings” or “meadows”, not *vratih* “door”. (A telephone call to Venko Taufer cleared this up for me: this should have been checked.) Or consider the following, in the same poem: *na mah* translated as “in the moss.” Here, *na mah* is clearly “all at once.” I do not suggest that Biggins does not know this meaning for *na mah*; what I do suspect is that that great temptation for the translator—the desire to be a poet—is to blame. Biggins has a chorus of women “fall silent in the moss,” and this is so much more poetic than having the chorus fall silent, *tout court*. Likewise in “Ljudje in živali v blatu [People and animals in mud]” he has seen *ihtenje* where the original has *hitenje*. Is this carelessness? No: ‘sobbing’ is so much more poetic than simple “hurrying.” I know this kind of temptation all too well.

Yet Biggins, who will come out of accidents such as the above a wiser man and a very good translator, can be right on the money. In “Luči gorijo... [The lamps are shining...]” his phrase “someone will swat the light out” seems to be the only way to do *potem bo nekdo udaril po luči*. And I envy him his solution (in “Žene grede z dela”—a poem so wonderful that we should all try our hand at it till we get it right—for *zavlačujoči glas*. He translates this as “the ritardando of their voices”, which is so precise, although perhaps redolent of the music text-book. What a job this translating is, and how temporary are the victories!

All in all, this is a volume well worth reading, but which might have been better with help from appropriate sources. The problem has simply been this: we who care about translating have not known about one another. Why, for instance, has *Le livre slovène* not made better use of Slovenes living abroad? Will *Vilenica* do so? In this light, the fact that there were no checks requested at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga is more excusable.

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Aleš Debeljak, *Chronicle of Melancholy* [= Selected poems], trans. Michael Biggins. Chattanooga TE: Poetry Miscellany Chapbooks, 1989.

The same sort of praise, and the same caveats, as were offered in the above review apply to this chapbook of Aleš Debeljak’s poetry. In this case, perhaps greater praise is due to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, for it is wonderful that we should so quickly

have available in English one of the newest voices from Ljubljana. Debeljak, winner of the Hayden Carruth Prize at Syracuse, deserves more prestigious presentation, but this is a nice start. For my taste, especially his prose—for instance his perspicacious comments on the United States which have been appearing in *Delo*—needs to be translated.

I wish to insist again that, although the reader in English will not be in a position to make interlingual comparisons, the standards of exactness for poetry translation have to be the highest. There must be a religious respect for the original if only because so much has already been lost on the way to the original. As Merwin says in “The Poem,” “Coming late, as always, / I try to remember what I almost heard.”

Michael Biggins’ translations of Debeljak are much more precise than his translations of Kocbek; no doubt he consulted the poet, whose English is very good. However there are, occasionally, slips that do matter, such as the following: *komaj se premikaš* in “Opis zgodovine 4 [Outline of history 4]” is translated as “no sooner do you move;” in other words, the translator has mistaken it for *komaj se premakneš*. (Yes, Slovene verbs are tricky). Or: in “Biografija sna 5 [Dream biography 5]”, *plivka* is “surges”; thus “lapping” becomes “surging.” Who would know about this, if I were not to point it out here? Does it matter? Yes.

A few words about the originals—with the warning that my taste in Slovene poetry runs to Brvar. I stand in awe of Debeljak; and if he can turn out this kind of writing now, just imagine what is to come! But the poetry is too erudite for my poor taste. Pretentiousness is rampant in Ljubljana (perhaps as a product of its real—very romantic, but noxious—fog). How a Marcel Štefančič, jr. [sic] loves the *tujka*! And when Debeljak compares something to *visoki ce Elle Fitzgerald*, I am of course impressed that he has heard her, that he has seen the commercial—but does he know his image is corn? The problem may well be that Debeljak is not Slovene enough for me. One must be local before one can be universal.

Nonetheless I recommend both this volume and the one reviewed above. Quibble as I may, these are wonderful enterprises that promise much in the way of fine writing to come.

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Editor’s note: Michael Biggins, the contributor of translations to the last two books reviewed above, informs me that editorial neglect in both publications resulted not only in numerous typographical errors, but also in misreadings of words (what should have been “intimation” in one of Debeljak’s poems was printed as “imitation,” and “from” in one instance became “form”), even the deletion of words and entire phrases in three instances. Of the two publications, the Yugoslav issue of *The Poetry Miscellany* was far more carefully edited than Debeljak’s *Chronicle of Melancholy*.

Ivan Cankar, *My Life and Other Sketches*. Selected and introduced by Josip Vidmar. Transl. Elza Jereb and Alasdair MacKinnon. Ljubljana: DSP MKI, 1988 [= VILENICA SCLC],¹ 130 pp..

Ciril Kosmač, *A Day in Spring*. Trans. Fanny S. Copeland. Foreword by John Parker. Ljubljana: DSP MKI, 1988 [= VILENICA SCLC], 170 pp..

Ivan Potrč, *The Land and the Flesh*. Trans. Harry Leeming. Ljubljana: DSP MKI, 1988 [= VILENICA SCLC], 198 pp..