

The four essays of the second part of the collection treat language and cover the following topics: "Jezikovna misel v slovenski književnosti" (Linguistic Thought in Slovene Literature, 219–40), "Jezik kot vprašanje svobode" (Language as a Question of Freedom, 241–49), "Jezik v skupnem prostoru tesnobe" (Language in a Common Space of Anxiety, 250–53), and "Jezik znanosti in jezik poezije" (The Language of Scholarship and the Language of Poetry, 254–60).

Paternu's selection of representative names is based on his personal orientation in the world of poetry and on his scholarly endeavor to introduce the most reliable viewpoints into the historico-evolutionary stream and typological structuring of twentieth-century Slovene poetry.

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Vlado Kreslin. *Besedila pesmi. Prevodi in kratek jezikovni vodič. Liedertexte. Übersetzung und kleiner Sprachführer. Testi musicali. Traduzione e guida alla studio. Lyrics. Translation and learner's guide.* [= SLO BOX 2.1.1. Slovenščina v paketu. Das Slowenisch-Lern-Paket. Lo sloveno in cofanetto. The Slovene Learning Parcel]. Ed. Angela Schellander. Klagenfurt/Celovec: Referat Alpe-Jadran na Univerzi v Celovcu in Slovenska prosvetna zveza v Celovcu, 1998. 64 pp. (paper). Published with a CD: **Vlado Kreslin.** *Mali bogovi.* Beltinška banda.

This review will examine the translations into English (and not into German or Italian) of fourteen of Vlado Kreslin's songs, and will cast a brief glance at the "Learner's guide." Kreslin, as the back cover of the booklet reminds us, "is something of a national institution in Slovenia, a singer and songwriter who is also responsible for a reawakening of interest in older traditional ballads and songs." The translations into a foreign language of such a balladeer's songs should be at least good, and preferably excellent; and when they form part of an instructional package, all the more reason to examine them critically.

The translator into English, Erica Johnson-Debeljak (henceforth EJ-D), had an overall aim that calls for discussion: rather than translating word-for-word, she all too obviously tried in many instances to produce a “poetic” translation, with some approximation of the rhyme-scheme of the original. Normally, translators of poetry should indeed try to capture not only the meaning but also the form of the base text, whenever this is possible (which often it is not), because otherwise they will offer the non-native reader/listener only a one-sided appreciation of the original. This particular set of translations has, however, two purposes: not only to provide versions of Kreslin’s ballads in English, German, and Italian, but also to be a pedagogical aid (see my penultimate paragraph). The latter aim, I firmly believe, is better served by simple, word-for-word translations, to which (as far as my insufficient German and extremely shallow Italian allow me to judge) Klaus Detlef Olof and Jolka Milič, respectively, limited themselves. My first conclusion, then, is that EJ-D made the wrong decision in this instance. I will nonetheless continue this review as if her decision was correct—as if she were indeed justified in attempting a “poetic” translation. And I think that I can demonstrate that she was too ambitious: she succeeds in some instances, but she fails in many others, because too many of her translations stray far too far from the meaning of the original.

Translators of poetry who strive for “poetic” translations have to balance the normally competing demands of the meaning and the form, which are all too seldom fully compatible when transferred into the second language. For instance: a Slovene poem with line-final ljubezen rhyming with bolezen cannot be exactly rendered in English, where line-final “love” rhymes with “glove,” “dove,” “above,” but with no word meaning “sickness”; some change to the original—if only to the word-order, but more often to basic semantic elements—has to be made if a rhyme is to be achieved. How, then, did EJ-D fare in this difficult quest? A good example of how she fared with the “balancing” problem is the refrain—the twice-repeated stanza—of Kreslin’s first ballad, “Namesto koga roža cveti”:

Namesto koga roža cveti,
 namesto koga sem jaz,
 katera koža najbolj diši,
 Čigava pesem rabi moj glas?

The text shows a rhyme-scheme ABAB, and the recording confirms that the rhythm consists in four, three, four, and four feet (Namésto kóga róža cvetí / namésto kóga sem jáz / katéra kóža nájbolj diší / Čigáva pésem rábi moj glás). EJ-D's translation:

Instead of whom the flowers bloom,
instead of whom am I,
whichever skin smells sweet and fine
whichever song needs this voice of mine?

EJ-D has substituted ABCC for ABAB, but has an internal rhyme in lines 1-2, and thus achieves an admirable “poetic” quality in her rhymes. To achieve the CC rhyme, her fourth line has five rather than four feet, and she substitutes “smells sweet and fine” for the more accurate “smells the most.” (Compare the other translations: “welche Haut am stärksten riecht,” “quale pelle è la piu odorosa.”) A similar problem: she translates Čigava in line 4 as “whichever” rather than as “whose.” Had she chosen “which skin smells sweet and fine / whose song needs this voice of mine” the closer semantics would have been offset by a more clumsy rhythm. Is the balance between form (the rhymes and rhythm) and meaning acceptable? In this instance, I am unsure. Elsewhere, as I argue below, EJ-D has managed to solve this kind of problem very well in a few instances, but has failed in far too many others. In this particular example, her translation is probably acceptable; but I find this a borderline example. To argue this point, I will exemplify the few instances where EJ-D has successfully combined meaning and form in a “poetic” way, and the many instances where she has failed to do so.

But first, examples of what are, quite plainly, unnecessary mistakes—in some instances totally unacceptable “howlers”—with no conceivable justification in terms of “poetic” balance. How, for instance, can she manage to translate nad as “under,” and yet do so inconsistently? (Ballad titles and the page numbers of the English versions are cited; the symbol ≠ is used for “does not mean”).

- “. . . le noge nad vodo” ≠ “only my legs under waters” (“Namesto koga roža cveti,” 10);
- “močvirje novih želja bo odletelo” ≠ “a swamp of desire . . . soars” (“Namesto koga roža cveti,” 10);

- “trava nad mojo zemljo,” ≠ “the grass under my soil” (“Namesto koga roža cveti,” 10);
- “Žarek že dviga se iz sna” ≠ “a sunbeam awakens us from sleep” (“Nekega jutra, ko se zdani,” 12);
- “glasneje od viharjev se slišal bo naš smeh” ≠ “our laughter was louder than the roar of the storm” (“Nekega jutra, ko se zdani,” 12);
- “Ljubezen moja / prav potihno obrne stran glavo” may imply “Love of mine / you betrayed me” (“Obrni, obrni,” 16) but both the original metaphor and at the same time the repetition of the “turning” theme (which is important, cf. the title) are lost. A more literal translation is essential;
- “da je . . . žarek / ki tebe zbudi / ko si ga odgrneš z oči” ≠ “that a beam . . . / when you open your eyes / will come to waken you” (“Tvoje jutro,” 18, see also below);
- “rože” ≠ “a rose” (“Če bi ti imel,” 20);
- “lepši dan” ≠ “beautiful days” (“Če bi ti imel,” 20, see also below);
- “tam nad goro, tam nad vodo” ≠ “There neath the water, there above the hill” (“Zvezdice bele,” 22);
- “ovce jezno grizejo” ≠ “biting sheep with tender teeth” (“Vrane,” 24);
- “ure tiktakajo, / kazalci pa stojijo” ≠ “the clocks tick away / our fingers point and say” (“Vrane,” 24);
- “zapojte mi raje” ≠ “sing to me of paradise” (“Bela nedelja,” 30);
- “v beli tišini / poljubiva se oba / to nedeljo” ≠ “in the white silence / let us kiss one last time, this Sunday” (“Bela nedelja,” 30);
- “nov gvant” ≠ “a new glove” (“Daleč je moj rojstni kraj,” 34);
- “naj sliši se” ≠ “let him hear them” (“Vriskanje in jok,” 36);
- “saj mi je vseen’, saj mi je žal” ≠ “it’s all the same to me whether I’m sorry or no” (“Qué será, será,” 38).

Where, to offset all these glaring mistranslations, does EJ-D succeed in achieving a poetic rendering? The occasions are few, but noteworthy.

- “Nekega jutra, ko se zdani / in se solze posušijo, / nekega jutra / ko se zdani” — “One morning, when tears go dry, / one morning / when dawn draws nigh” (“Nekega jutra, ko se zdani,” 12): here EJ-D omits one phrase, but the final effect is harmonious;
- “Vrana vrani ne izkljuje oči, / jager jagru stolček gor drži” — “The raven never plucks out the eye of another, / just as the hunter holds the stool for his brother” (“Vrane,” 24);
- “Črna kočija / te vzela je v nebo. / Vem, da te angeli / več ne pustijo čez” — “A black carriage / took you up the sky. / And I know that the angels / will not let you nigh” (“Bela nedelja,” 30);
- “v muzikantsko noč / gre rosa proč” — “in the music-filled night / when the dew took flight” (“Joužek,” 32) (but why the change of tense?).

In some of these instances, the specific translated example is more “poetic” than its original, in the sense that it has a rhyme where the original does not; this reflects the fact that the translator is often forced to shift the locus of a rhyme from one part of the ballad to another.

In contrast, the instances are far too numerous where the effort to achieve a rhyme proves too much of a strain for the translator, with a resulting major sacrifice in meaning. Some examples:

- “Da je najlepši žarek / ki tebe zbudi / ko si ga odgrneš z oči” is rendered as “that a beam damp with dew / when you open your eyes / still comes to waken you” (“Tvoje jutro,” 18): setting aside the mistranslations here (see “mistakes” above), the translation of najlepši as “damp with dew” is only justifiable to provide a rhyme with “you”; but EJ-D appears to miss the point of these last three lines—that it is that (sun)beam you rub from your eyes when it wakes you, that is the best (of all sunbeams). The point of these lines is far too important to be sacrificed for a rhyme: quite simply, the word “best” (or a synonym) *has* to be in the English version.
- “Priskrbel bi ti lepši dan, / dneve in jutra bi ti preštel, / dežne kaplje ti shranil v dlan, / Če bi ti imel, / Če bi ti imel” has two mistranslations that I have already mentioned: dan is pluralized and lepši is rendered as “beautiful” rather than “more beautiful”; and, for this last, “maintaining the rhythm” is no excuse, for the extra syllable of the comparative could have been fitted in to this

line by omitting “to”— “I would give you more beautiful days.” But this is not all: “I would give to you beautiful days / days and mornings count for you, / I would save in my palm the morning dew / if I had you / if I had you. (“Če bi ti imel,” 20). EJ-D prefers the phrase “morning dew” to “drops of rain,” again, to provide a rhyme with “if I had you.” And again, I find this too far from the original meaning, recalling the themes of the preceding ballads rather than concentrating on the import of this one.

- In the same ballad: “Zamešal bi sledi, / prebarval si lase, / zagnal bi se kot pes / v tvoje noge” has ABCB rhymes: EJ-D contrives AABC rhymes (an option that in itself is laudable) with another large semantic leap: “I would cover any trace, / change the color of my face, / throw myself like a dog / at your feet.” (“Če bi ti imel,” 20). The image of coloring hair is in my opinion trivialized, and/or made unnecessarily comic, by substituting the ambiguous idea of changing face color—are we to understand, for example, blushing—or using woad?
- “otročki obrazi / z hripavim glasom” is englished as “with the face of a child / with a voice hoarse and wild.” Singular “child” for plural would be acceptable, if justified, but this change is made to rhyme “child” with “wild,” which in itself is *far* too far from the original meaning (“Tista črna kitara,” 28).
- “Solzam radosti in boli / ti prsti najdejo sledi” means literally: “The fingers find traces of tears of pleasure and pain.” EJ-D achieves a rhyme, but with phrases that are ambiguous at best, and that I think would normally be understood in the wrong sense: “Tears of pleasure and pain / let the fingers find their strain” (“Joužek,” 32).
- “Včeraj umrl je en norc, / vaški umetnik, skratka norc, / vsem predmet za smeh, / vsem ogledalo za lastni uspeh” has AABB rhymes. EJ-D’s translation, with ABAB rhymes, is good except for one word: “Yesterday a madman dead did fall, / the artist, the village fool, the don, / a laughing stock for one and all / a mirror for the pride of everyone” (“Vriskanje in jok,” 36). I find “madman” too strong, but accept it; but I cannot accept “don,” which is there, obviously, to provide a rhyme for “everyone.” “Don” has several meanings, but none of them in any way fit this context—four in one small dictionary: a Spanish nobleman? an expert? the head of a

student dorm? or could EJ-D mean a professor at Cambridge or Oxford?!

- Finally, in her translation of the Prekmurski dialect “Igrala je, igrala,” EJ-D again goes in for what I can only term “over-poeticizing.” Stanza two begins: “S čin pa tij svoje goloube, / goloube raniš? / Sebe rejžen, fse goloube, fse goloube ranim!” That is, “With what do you feed your pigeons, your pigeons? I cut myself [to] feed all [my] pigeons, all [my] pigeons!” EJ-D translates as follows: “With what do you feed the pigeons, / the pigeons that you feed? / I give pieces of my flesh to them, / for that is what they need!” The quest for a rhyme is justified, but to pursue the quest this far is not translating, but re-interpreting.

Hitherto I have concentrated my remarks about form on end-rhymes; but there is of course a great deal more to form—other kinds of sound instrumentation, and, in particular, rhythm. Given the fact that a CD accompanies the text as a deliberately-provided pedagogical aid, and that the translators presumably had access to recordings of Kreslin, I believe that EJ-D (having decided to make a “poetic” translation) should have paid as much attention to the rhythm of her translations as she gave to devising rhymes; and I do not believe that she did this. One example where the rhythm is more or less correct, and one where it is not: “Tista črna kitara” has a refrain repeated twice in literary Slovene and once (slightly altered) in Prekmurski dialect:

Gospód, tísto kitáro 1e imáte,
 Gospód, tísto črno kitáro 1e imáte?
 Gospód, tísta bíla je res dobrá!

and:

Gospóud, tísto gitáro že máte,
 Gospóud, tísto čárno gitáro že máte?
 Gospóud, tísta je bíjla dobra,
 tísta je bíjla dobrá!

A listen to the recording shows that res in the last line is unstressed, hence that there are four, five, and four stresses syllables, as marked here. EJ-D’s translation:

Sir, do you still have that guitar,
 Sir, do you still have that black guitar?
 Sir, that one was the best by far!

Here again EJ-D has inserted a rhyme that was not in the original, in her striving for “poeticity,” and in this instance I do not fault her. But what of the rhythm? “Sír, do you stíll have thát guitár”—four feet. “Sír, do you stíll have thát bláck guitár?”—the required five feet, but clumsily achieved, with consecutive stresses on “that” and “black” “. . . thát old bláck guitár” would have captured Kreslin’s rhythm and the insertion of “old” is justified by the context (father having bought the guitar with his first paycheck). As for the last line, it is unclear whether it is to be read as “Sír, thát one wás the bést by fár!”—or, to achieve the four stressed syllables of the original, for example, “Sír, that one wás the bést by fár!” To avoid this uncertainty, I suggest that EJ-D should have simply written: “Sír, thát was bést by fár!”

“Qué será, será” follows the well-known song, immortalized by Doris Day in Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, in structure and in melody. This is recognized by EJ-D who does not translate the refrain (Kreslin has “prešvercati se ne da,” literally, “it can’t be smuggled through” as his third line) but replicates the original English refrain (with “the future’s not ours to see” as her third line): I think she might have essayed a translation here, but perhaps that’s a quibble. There are three stanzas other than the refrain: let us examine the first, on the understanding that the translations of the second and third follow the same pattern. Kreslin replicates the original rhythm (four, four, four, and three feet) with:

Bíl sem še číst kot prva strán
 Vprašal sem zvezde, kákšen je plán.
 Áli bo dólgo, áli bo fáir,
 bóm lovec áli zvér?

EJ-D has:

When I was as pure as a clean white slate,
 I asked the stars what would be my fate.
 Would it be fair, would it be long as the day,
 would I be hunted, would I be the pray?

(There are, incidentally, two gross errors that may have been typos in the last line: correct would be “hunter ... prey”). This is a good

example of EJ-D's insistence on rhymes at the expense of meaning, and also at the expense of rhythm, as anyone will discover who tries to sing her words to the well-known melody. But, keeping to EJ-D's lexical choices, some small adjustments make this fit the rhythm!

Whén I was púre as á clean sláte,
I asked the stárs what wóuld be my fáte;
wóuld it be fáir or as lóng as the dáy,
wóuld I be húnter or préy?

And similar adjustments can be made to the other two stanzas. In sum: too much attention to rhymes, too little to rhythm.

Many of the glaring errors listed in my fourth paragraph, and some of the instances where EJ-D was too ambitious in trying to achieve a "poetic" translation, could have been easily avoided by having the translations checked by someone else, preferably a native Slovene-speaker with a good command of English. Another necessary step in the process is for the editor to have a third party review the translations. Clearly, neither of these steps was taken in this case. And, above all, recall that this is an instance where a non-poetic, word-for-word translation, like those presented by Olof and by Milič, would have been well justified and almost certainly preferable. These English versions are, all in all and with very few exceptions, a disservice to the craft of translation and a disservice to Vlado Kreslin—a disservice that does not appear to have been done in the German or the Italian versions.

The "Language learning guide" takes up the last twenty-three pages of this booklet. First, on pages 42–43, we find some words of explanation in all four languages, to the effect that the texts are (imaginatively and usefully) printed in different typefaces (bold, italics, etc.) to show different parts of speech, with case-forms identified according to the European order, NGDAPI (or NGDALI for those who prefer "locative" to "prepositional"), which is, alas, unfamiliar to most English-speakers, both in Britain and in North America. The recommendations for independent study are sensible, if somewhat verbosely presented; they amount to (a) listening alone, (b) listening and reading, (c) checking the meaning, and (d) listening again. The remaining pages present the texts of all fourteen ballads in the different typefaces and with dictionary look-up forms in the margin (so, for the verb pregrize, we are given pregristi, pregrizem, pregrizel). In addition, five of the fourteen ballads have parallel glossaries in German, Italian,

and English (and the English one seems to have been prepared by someone other than EJ-D, for the errors listed above do not reoccur here, e.g., *kazalci* is glossed as “hands” and not “fingers”). One question is obvious, and is not answered: why only five ballads? This part of the booklet is extremely useful, and it is a pity that the editor did not commission equal treatment for the remaining nine.

A postscript: Translators are a patient and passive group: to actually have their translations accepted for publication is a reward with which they are often satisfied—even if their names do not appear on the title page of the publication in question. Of five poetry collections with which this reviewer has been involved, four have shown his name on the title page, but one has not. Editors who relegate the names of the translators to later pages are implicitly suggesting that translation is a matter-of-fact, automatic, simple affair that does not merit recognition. Naturally, some translations are better than others, and—as suggested above—the translations into English in the book under review are in many details far from laudable. However, the editor, Angela Schellander, must presumably have had sufficient faith in the three translators involved to consider their translations worth publishing; but she only acknowledges their contribution grudgingly; for what the reader, or the bookstore-browser, finds is as follows. On the front cover is the title as presented at the beginning of this review. Page 1: *Vlado Kreslin. Besedila Pesmi*. Page 2: information about the SLOBOX series. Page 3: again, the title as presented at the beginning of this review. Page 4: information about the simultaneously-published CD, and *only then* the names of the translators and the names of the authors of the “Learner’s guide.” This admission that the translators are real people, and that the translations were not performed by automata, is far too late, and this postponement of recognition is no less than an unkind, or at least a thoughtless, act of humiliation. I strongly believe that translators should long since have adopted a less passive stance: what they achieve is, or at least should be, something that is worth recognition on the title page.

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