

A POEM BY JANKO MESSNER

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Janko Messner, the doyen of intellectual life among the minority Slovenians in Koroška/Kärnten (Carinthia), Austria was born December 13, 1921 in the village of Dob/Aich; he studied Germanic, Romance and Slavic Literatures in Austria and Yugoslavia and 1963-1981 taught at the Slovene *Gimnazija* in Celovec/Klagenfurt. He did not begin writing until 1970 but his literary output since then was extensive: essays, short stories, filmscripts, dramas, poetry. Much was polemical, witty, satirical, but often tender and always passionate and engaged. Yugoslav Communists called him a lackey of the Austrian right wing, while Carinthian German nationalists castigated him for his left-wing views, especially after his championing of Nicaraguan revolutionaries and his collaboration with Ernesto Cardinal. In spite of his strongly-held views he was awarded many literary prizes in Austria and Slovenia. Personally, he was curmudgeonly and charming, usually the latter. After publishing some translations of his poetry in 1998, I visited him several times and worked on further translations with him; our interesting and annoying collaboration is described in “Multiple im/person/aliz/ations: Four Attempts to ‘get under the skin’ of Poets,” *TranscUlturAl* Vol. 1, no. 4, 2011. Janko died on October 26, 2011. The following poem, first published in *Pesmi in puščice*, Ljubljana, 1991, shows that “he heard a different drummer” from his small-minded contemporaries and stepped to that rhythm. Most of the translation dates from our collaboration in his house in Osojnica/Zwanzgerberg in the late 1990s, with a few changes since his recent death.

Dva tabora

Če se natanko pregleda stvari,
v tabora dva se človeštvo deli:
eni so v cunjah, a drugi v škrlatu,
eni v palačah so, drugi pa v blatu.
Eni umirajo lačni brez dela,
druge pa stisne od mastnega jela.

Če se natanko pregleda stvari,
v tabora dva se človeštvo deli:
dvoje marksistov je zmeraj bilo,
s knjižico eni, a drugi z vestjo.
Enim je delo merilo človeka,
drugi živijo od golega čveka.

Two camps

If you look carefully, why, you will find
there are two camps for all humankind:
some dress in rags, the others in silk,
some live in palaces, the others in filth.
Some die of hunger, without any work;
the others of heart disease: butter and pork.

If you look carefully, why, you will find
there are two camps for all humankind:
two kinds of Marxist right from the start,
those from the book, and those from the heart.
For some it is actions only that matter,
For others it's words — meaningless chatter.

Če se natanko pregleda stvari, v tabora dva se človeštvo deli: dvoje kristjanov ta božji svet tlači, eni dejavni, a drugi žebrači. Eni brez greha bojé se pekla, drugi pregrešno živé od Boga.	If you look carefully, why, you will find there are two camps for all humankind: two kinds of Christian ruling the earth, some very active, the rest of no worth. Those without sin live in dread fear of hell; the others, self-righteously, sin very well.
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