

this may represent testimony about remote and unpleasant events. For serious students, the book represents intensely instructive and compelling reading. *Resistance, Imprisonment & Forced Labor* primarily demonstrates two things: (1) In World War II, many Slovenes were unable to define their historical national interests. Most of them were badly organized; and—except for the Partisans—they lacked coherent and intelligent leadership, and (2) Today, we must admit that Europeans, Slovenes included, have progressed beyond the most optimistic expectations. This is drastically evident if we compare our situation to our predecessors' during World War II. We realize how much nationalist confrontation, fear, animosity and discrimination have disappeared from modern European life.

Dimitrij Rupel, Ljubljana

Aleš Berger, ed. *Ten Slovenian Poets of the Nineties* (= *Litterae Slovenicae 100*). Ljubljana: Slovene Writers' Association, 2002. 103 pp., no price listed (paper). ISBN: 961-91010-0-6.

The Slovenian poets Tomaž Šalamun and Aleš Debeljak are well known in American literary circles. Translations of Šalamun's daring, exuberant poems have exerted a profound influence on younger American writers, while the incisive intelligence on display in Debeljak's prose poems and sonnets offers an antidote to the discontinuous narrative and lyric practices greatly infecting much contemporary poetry. For those that take an interest in the literature of Central Europe, the works of Šalamun and Debeljak remind us of poetry's noble heritage and enduring cultural significance.

But what of their followers in Slovenia? They are unknown to all but the most devoted readers of foreign literature. *Ten Slovenian Poets of the Nineties* seeks to address this gap in our knowledge, presenting the works of ten younger poets that came of age in the last decade of the twentieth century. This was, of course, an extraordinary moment in Slovenian history, marked in a variety of ways by the poets under review in these pages. Peter Kolšek notes in an introductory essay that these poets were shaped from childhood by the disintegration and collapse of

socialism, a changing world order that left them with a new understanding of their vocation. Kolšek argues that, if the traditional role of Slovenian poets had been to create and maintain a distinct identity for a people always subject to larger political forces (Germanization, Italianization, Nazism, Yugoslav centralism), now for the first time in their history they can write in freedom—political and cultural. “They all speak for themselves,” Kolšek writes, “and none of them either can or wishes to speak for them all”(10). In independent Slovenia the poets’ words are no longer central to the discourse of the age; their diminished place in society is reflected in these poems.

The anthology opens with a pair of erotic poems by Barbara Korun, whose first collection, *The Sharpness of Gentleness*, appeared in 1999. Here are the opening lines of “Stag”:

I wake up to a warm stag’s tongue between my legs.
 the evening light penetrates in slits through the opened
 doors.
 the stag gently prods my breasts and licks me.
 I let his coarse tongue lick my vulva, breasts and face.
 His smell intoxicates me, the smell of earth, moss, decay
 and fear,
 the smell of instinct (17).

This energetic hymn to life, which may account for its haphazard relationship to the rule of initial capitalization, is perhaps emblematic of the poetry of a small nation entering the common house of sovereign states: daring, private, intoxicating—and, like many poems here, poorly translated. It is difficult, for example, to imagine a poet said to be in possession of a highly charged language writing: “the desire to make love is mine and it is frantic./ he makes love to me with ease and closeness”(17). Makes you wonder why anyone would bother doing it in the first place.

Uroš Zupan is the best-known poet in this collection, and indeed his poems are nothing if not ambitious. “Silver,” a lengthy and sometimes dazzling catalogue of improvisations on the color of, well, nearly everything, including his own mind, aspires to epic grandeur:

Silver is the wind, adding to every hour of oblivion
 three additional hours of oblivion, the hours that constantly
 happen in the present,

Silver are sails, which in truth are white, and are silvery
 because of the imagination's needs, and because of the
 celebration of their inaudible movement,
 Silver is the stillness of the afternoon, fastening its warmth
 to the earth and then
 refusing to give the seat to the approaching evening (27),

and so on.

For what in the original may be a brilliant poem skirting the edge of the abyss appears in this translation to be little more than a pretentious exercise. "My only life is poetry," he writes in "Leaving the House We Made Love In," "and the more she wins the more I lose"(26). For English readers to learn Zupan's fate in this contest, the quality of translation will have to improve.

This is a pity, because a careful reader can recognize in the works of each of the poets under discussion the flashes of insight and imagery integral to genuine poetry. Aleš Šteger is by all accounts a talented poet, whose wit, inventiveness, and moral rigor can be glimpsed through these wooden translations. It is like watching a soccer match through a hole in the fence: you see only part of the action. In "10 Pleas for a Good Night" Šteger writes: "Grant me each and every day a sign of fullness, nothing major, just a little, tiny sign. For instance, please, a hole in a pocket, through which my money falls not out on the street, but somewhere into the innards of my pants, that I may confidently watch and wait, with faith unshakable in You"(94). If only his translator had listened with the same patience, desire, and faith.

As it happens, in the course of reviewing this book an anthology of Polish poets arrived from Britain. *Altered State: The New Polish Poetry*¹ is a marvelous introduction to the younger generation of Polish poets. What a pleasure it is to hear vibrant new voices, to read poems that succeed in English, to feel one's vistas expanding with every line. And what a shame it is that the same cannot be said of *Ten Slovenian Poets of the Nineties*. The difference? A native English speaker with literary skills has teamed up with his Polish colleagues to produce a readable, and vital, collection. The younger poets of the new Slovenia deserve nothing less.

Christopher Merrill, University of Iowa

¹ Rod Mengham, Tadeuz Pióro, and Piotr Szymor, eds., *Altered State: The New Polish Poetry* (Tadmorden, UK: Arc Publications, 2003).