

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.

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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

*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 gredo 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 gredo 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