

“When by touches we imitate”¹ – sensuality and allusion in Tomislav Kis’s poetry collection *The Flintstone from the Sun*

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The newly published Slovene poetry collection *Kremenov kamen s sonca* (*The Flintstone from the Sun*) by the young author Tomislav Kis is named after the poem with the same title. As a flintstone is a common mineral in the lithosphere, so do Kis’s poems capture a vast variety of motifs, from gothic: bones, veins, steel chains, vampires; sensual, such as muscles, icy blade, ebony cane, limbs; to didactic, which convey a moral message.

The collection is divided into two parts with the titles *About Divinities-Monsters* (*O božanstvih pošastih*) and *Adela’s Garden* (*Adelin vrt*), which are also the titles of two poems from these parts (pages 10 and 28 respectively). I hyphenated the translation of the former title because its meaning in Slovene expresses coordination, or equality between/among parts of speech, in this case nouns. The poem depicts the bipolarity of human nature; people can therefore be both – divine-like beings as well as monsters. These two natures often coincide as expressed by the lines 8 and 9: “... Should I not talk about them as monsters? / Should I clap my hands in ecstasy, or hold my hands in prayer to the Lord?”

“Butchering” (lines 21 and 22) was indeed, so history tells us, the fashion of “twenty centuries” (line 20), and the poem is a reminder of unholy deeds done in the name of the God or gods in general; for some of them somebody apologized (the papal letter *Mea Culpe*), but some of them were so private that we cannot tell when, where and why they happened nor how a butcher and their victim lived with them afterwards. In spite of the fact that a holy war is a paradox *per se*, the speaker does not pass any direct judgement about the butchers.

The first part of the collection is also focused on death and dying, sometimes also mixed with sensual pleasure as in “In the Middle of Europe of the 21st Century” (9) where the poem, talking about vampires, ends with “On the March 7, before sleep, men / shared the blood on the lips and neck” (lines 13 and 14). The poem “Under the jutting roof (diptych)” is another example of a death poem to which a feeling of melancholy is added. There are images of aridity, albatrosses, tomb and ash dump, which, typical of Western culture, signify the expiring of one’s life.

One of the key themes in Kis’s poetry is sensuality/sexuality, which in most cases bares male homosexual connotation. “To Rimbaud” (p. 8), for instance, captures the life story of this well-known 19th century French poet, who was, for a period of his life, involved in a passionate love affair with another poet – Verlaine. Their consuming relationship is perhaps expressed best by the line three: “Till the day I die, I offer you no more passion which would burn out on your bones.” There is also a biographical remark in the poem, which directly alludes to Rimbaud’s life: “And he will ask, whether I, there, in *Africa*, wrote poetry” (line 4). He in fact lived in Africa for a period in his life.

¹ Taken from the poem “Intertwinings” (35, line 19).

In the same part of the collection there are also a didactic poem and two elegies, perhaps not so common types of poems in contemporary poetry. The former has no particular title, so I will name it after the first line “Shall we wait until the children” (11-12) and is one of the most powerful poems in the collection. It deals with prejudices in the Slovene society of the time. The poem opens by mentioning “the erased.” These are people who were erased from the register of Slovene citizens at the time when Slovenia was establishing its independent status. The speaker of the poem encourages readers to stop being prejudiced:

Let us, yes, let us trample on
This fear of the different,
Of the hungry,
Of our neighbours,
Of the same-sex oriented,
Trample on this fear of women,
Of mothers without children. (lines 20-27)

The other two poems mentioned above are elegies “To grandfather who typed my stories and stories of other people” and “Come as you may (as the invitation goes)” (18, and 24-26 respectively). The first one is dedicated to the author’s grandfather and it contains many biographical data about the grandfather. The images which add infinity to the poem are the speaker’s lip, inherited from the grandfather, stars, river and trains (the grandfather was a manager of one of Slovenian river power plants, and he and his grandson had a memorable trip by train to Ljubljana).

The other elegy was written at the time of Pope John Paul II’s death. I believe it not farfetched to say that the speaker here is Jesus himself and the theme is the ascension of all people – people as they are, who do not have to fake/hide anything to get to heaven. The lines which confirm my statements are these: “... let them all sit next to me / rule with me / ... this is my wish and command” (lines 35-36, 58). The poem also abounds in Christian symbols and predictions of afterlife. The word *octagonal* is repeated three times. It fits to this poem perfectly as octagonal shape is oriental and ancient symbol of perfection in the Universe, and it also alludes to the medieval imperial liturgy as it mimics the shape of imperial crown.

The second part of the poetry collection is more personal and intimate than the first one. The titles of poems, containing either personal names or addressing significant others, help to create a confiding atmosphere. The poems deal with the past social and personal events in a meditative way. The title poem “Adela’s garden,” for instance, comments on some issues of the time, such as September 11, global warming, cultural awareness, the role of Christian faith, but the frame story is the story of some Adela. On the other hand, the following poem, called “Ana’s story,” bears no significant society critique; it is a poem about a girl/woman finding happiness in the relationship with a man. It is rich in superlatives describing her experiences when she was in his company.

There are certain motifs that the author likes to use and which appear in both parts of the collection. These are *cattle*, used in the poems “Talk to me about divinities-mosters” (10) and “What did you think” (30); *butchering* used in the former poem above and in “As a big sponge after rain” (35); the *octagonal* from “What was the name of the old lady I never” (22). Maritime motifs, however, are present exclusively in the second part. Having the privilege of knowing the author in person, I can say that sea presents a core element in his life, so, in my opinion, poems containing this motif express his deepest, most subtle feelings and great passion; what is more, these poems are also the most numerous in this collection. Let me mention them: “Kanegra or the barefoot” (32-33), the above mentioned “As a big sponge after rain”(35), “Twisted around the light bulb” (37), “Your nakedness is my privilege” (46), “The sailing boat” (51) and “The seagulls” (53). The poem “Twisted around the light bulb” (37) in one of those poem in which tenderness and wild sensual passion go hand in hand. Here are some of the lines which establish my argument:

The world spins around a single light.

You sooner lose heart, when you seek for swans you find scraps
and for a beginning this is all they can offer.

We fastened ourselves with our frailty,
and now you tell me: ”Those nights you were
the best.”

.... We really loved to fuck, and we loved to fuck in real. (37; lines 1-6, 12)

Richness in figures of speech, poetry full of extraordinary themes/motifs and the learned character of Kis’s poems, sometimes also expressed in a form or a conceit, make the author one of the most creative poetry writers in contemporary Slovenia. Kis’s poetry collection certainly calls for the same publication in English, as now it is only available to speakers of Slovene. Nevertheless, I believe that the present collection importantly contributes to Slovene poetry corpus with its genuineness of re-established gothic, romanticist and elegiac poetry conventions.

Works Cited

Kis, Tomislav. *Kremenov kamen s sonca*. Maribor: Mariborska literarna družba, 2008.