

REVIEWS

Margret Kreidl. *Hitri streli, resnične povedi.* Translated by Urška P. Černe. Ljubljana: Društvo Apokalipsa, 2005. 49 pp., €6.26 [= \$9.29] (paper). ISBN 961-6314-73-4.

This volume is a Slovene translation of poems selected from three collections of poetry by the Austrian author Margret Kreidl. Kreidl, who was born 1964 in Salzburg, has been a freelance writer since 1996. She has been publishing since 1990, and now has eight books (mostly poetry), seven stage plays, and five radio plays to her credit, and has been awarded several literary prizes.

In this selection, Černe presents us with sixteen poems entitled “Hitri streli,” from “Schnelle Schüsse,” first published in *Mitten ins Herz* (Vienna, 2005); one long poem, “Zastor,” from “Vorhang,” which appeared in *Ich bin eine Königin. Auftritte* (Klagenfurt and Salzburg, 1990); and, finally, twelve poems with the title “Nastopi” from the series “Auftritte” and four pages of one-line “Povedi,” a translation of “Sätze,” both of which were published in *In allen Einzelheiten. Katalog* (Klagenfurt and Vienna, 1998).

These poems vary widely in their subject-matter and style, but most reflect a conjunction of the lyric with the dramatic. Thus the twelve “appearances” in “Nastopi” are descriptions of what could be short scenes from a film with one actor, a woman performing everyday tasks; these scenes are described in short simple sentences. “Zastor,” on the other hand, while also a drama in poetic form, erotic this time, is more of a succession of impressions, strung together with little regard for syntax, punctuated with

stage directions about raising and lowering the curtain and frequent repetitions of the exclamation “Zastor!” The poem “Hitri streli,” while also a succession of scenes, moves from place to place; more is said about this cycle of poems below. In contrast, the four pages of “Povedi” consist of one-line utterances, from clichés to unique sayings: for example, with the number of hits on Google™ to show the (non)-uniqueness of each—from “Enkrat ni nobenkrat” (2,070 hits; this even appears on a Slovene sugar packet!; translation of “Einmal ist keinmal” [149,000]), to the original “Mačke so majhni, brzi konji” (zero hits; translation of “Katzen sind kleine, schnelle Pferde” [zero hits]). The poetry in this instance is in the juxtapositions; for example, four of the final five sayings are, “Tudi najmanjši delci imajo težo. / Nohti so lahki. / Peresa so lahka. / Las je zelo lahek.”

The translator, Urška Černe, born 1971 in Maribor, has translated a great number of German literary works, mostly poetry but also plays and essays. She had the good fortune to be in contact with the author even before beginning on the translations. Even though Kreidl does not speak Slovene, the constant discussions between her and Černe—as related in an interview with Margret Kreidl and Fabjan Hafner in *Delo* on 25 October, 2006, and confirmed in e-mails between the poet and this reviewer—have produced what can only be characterized as translations that are excellent, ones with very few faults other than unavoidable imperfections. Moreover, Černe has not simply reproduced the content extremely closely, but has found a clear Slovene echo of the various styles and rhythms employed. As related in the interview with Hafner, the selection of poetry was also made in collaboration.

The translation of poetry is bound to profit when the poet and the translator can discuss the more intransigent among the inherent challenges, and Kreidl and Černe obviously did so at length; the result in this case yields extremely little that this reviewer can fault. Most of the quibbles that I have presumably derive from the fact that some of the original poems were published more than once and in more than one version, and I have not seen them all. One minor point remains: I believe that the “Nastopi” should have followed the original in having each poem headed: “Erster Auftritt,” “Zweiter Auftritt,” and so on through “Zwölfter Auftritt;” that is, “Prvi nastop” through “Dvanajsti nastop.”

Otherwise, I can only point out to a very clear example of a failing that derives not from mistranslation, but from interlinguistic incompatibility. This must be set forth at some length.¹ The unfortunate result of this incompatibility in this instance, while unavoidable, is in my

¹ This paragraph profited greatly from advice from several colleagues, and especially Adi Wimmer (Alps-Adriatic University of Klagenfurt) and Miran Hladnik (University of Ljubljana). Margaret Kreidl herself added useful insights.

view quite serious: I refer to the cycle called “Schnelle Schüsse,” “Hitri strelī”—indeed, this is the title chosen for the entire translated book. Of the sixteen original poems all but one end, or contain in their last two lines, the phrase *Ein Schuss*, and the remaining poem has this phrase halfway through. The German word *Schuss* has a wide variety of meanings (similar in many ways to English *shot*); thus in one dictionary, inter alia, “round [of ammunition], gunshot, bullet wound, rapid movement, rush [of water, etc.], rapid growth, blasting charge, batch [of bread], swig [of liquor],” to which I can add “rapid descent [on skis]” (in English, skiers speak of *schussing*) and “the sound of an approaching avalanche.” In addition, the compound word *Schnellschuss* can mean “snap decision.” In some of the poems in this cycle, it appears that one rather than another of these meanings is most appropriate: thus, in a hunting scene ‘gunshot’ comes immediately to mind; in another poem, which finishes with the words “Ein Schuss. Er schaut durch das Fernglas. Die Bindung an ihrem linken Fuss hat sich nicht gelöst” (He looks through the binoculars. The binding on her left foot has not come free), it is obvious that one of the two skiing meanings (or, ambiguously, both) must be intended. In contrast, most of the other poems allow several interpretations. Note that Černe has translated every instance of *Schuss* with *strel*. This word is not monosemic in Slovene, but its range of meaning is far narrower than German *Schuss*, being used for not much more than shots from armaments (in battle and in hunting) and shots in sports. There are, to be sure, various other meanings that may be associated with the word, both through verbs such as *ustreliti* and *streljati* and through the similarity of the words *strela* and *strelica*. Nevertheless, this semantic limitation results in the loss of a great deal of Kreidl’s obviously deliberate ambiguity and her use of monosemicity. The skiing association is not likely to come to mind, for instance, in a straightforward translation of the poem-ending quoted above: “Strel. . . gleda skozi daljnogled. Vez na njeni levi nogi se ni odpela.” To restore the semantic association, Černe has inserted “Smučarski učitelj” in the ellipsis above; the skiing idea is now obvious, but it must be admitted that the poetic force of the original is now partly lost. The author, in correspondence with me, admitted that this particular problem was one that exercised her and the translator a great deal. She wrote that the final choice—namely, to stick with *strel* throughout—was based on (a) the vital importance of having the same word repeated every time, (b) what may be termed the basic semantics of the words *Schuss* and *strel*, and (c) the actual sound of the Slovene word and the way that this monosyllable fitted into the rhythm of the poem. I do not argue with the decision or with these motives: the problem was ultimately insoluble and, if the poet herself and the translator agreed on one partial solution rather than on another, one should not cavil. Nevertheless, I wonder: perhaps readers of Slovene with no knowledge of German would have profited from a footnote or endnote explaining this particular point, to have been able to learn what they are missing.

This book was a pleasure to review, and will bring pleasure to lovers of poetry as well as fascination to those interested in the business of translation.

Tom Priestly, Edmonton, Alberta

Katarina Tepesh. *Escape from Despair: A Croatian Family's Survival.* College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing, Inc., 2007. 203 pp., \$15.00 (paper). ISBN: 978-1-60264-041-2.

Katarina Tepesh's harrowing and engagingly straightforward account of her family history in communist Croatia and then in the United States after fleeing an abusive and alcoholic father in 1968 should be added to the shelf of memoirs of such family legacy, both for the new information it adds as well as for the story it continues to tell.

This is the familiar story of the legacy of family trauma, alcoholism, and abuse—and as old as Original Sin. Since the mid-1990s, there has been a rise in literary and cultural accounts of growing up under the dark shadows of alcoholism and mental illness. Mary Karr's poetic rendering of her East Texas upbringing, *The Liars' Club*, is credited with the resurgence of memoir writing. In *Angela's Ashes*, Frank McCourt captured the frame of mind of a child growing up under an Irish-romantic-alcoholic father that slaked his frustrated dreams and inflicted an amazing amount of suffering on his brood.

Tepesh's spare and reportorial account of her Croatian family living near the border with Slovenia adds much-needed cultural perspective. The memoir introduces her family's history (a marriage initiated by a rape) with this straightforward connection:

My turbulent family history mirrors the history of two countries, Croatia and Slovenia. For centuries, Croatia and Slovenia have been caught in turmoil between powerful empires or invaded by aggressive neighbors. Just as Croatians and Slovenians always wanted to gain their freedom from their conquerors and live in peace, my own family was abused and sought freedom.

And therein lies the paradox: how to obtain peace and freedom? Does "escape" from political and patriarchal tyranny by the channels leading to green cards and citizenship promise escape from its legacy? Tepesh, significantly, reports that this is often not the case. Tepesh's poor long-suffering mother and six children save their lives by emigrating to New York. However, the family remains haunted; the book could have been