

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

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.

Aleš Debeljak, Syracuse University.

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