

Translating Prešeren's 'Wreath of Sonnets': Formal Aspects

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1. Introduction

In 2011 I spoke at the St. Jerome's Day conference about two kinds of peripherality in translation; now, I shall discuss a third. My topics then were, first, the normally lonely role of linguists hovering on the edge of the mass of those literary scholars who constitute the huge majority of translators; and, second, the rare attempts to translate "dialect" literature in one language into a "dialect" of another language (Priestly, "Two (other) kinds"). My topic now is a venture to an even more extreme edge of the realm of translating poetry: attempts to translate *Wreaths* (or, *Heroic Crowns*) of *Sonnets*, including one undertaken by a colleague and myself. My aim is to describe our own attempt and to assess the result from my own, personal (and peripheral) viewpoint—that of a linguist without literary training. I emphasize at the outset that I examine *form* and deal not at all with *content*; and I acknowledge that my assessment is too narrowly circumscribed to be fully acceptable to scholars of literature.¹ I hope, however, that a linguist's criteria, however limited, will be of interest to translators.

Before describing this poetic form, I should explain how and why I came to be involved in translating this work. When in 1987 I was asked by an editor in Celovec/Klagenfurt (Austria) to make an assessment of Pinto's 1954 translation of France Prešeren's "Sonetni venec [Wreath of Sonnets]" (Matthews and Slodnjak) for possible reprinting, I thought that I had enough experience and knowledge to comply with his request. I took the translation away, and (all too quickly!) decided that it should not be reprinted. But very soon I was attacked by nagging doubts: having never translated from Slovene—let alone from early 19th-century Slovene—to English, was I in any way justified in making this assessment? When, therefore, I found the time in the following few months, I attempted English versions of six of Prešeren's shortest poems—and I found them *extremely* difficult. I was like a reckless non-swimmer whose first attempt to swim is upstream against a raging

¹ As is clear from the comments of reviewers of this article, who are hereby sincerely thanked: they assisted in several improvements.

torrent. I soon recognized my own foolhardiness, and quickly gave up translating Prešeren for a while. It was only after some six years, and in tandem with the leading Prešernologist in North America, Henry R. Cooper Jr., that a co-translation of any Prešeren appeared, namely our version of “Zdravljica [A Toast]” (Priestly and Cooper 1994).² Following this, we took up the challenge of translating a large part of Prešeren’s oeuvre for an anthology to celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary of his birth (1800), and his “Venec” was part of the eventual anthology (Priestly and Cooper 2001).

2. France Prešeren and His Wreath of Sonnets

As I wrote in a previous article (Priestly, “Multiple Im/person/aliz/ations”), before Prešeren there was little Slovene literature and almost no Slovene poetry; he shouldered the burden of pioneering multiple poetic genres and proving that this language could stand beside any other as a vehicle for literature. He wrote an epic poem of over 500 lines, “Krst pri Savici [The Baptism on the Savica]” in 1840, and elegies, folk tales, lyric poems, even poetry in unusual metres such as his “Ghazals” of 1846. In addition he wrote many sonnets, the best known being “Sonetje nesreče” [Sonnets of Unhappiness]. Above all, in yet another effort to show that Slovene could rival Italian, he wrote a “Wreath of sonnets” in 1834. This is one of the few *Wreaths* (or *Heroic Crowns*) referred to as part of the literary heritage in any language: for a few others, see below.

I shall not describe the structure of a sonnet, or the different types, here. For those in need of an introduction to this poetic structure, and those wishing to refresh their acquaintance, Stephen Fry’s *The Ode Less Travelled* is a most entertaining and instructive guide. I shall restrict my remarks to the fact that a traditional sonnet has 14 lines and one of a very few conventional rhyme-schemes. The most famous early sonnet-writer, Francesco Petrarco (Petrarch), who was Prešeren’s inspiration in many different ways,³ wrote a series of over 300 sonnets declaring his love for “Laura”; they were thus centered on a single theme but had few structural connections. Other poets developed the idea of structurally linking a set of sonnets, again with a unified theme or themes, by using the last line of one sonnet as the first line of the next. In this way Crowns of Sonnets were

² The seventh stanza is the Slovenian National Anthem; alas, when this is sung in English, they use an earlier (and I believe less successful) translation.

³ See Cooper, *France Prešeren* (1981), 82-84 and *passim*.

developed: seven sonnets thus linked, with—to complete the crown—the last line of the seventh identical to the first line of the first. Its logical extension (logical since there are fourteen lines in a sonnet) was the Heroic Crown of Sonnets or Wreath of Sonnets, with fourteen sonnets linked in the same way, the last line of the fourteenth being identical to the first line of the first. Since this exercise results in fourteen lines with the chosen conventional rhyme-scheme, a fifteenth sonnet, made up of the first lines of all fourteen sonnets, is automatically produced. This final combination is termed a Master Sonnet.

Crowns of Sonnets in English⁴ have been quite numerous; an outstanding example is John Donne's "La Corona",⁵ and a recent one is Marilyn Hacker's "Desesperanto".⁶ Not surprisingly (given the difficult task of combining memorable poetry with such a demanding form) Wreaths of Sonnets figure less frequently in the lists of any country's "great" poetry. To my knowledge, the earliest such in English is "A Crown of Sonnets Dedicated to Love" by the Jacobean Poet Lady Mary Wroth (born 1587).⁷ A recent example is Marilyn Nelson's very moving "A Wreath for Emmett Till" (2005), written for children.⁸ In her introduction Nelson writes, "When I decided to use this form, I had seen only one heroic crown of sonnets, a fantastically beautiful poem by the Danish poet Inger Christensen. Instead of thinking too much about the painful subject of lynching" [Emmett Till was lynched when he was 14 years old], "I thought about what Inger Christensen's strategy must have been. The strict form became a kind of insulation..." (Nelson 2). It is the strictness of the form that presents the greatest translating challenge.

Prešeren's *Sonetni venec* not only follows the prescribed structure for a Wreath, as described above, but has one further feature: "To the very demanding requirements Prešeren added one further refinement: an acrostic. That is, ... the first letter of each line in the master sonnet spells out the name of the object of his unrequited love in the dative case, **P R I M I C O V I J U L J I**, "Primicovi Julji," "To Julija Primic" (Cooper, *Francè*

⁴ For lists of crowns and wreaths of sonnets in other languages, see, e.g., German: <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonettenkranz>, French: <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonnets>, Russian: http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/venok_sonetov.

⁵ See <http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/donne/lacorona.htm>. Another fifteen poets who have written Crown of Sonnets in English are listed at http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_of_sonnets

⁶ <http://www.poemhunter.com/best-poems/marilyn-hacker/desperanto/>

⁷ See http://allpoetry.com/poem/8602399-A_Crown_of_Sonnets_Dedicated_to_Love-by-Mary_Wroth

⁸ See http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers_guides/nelson_wreath.shtml, a teacher's guide.

Prešeren, 1981, 99).⁹ Among the Wreaths enumerated above only Marilyn Nelson's achieves this refinement: the first letters in her master sonnet spell out **R I P E M M E T T I L L**.

3. Translations of Wreaths of Sonnets

Apart from versions of Prešeren's "Sonetni venec" (see below) I have only found two translations of Wreaths of Sonnets. There may well be some more. The two, whose quality I cannot judge, are:

1. The Danish poet Inger Christensen wrote the Wreath "Sommerfugledalen [Butterfly Valley]" in 1991. In this she "explored the sonnet cycle and created glowingly beautiful poems about death and hope under the title symbol of the book, which suggests [the idea of] transformation."¹⁰ An English translation, "The Valley of the Butterflies," by John Irons was published in 2003.¹¹ Christensen was the recipient of many important awards but, although she was a candidate, never was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.
2. The Czech Jaroslav Seifert was indeed a Nobel prizewinner (1984) and in 1956 wrote a well-known Wreath, namely "Praha a venec sonetu [Prague and a Wreath of Sonnets]." An English translation (termed "an authorized poetic rendition"), by J.K. Klement and Eva Stucke was published, with the original, in 1987.

Prešeren's Slovene poetry¹² has been translated by dozens of translators, into (apparently) at least 26 languages.¹³ As for the *Sonetni venec*, there are eight translations alone into Former Serbo-Croatian (Železnjow) and I have learned of versions, before 1998, in

⁹ To make 14 letters, Prešeren elided the second "i" of the second (her given) name.

¹⁰ See <http://denmark.dk/en/meet-the-danes/great-danes/writers/inger-christensen/>

¹¹ See the translator's blog "What words cannot express" at <http://johnirons.blogspot.ca/2011/04/what-words-cannot-express.html>

¹² He also wrote poetry in German.

¹³ The figures derive from the far from explicit details in Moder. The numbers will probably have increased over the ensuing years. According to Moder, apart from the 'major' languages of Europe and virtually all of the Slavic languages, translations of Prešeren have been made into Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Japanese, Swahili and Turkish, and also Esperanto and Latin.

most of the Slavic languages and in at least eight others. Most of these have an acrostic in the Master Sonnet: this is a relatively easy task for the Slavic languages with their grammatical structures so similar to Slovenian (e.g., Polish “Primczewa Julja,” Ukrainian “Примицовой Їули (Прумусовоу Yuli) but is a little more challenging for other languages: two German translations have “An Julija Primitz [To Julia Primic]” and “Dem Bilde Julijas [To the Picture of Julia]”.¹⁴

Our volume of Prešeren’s poetry (Priestly and Cooper 2001) was one of a number of translations commissioned by the editors and Kranj, the nearest city to the poet’s birthplace, for the bicentennial of his birth (e.g., Pibernik and Drolc 1999, 2001). The full list of languages into which the Wreath has been translated is, in the order published, German, Italian, French, English, Croatian, Russian, Slovak, and Spanish. Here my comments refer only to the two English versions that I know: ours, and Pinto’s referred to above (Matthews and Slodnjak)—a contribution to a co-operative edition organized in Oxford in 1954.

4. A Strategy

Having surveyed all kinds of poetic forms in his amusing *The Ode Less Travelled*, Fry (297) mentions Wreaths rather dismissively: “... a corona sequence of fourteen sonnets terminating with a fifteenth which is wholly composed of each linking line of the corona sequence. *If there is no good reason for such complexity it will look like showing off, I feel*”.¹⁵ Neither Marilyn Nelson nor France Prešeren was “showing off”: the former felt inspired by the coincidence of the number of sonnets in a Wreath with Emmett Till’s age when he was lynched; the latter took on the challenge as part of his task of proving Slovenian poetry to be the equal of well-known European poetry. What of translators who attempt a faithful translation (in the following sense: one with proper rhyme-schemes, interlinking lines and, where required, an acrostic) of a Wreath? They may indeed be “showing off”, or they may,

¹⁴ Eleven different acrostics are listed by Olof, “Prešeren in deutscher Übersetzung.” The French version in the anniversary series “La couronne de sonnets” (Pogačnik, in Pibernik and Drolc 1999) simply reproduces the Slovene name, but in reversed order and the nominative case: “Julia Primicova.”

¹⁵ My italics. The term he uses for “Wreath” is “Corona redoublé”.

rather, be making the attempt as one of the ultimate challenges¹⁶ of translating poetry. Mountaineers do not attempt high summits simply to “show off”. As for Henry Cooper and myself: having accepted the commission to translate a representative sample of Prešeren’s poetry, we simply could not reject one of his greatest achievements, and accepted the challenge that it offered. We shared out the work as follows: Henry produced a “pony”, i.e., a more-or-less precise “literal” translation, with little attention to scansion or rhyme (Cooper, “France Prešeren” 1998); I then made a first “faithful” translation, in the sense used above; and then, in many e-mails, we discussed improvements and refinements.

Our task, then, was to devise fourteen sonnets, linked as described above, with (if possible) the Master Sonnet displaying a suitable acrostic. Inherent in the structure of this, as of any, Wreath was a trap for the translator: we had to ensure that when we reached the fourteenth sonnet we would not, like a mountain climber who is repulsed a few metres from the summit, be forced to go back and choose another route. To avoid this probable outcome we had to have some kind of plan of attack, some kind of strategy (see Marilyn Nelson’s use of this word, above). To illustrate the structure of the original, here is the first sonnet:¹⁷

Poet tvoj nov Slovincem venec vije,
‘z petnajst sonetov ti tako ga spleta,
da “*magistralē*”, pesem trikrat peta,
vseh drugih skupaj veže harmonije.

Iz njega zvira, vanjga se spet zlije
po vrsti pesem vsacega soneta;
prihodnja v prednje koncu je začeta;
enak je pevec vencu poezije:

vse misli zvirajo ‘z ljubezni ene,
in kjer ponoči v spanji so zastale,

¹⁶ Cf. Olof’s use of the German equivalent, “Herausforderung” (“Prešeren in deutscher Übersetzung” 109).

¹⁷ The italicization follows the example of the special edition: *France Prešeren*, 1995.

zbude se, ko spet zarja noč prežene.

Ti si življenja moj'ga *magistrale*,
 glasil se 'z njega, ko ne bo več mene,
ran mojib bo spomin in tvoje hvale.

Here and throughout, each line has what is known as “pure Petrarchan form”: (a) iambic pentameters with feminine rhymes in line-finals (' -, i.e., “DUM-da”), (b) the rhyme-scheme *a b b a / a b b a / c d c / d c d*. Given the regular intertwining of first and last lines, many rhymes would necessarily have to be repeated: in the original, *-ije* must occur in 28 line-endings, and *-ale* in 21. The whole is set out on **TABLE I**.

TABLE I: PREŠEREN'S RHYME-SCHEME FOR HIS *SONETNI VENEC*

Notes: rhymes A B C D are determined by their occurrence in the Master sonnet [M];
 x and y denote any other two rhymes within any sonnet

A = [-ije] (Master sonnet: vije, poezije, sije, domačije)

B = [-ale] (Master sonnet: hvale, pognale, pogrešvale, skale)

C = [-ile] (Master sonnet: redile, sile, mile)

D = [-elo] (Master sonnet: neveselo, velo, veselo)

Sonnet	01	01	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	M
line															
01	A	B	B	A	A	B	B	A	C	D	C	D	C	D	A
02	x	x	x	X	x	x	x	x	X	x	x	x	x	x	B
03	x	x	x	X	x	x	x	x	X	x	x	x	x	x	B
04	A	B	B	A	A	B	B	A	C	D	C	D	C	D	A
05	A	B	B	A	A	B	B	A	C	D	C	D	C	D	A
06	x	x	x	X	x	x	x	x	X	x	x	x	x	x	B
07	x	x	x	X	x	x	x	x	X	x	x	x	x	x	B
08	A	B	B	A	A	B	B	A	C	D	C	D	C	D	A
09	y	y	y	Y	y	y	y	y	Y	y	y	y	y	y	C

10	B	B	A	A	B	B	A	C	D	C	D	C	D	A	D
11	y	y	y	Y	y	y	y	y	Y	y	y	y	y	y	C
12	B	B	A	A	B	B	A	C	D	C	D	C	D	A	D
13	y	y	y	Y	y	y	y	y	Y	y	y	y	y	y	C
14	B	B	A	A	B	B	A	C	D	C	D	C	D	A	D
Whereby:															
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● every octave rhymes lines 1, 4, 5, 8; every sestet rhymes lines 10, 12, 14 ● the first line of each sonnet is a repetition of the last line of the previous sonnet, i.e., line 01/14 = 02/01, line 02/14 = 03/01, and so on ● the Master sonnet (“Magistrale”) is composed of the first lines of sonnets 1 - 14: line M/01 = 01/01, line M/02 = 02/01, line M/03 = 03/01, and so on ● required are 24 “different” rhymes each in A and B (28 minus 4 repeated lines), and 18 each in C and D (21 minus 3 repeated lines). 															

First, we decided that we would try to have a “Master theme” with an acrostic. The existing translation by Pinto did not have one; his Master theme has lines beginning with the letters **A-A-S-T-T-U-A-W-T-F-A-B-S-F**. My choices were limited: the name **Julija Primic** was required; it comprises twelve letters. (“Julja Primicova,” the name in the nominative and with one letter elided, was quickly rejected, for this would have required an explanation). From the few solutions that offered themselves, we chose the acrostic **F-O-R-P-R-I-M-I-C-J-U-L-I-A**. The decision was, after some trial attempts, an easy one; and as it turned out, devising a first line of each sonnet to begin with the necessary letter was seldom a difficult task.

Two major problems remained before we might begin actually translating. First, would we attempt to use exactly the same scansion as the original, and hence have lines ending

in feminine rhymes, throughout? And second, what particular frequently-recurrent rhymes would we try out for what are labeled **A, B, C, D** on Table I?¹⁸

First: feminine rhymes? English translations of any poetry that has feminine rhymes in the original are superabundant, given that (for example) virtually all of Italian and much of Russian and German poetry uses feminine rhymes. A tiny sample: over 40% of the lines in Pushkin's *Evgenij Onegin* have F[feminine] rather than M[asculine] rhymes (e.g., in Chapter One, Stanza one, the first four lines end in "právil, zanemóg, zastávil, ne móg"—F, M, F, M; and the prologue to Goethe's *Faust* has 50% feminine rhymes (the first four lines end in "gewechselt, sehn, drechselt, geschehn"—F, M, F, M). Most translators into English, however, use feminine rhymes rarely or not at all. The reasons given are of two kinds (Priestly, "On translating"). First, most commentators have a very negative view of them. Two examples from many: in the preface to her translation of Dante's *Inferno*, Dorothy L. Sayers (56-57) writes: "A *preponderance* of feminine rhyme tends to produce special effects—of sonority (e.g., the inscription over Hell-Gate in Canto III. . .), elegiac lamentation (Canto V), or of burlesque (the Gilbertian gallop at the beginning of Canto XXII)"¹⁹; and Vladimir Nabokov, in his translation²⁰ of *Evgenij Onegin*: "because of associations with the burlesque genre the lyrical English poet will use conspicuous polysyllables warily, sparingly, or not at all". The relevant section in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* expresses a more temperate, but still very limiting opinion: "In dramatic verse, [feminine rhymes] give a sense of colloquialism to speech; ... in narrative and lyric verse they have been generally reserved for moments of special poignancy ... They have also been used for delightful comic effects" (Preminger and Brogan, 737-38). The second reason is the very simple fact that the choice of feminine rhyming words in the English language is very limited: iambs followed by the endings –*ing*, –*tion*, –*ly* and so on, plus not many others. Thus C.F. MacIntyre, in his preface to his translation of Reiner Maria Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* (xi), writes: "Too many translators feel obligated to reproduce the exact German meter, and their verses abound in silly

¹⁸ Olof writes [my translation from German]: "Because of the internal limitations ... there is an enormous need for precisely or approximately rhyming words or parts of words" (112).

¹⁹ Sayers (loc. cit.) does, however, use "a liberal admixture of feminine rhyme" to moderate what she calls the "heavy thump of the masculine rhymes".

²⁰ See Nabokov vol. III, 493, 496.

all [his] thoughts arise from one love,
and where at night in sleep they have been inert,
they awake as the dawn again drives back the night.

You are the *master theme* of my life,
from it, when I am no longer [alive], will sound
the memory of my wounds and of your praise.

Reference to **TABLE I** shows—to take one example—that lines 1, 4, 5, 8 must rhyme and that this rhyme must be used 24 times in all. Henry's "*wreath*" was not, for instance, a word that we could use as the last syllable of line 1: there are *far* fewer than 24 words in English with this rhyme, and with repetitions of the same rhyme some would have been very much overused. One reference work, Ferguson, has only seven, "heath, neath, wreath, sheath, teeth, beneath, underneath".²³ Needless to say, much trial-and-error ensued at this stage. Our final version of the first sonnet was as follows:

For Slovenes I a poet's wreath devise:
I fifteen sonnets will together weave,
And so a thrice-sung 'Master Theme' conceive
That it with all the rest will harmonize.

Within my Theme the sonnets' sources rise,
In turn therein their endings they retrieve,
Their first and last lines, braided, interweave;
This wreath your poet thus personifies;

The fount of all my thoughts one love supreme,
They wake as dark gives way to dawn's ascent,
When they have slept inert through nightly dream.

²³ Ferguson also has the very rare "monteith" and three place- and proper names.

Of my whole life are you the ornament:
When I am gone will sound the Master Theme,
Of both my pain, your praise a monument.²⁴

Rhyme “**A**”, therefore, was “-IZE”, and rhyme “**B**” was “-ENT”. We had sufficient choice of suitable words with these rhymes, if we allowed ourselves the luxury of words with *secondary stress* with these rhymes: thus for “**A**”, not only “eyes, rise, prise, sighs, surprise, guise, devise” and so on, but also verbs in “-ifies” and “ize”, including “hármonize, persónifies” in the first sonnet above. Similarly, for “**B**”, not only “spent, extent” but also “órnamènt, monument,” as above. When we reached sonnets eight and nine, we had to choose two more recurrent rhymes: for “**C**” and “**D**” we chose “ANED” (“regained, unrestrained,” etc.) and “OUD” (“loud, allowed, overcrowd” etc.).

For “**A**”, we ended up using “eyes” and “arise” twice each, and thus did not succeed in using 24 different rhymes in this instance. We did however have 24 different “ENT” words for “**B**”. As for “**C**”, we finished with 16 different rhyming words, while for “**D**” we had as few as 12. This, then, is a second possible criticism, namely that we repeated too many rhymes; however, we never used any one rhyme more than twice; and the number of rhymes used twice is just 10, out of a total of 84.

If we compare our translation with that by Pinto *from this purely formal point of view*, we find the following:

- a) Both we and Pinto use masculine rhymes throughout.
- b) For the rhymes labelled “**B**” we have “ENT” throughout; Pinto has “AZE” with almost complete consistency (“dismays, ways, amaze” etc.) but resorts to “ACE” in three instances (“grace, place, Thrace”).²⁵

²⁴ The last two lines are, as pointed out by a reviewer of this article, difficult to parse and may not be readily understood. First, “... will sound the Master Theme” is to be understood as “the Master Theme will sound”: perhaps the inversion is, for the sake of the rhyme, acceptable. Second, we would have done better to substitute “To” for “OP” in the last line. This was an error and will be corrected if there is ever a reprint.

²⁵ “Inconsistency” here is to be understood within the narrow formal constraints explained earlier. As it happens, there is (as a reviewer points out) a long tradition in English literature of rhyming “AZE” and “ACE” words.

- c) Our rhyme-scheme follows Prešeren's "pure Petrarchan form"; Pinto's does so only for four of the fourteen sonnets, and has slight but clear departures from this form in the sestets of the remaining ten.²⁶
- d) We have four instances where the rhythm is "imperfect"; Pinto has nine.
- e) We use ten rhymes more than once (in every case, twice each); Pinto uses "mind" and "find" four times each, "days" and "you" three times each, and 13 other rhymes twice.

Using these five criteria, we clearly have the formally more precise translation in four out of five respects.

This is of course only a mechanical comparison of formal properties of the two translations, and does not imply that our translation is better from a semantic and/or stylistic point of view. I shall not attempt any kind of assessment of the non-formal quality of the two translations. To give some idea of Pinto's version for contrast with ours, here is his first sonnet:

A Slovene wreath your poet has entwined,
Of fifteen sonnets is the chaplet bound,
And in it thrice the Master Theme must sound:
Thus are the other harmonies combined.

Now from his source like streams in order wind
The sonnets, and the head of each is found
By the last line of the last sonnet crowned;
This is a semblance of your poet's mind.

From one love all by thoughts arise, and lo!
Whene'er I sleep at night they cease to flow,
But stir when darkness flees before dawn's rays.

²⁶ E.g., in sonnet 2, Pinto has (using the lettering in Table I) **B-B-y y-B-B** where the original has **y-B-y B-y-B**.

You are the Master Theme of my whole life,
Which will be heard when I have ceased my strife -
A record of my pain and of your praise.

To my own ear, this sounds quite as good as the first sonnet in our translation, indeed perhaps stylistically a little more suitable as a translation of poetry from the 1830s. There are, to my knowledge, no published comparisons of any aspect of the two translations; this subject remains unaddressed.²⁷ I can do no more than offer the “Master Sonnet” (in the original, in Henry’s “pony” and in the two translations) for inspection by the reader: if the Cooper and Priestly version does not “sound right,” then there is something at fault in our preceding 14 sonnets, and probably in the strategy that we devised.

Poet tvoj nov Slovincem venec vije,
Ran mojih bo spomin in tvoje hvale,
Iz srca svoje so kali pognale,
Mokrocveteče rož'ce poezije.

Your poet winds for Slovenes a new wreath,
The memory of my wounds and of your praise,
Their buds have sprung from the heart,
The moistly-blooming flowerlets of poetry.

Iz krajev niso, ki v njih sonce sijje;
Cel čas so blagih sapic pogreš'vale,
Obdajale so utrjene jih skale,
Viharjev jeznih mrzle domačije.

They are not from places wherein the sun shines;
They have lacked gentle breezes all the time,
Hardened cliffs have surrounded them,
The cold homelands of angry storms.

Izdihljaji, solze, so jih redile,
Jim moč so dale rasti neveselo,
Ur temnih so zatirale jih sile.

Sighs [and] tears have fostered them,
They gave them power to grow sadly,
The powers of dark times have suppressed them.

Lej, torej je blede njih cvetje velo,
Jim iz oči ti pošlji žarki mile,
In gnale bodo nov cvet bolj veselo.

Lo, that is why their bloom has faded palely,
Send them the dear rays from your eyes,
And will bloom afresh more gladly.

France Prešeren, 1834

Henry R. Cooper Jr., 1998

²⁷ There are two short published reviews of the Cooper-Priestly commemorative volume (i.e., Pibernik and Drolc). Pogacar (545) has one comment on our Wreath: “The complex fidelity of the translators’ work is demonstrated at greatest length in ‘A Wreath of Sonnets.’” Burt (19) is generally laudatory, especially with respect to our choice of vocabulary (“ne zveni niti pristno starinsko, ... ne resnično moderno [it sounds neither purely archaic ... nor really modern]”).

A Slovene wreath your poet has entwined;
A record of my pain and of your praise,
Since from my heart's deep roots have sprung these lays,
These tear-stained flowers of a poet's mind.

They come from where no man can sunshine find,
Unblest by soothing winds of warmer days;
Above them savage peaks the mountains raise,
Where tempests roar and nature is unkind.

They were all fed on many a plaint and tear;
Frail growth these blossoms had, so sad and few,
As over them malignant storm-clouds flew.

Behold how weak and faded they appear!
Send but your rays their glory to renew –
Fresh flowers will spread fragrance far and near.

Vivian da Sola Pinto, 1954

For Slovenes I your poet a wreath devise,
Of both my pain, your praise a monument;
Right from my heart these buds incipient,
Poetic flow'rs bedewed with tears arise.

Regions they come from with no sunny skies,
In want always of breezes provident,
Midst circling mountain-cliffs malevolent,
Inclement home where icy storms chastise.

Commingle sighs and tears these blooms sustained,
Joyless the strength with which they were endowed,
Unlit the hours whose force their power restrained.

Lo, faded now these flow'rs, their stature bowed;
I beg: your eyes' soft rays be on them trained,
And they will blossom then with pleasure proud.

Cooper & Priestly, 2001.

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