



MILAN RICHTER

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Born 25 July 1948 in Bratislava

STUDIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS

1967–1972 German, English and Swedish linguistics and literature at Comenius University, Bratislava
1984 Goethe Research Scholar in Weimar
1985 Dr. in literature
1990 Fulbright Research Scholar at UCLA, Los Angeles

PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS (selected)

1990–1992 executive secretary of the Slovak Literary Translators' Society
1992 counselor at the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs
1992 counselor at the Czechoslovak Embassy in Oslo, Norway
1993–1995 Slovakia's chargé d'affaires a.i. in Norway, accredited for Iceland
1996 Chief Editor of the Slovak Literary Review (in English and German)
1999 Chairman of the Slovak Literary Translators' Society
2000 Publisher (MilaniuM Publishers)
2001 Vice-president of the Slovak PEN Centre (international activities)
2002 Chairman of the FIT Karel Capek Translation Prize jury

PUBLICATIONS (selected)

7 volumes of poetry in Slovak (Evening Mirrors, 1973; Whips, 1975; Pollen, 1976; Secure Place, 1987; Roots in the Air, 1992; From Behind the Velvet Curtains, 1997; An Angel with Black Feathers, 2000);
A Temple Collapsed in Me – to be published in 2002
His poems were translated altogether into 22 languages and published in 18 languages, incl Chinese, Arabic, Hebrew, and Icelandic.
1977–1986 – forbidden to publish his own books of poetry for political reasons
53 translated books and theatre plays from English, German, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, and Spanish

AWARDS

Swedish Writers Fund's Award for Promotion of Swedish Literature (1991)
Austrian Ministry of Education and Arts' Translation Award (1993, 1996)
Swedish Academy Translation Prize (1999)
Translation Awards in Slovakia (1988, 1992, 2000, 2001, 2002)

SPOILED POEM

You spoiled something back there at the beginning,
a vowel, a syllable, a word,
and the poem's inedible now,
like strawberry jam
capped with mold.

Someone spoiled something back there at the beginning,
the Lord, the twenty-fourth pair of chromosomes,
and the poem's buried now
like a tallith
in a mass grave.

You spoiled something back there at the beginning,
married, got divorced,
and the poem's torn away now
like a son from the father,
the father from a son.

Someone spoiled you back there at the beginning,
forgot to give you sharp elbows, a dull conscience,
and the poem's in trouble now,
like a fool
who told the king the truth.

The poem is spoiled,
something's missing,
too late to set it straight,
like your life, your ancestors, like history:
it's what it is.

A strawberry in spoiled sugar.

From the Slovak by Jascha Kessler and Milan Richter

LES RACINES DANS L'AIR

*Dans l'air, c'est là que se tiennent tes racines,
là-bas, dans l'air.
Paul Celan*

- Vous allez voir les tombes de vos morts M.L'ingénieur?
- Oui mon voisin. Ma mère repose là-bas
mon frère aussi et la nièce de ma femme,
on l'a enterrée l'an dernier, elle avait dix-sept ans,
morte de leucémie à ce que l'on dit. Et vous, mon voisin?
- Je vais à la maison. La nuit vient vite ces temps-ci.
C'est à la maison que je suis le mieux...
- Vous êtes déjà allé voir les tombes de vos morts?
- Je n'ai pas de tombe. Ma femme m'a abandonné
il y a déjà longtemps, comme vous le savez, mes fils vivent encore
mais loin au Canada, oui, au Canada...
Je n'ai pas de tombe...
- Et votre mère, votre père, vos frères,
et vos grands-parents, où reposent-ils?
- Dans l'air d'Auschwitz, mon voisin, c'est là
qu'ils reposent, dans l'air.

Traduction: Evelyne Voldeng