

a 'poem for pay' in Latin by the fifteenth-century humanist Bernard Perger. He offers examples of laudatory verse from some of the best-known names of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Slovene literature, such as Vodnik, Stritar, Gregorčič, Župančič—praising both kings and presidents!—Gradnik, Zlobec and Matej Bor; the last-named refused to have his ode to Stalin printed in this volume, but Dolgan gives all the scholarly references for looking it up and then—delicious irony—quotes it in the afterword! He juxtaposes an ode "To the memory of Comrade Kidrič" by Manko Golar with the all but identical verses lamenting the passing of Comrade Tito twenty-seven years later: artistic (and not only artistic!) sincerity would seem to suffer in the process. Endless paeons to Franz Joseph I, Alexander Karadjordjević and Tito are adduced, as well as more restrained pieces (really some of a different nature altogether) celebrating such varied figures as Marx, Lenin, Nicholas II, Rosa Luxemburg, T.G. Masaryk, F.D. Roosevelt, Patrice Lumumba, Salvador Allende and Martin Luther King. Only the popes seem to get off easy: the section devoted to them is the shortest and the least humorous. But almost any page contains its own surprises: the piece entitled "Le Avstrija je naša domovina", to be sung to the tune of "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles!"; an apparently sincere work extolling the leader of the domobranstvo during World War II; the dreadful ditty equating Tito with Kralj Matjaž, by a figure very prominent in contemporary Slovene literature and politics; even a serendipitously-timed piece celebrating the Empress Zita, who died just this year.

If I cannot agree absolutely with Dolgan's closing appraisal of encomiastic verse—"in short, it is a matter of mass sadomasochism" (270-71)—which strikes me as an awfully heavy conclusion to reach about such awfully airy verse, nevertheless I do recommend his work. I have it on good authority that *Slovenska muza pred prestolom* has rattled more than a few teacups in Ljubljana these days, and I can easily understand why. It is painful to be reminded how readily any writer may divert his—less often her—mighty pen to the glorification of the scepter that wields the sword.

Henry R. Cooper, Jr., Indiana University.

Charles Simic, ed. *The Selected Poems of Tomaž Šalamun*. With an Introduction by Robert Hass. New York NY: The Ecco Press, 1988. xxviii + 93 pp., \$17.50.

An "angry young man," as he is even nowadays occasionally referred to in Slovene literary scholarship, Tomaž Šalamun is beyond a shadow of a doubt a leading figure in post-war Slovene literature. The reputation is hardly repudiated even among those who clandestinely dislike his daring, penetrating, and compelling poetic vision. Šalamun started off his literary career with a chapbook published at his own expense that entered school textbooks as a classic twenty-five years later. Forced for ideological reasons to be a village teacher, he ended up a celebrity with international prominence. Šalamun has alternately been silenced and put in the spotlight, scornfully laughed at and praised sky-high; venerated and yet never squarely integrated into the Slovene paradigm. The reason for this is a simple one: Slovene cultural space has until recently been permeated with a suspicion directed toward his unrestricted and forceful desire always to be already somewhere else—moving through the past and the present, traversing the many different vocabularies and strange provinces of the mind and geography, always on the go. Thoroughly consumed by "the process of becoming" (Gilles Deleuze), for Šalamun all that really counts is a flush of images, not an easily discernible story. *Selected Poems*, meticulously edited by Charles Simic, offers a very good display of some of the author's

most poignant and remarkable accomplishments. Šalamun exposes lyrical intimism as well as existentialist *angst* with ironic wit and converts many unquestionable truths in Slovene history and mythology into mere objects of his joyful, yet metaphysically justified "transvaluation of all values." Make no mistake: Šalamun, by radically refuting the arrogance of traditional humanism and its enduring laws, has single-handedly changed the course of Slovene literature. While balancing the cosmopolitan sensibility and persistent Slovene obsession with its precarious cultural position of being squeezed between two major cultures, Italian and German, he has successfully challenged the concept of parochialism of spirit on the ontological level, and mocked the inferiority complex of a small nation on the historical level. He is, of course, a staunch avant-gardist in the best sense of the word. Drawing from the legacy of French surrealism, *les poets maudits*, and—as Robert Hass rightly points out in his introduction to this volume—the poetic experiments of Velemir Khlebnikov, Šalamun has significantly expanded the boundaries of Slovene poetry. Working in a deceptively simple style he nonetheless pulls fragments from such diverse traditions as Rumi's mysticism and Italian Renaissance painting. He finds the stuff of dramatic correspondences in the ordinary rituals of daily life, and carries them to the point where their camouflaged transcendental meaning is unveiled in a thoroughly breathtaking manner. In this respect, his ability to handle personal experience as the reflection, indeed the creation, of the world, evokes Whitman's long breath and all-encompassing myth of the self. His unique and haunting mapping the territory of the quest for this self reads with great gusto.

Aleš Debeljak, Syracuse University.

Gustav Januš, *Wenn ich das Wort überschreite / Ko bom prekoračil besedo*, transl. Peter Handke. Salzburg-Vienna: Residenz Verlag, 1988. 39 pp.

This fine, if slim, Slovene-German volume of poetry comes from the pen of one of the winners of the distinguished *Petrarca Prize*, which is awarded to European writers for work published in German translation. Januš enjoys an international reputation since Suhrkamp Verlag, the prominent German publishing house, brought out a large selection of his poems a few years ago. Translations from minor languages are always painfully difficult to arrange and, by and large, lack the precision and subtlety of the original. Here, this is not the case. Handke, whose mother was Slovene, has done an excellent job, rendering those tender, fragile and subdued poetic meditations with a sensitive ear. It was not an easy task, however. This is even more true because Januš, in "Ko bom prekoračil besedo" (which translates roughly as "When I'll transgress the Word") is very much at odds with what is considered a commonplace of the literary production of the Slovene ethnic minority living in Austrian Carinthia. Although he is a member of that community, he does not allow the flat ideological passions of protest against the diminishing role of the Slovene language in this traditionally bilingual province to dominate his symbolic world, nor is he prone to permit one-dimensional political slogans into his poetry. This is not to say that he is negligent of the fate of his language in the modern Babel where "the right to be" is all too often equated with "the power to be heard." On the contrary, he is concerned with the contemplation of the human condition trapped in two different cultures, elevating the question of being from the politically-soaked ground to the realm of sheer poetic imagination. No wonder that he writes at his nest only when operating in his own personal idiom, so specifically framed by ascetic metaphors drawn from nature and by a poignant, if