

perhaps sometimes slightly pretentious blend of moral concepts and images of country life. Elegantly avoiding the temptation of despair, these poems are told from the viewpoint of a writer whose intellectual and emotional awareness has been motivated by the untransgressible limit, the dividing line between silence and language. It is here that the search for self-identity through the quest for the Word which would make all words superfluous comes into play with its utmost urgency and, it must be emphasized, artistic persuasiveness. Januš, balancing the melancholic tunes and the wisdom of an aging man, probes the enigma of how the paradoxical pursuit of the universal language, i.e., the Word, can be undertaken by individual poetic discourses. It is precisely here that the longed-for universality reveals itself as the silence which is nothing less than ultimate yet inaccessible reference. In his vain efforts to circumvent the very nature of humanity the reader is invited to see that man, as a speaking being, is inevitably condemned to loneliness since there are as many languages as there are men, whereas there is only one silence. Perhaps—Januš evokes it with an elegiac touch—fragments of what can be shared beyond silence itself are friendship, commitment, and love. Always running the risk of not being spelled out perfectly and thus not being represented at all, Januš prompts his readers to reconsider them all over again.

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

A small American publishing house and the Austrian Ministry for Education and Art jointly produced this handsomely-designed trilingual (English / Slovene / German) book of poems by the prominent young author from the southern Austrian province of Carinthia. Janko Ferk (born 1958), who experienced the trials and tribulations of being Slovene by origin and ethnic conscience yet educated in German-language schools, is an intriguing writer because of his incessant movement between the two languages. His highly-praised first book of fiction, *Der verurteilte Klager* [The Condemned Accuser] (1981), which brought him to the fore of young Austrian literati, was a very powerful novel. Later he focussed on the writing of poetry, and has produced a few books of verse in Slovene, which were routinely reviewed and on occasion praised in Slovenia.

Ferk's work is nonetheless rather hard to assess since it is difficult to determine *the national literary context in which his writings should be read*. This kind of shift from one culture to another may, however, reveal a tremendous potential to *better awareness of individual identity*. Now this particular cultural and linguistic condition appears to bear little literary importance for Ferk's poetic strategies. He is concerned with an altogether *different division of the self*. Rather than troubling himself with the unsolvable puzzle of ethnicity, he is truly obsessed with the ultimate question of the human condition: *mortality of the body and possible redemption of the soul*. In this context it should perhaps be welcomed that he implicitly takes to task the ethnic topics which, for better or worse, are the prime preoccupation of writers of the Slovene minority in restive Carinthia. While complimenting him on this self-liberation from the strait-jacket of defensive and at times also violent traditionalism, which—to be sure—is by no means a small accomplishment, one cannot help but note that what remains in his verses is, alas, well-wrought and erudite yet essentially vacuous exercises in *ironic style and worn-out subject matter*. Moreover, the subject of mortality itself is challenging but Ferk's delivery does not quite rise to the

occasion. Indeed, one cannot help but admit that the reader has the opportunity to participate in some haunting and poignant moments when Ferik 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 Ferik'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, Ferik 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 Ferik has evidently tried to do his best. I fear, however, that his attempts are not quite up to the mark.

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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