

Reviews

Franz Josef Degenhardt. *Deutsche Lieder—German Songs*. Translated from German into English by Stephan Lhotzky. Bremen: edition lumière, 2016. 260 pp.

Every facing-page bilingual translation makes its readers into far more attentive translation critics than they might have otherwise been. In the case of poetry, we are even more critical, since it is so difficult to walk the tightrope between accuracy and beauty. In the case of songs, as in this collection, there is the added challenge of singability with the melody, metric structure, and rhymes of the original. This collection is a worthy attempt at achieving this balance. However, in many instances, the English renditions sound awkward and don't adequately reflect the idiomatic German originals.

Franz Josef Degenhardt was one of the fathers of the German *Liedermacher* movement, active on tour and in recordings (28 albums as LPs, cassettes, and CDs) from 1962 until his death in 2011. He wrote some 270 songs, from which collected work the translator Stephan Lhotzky has selected 53, or about 20% of the total. They are arranged in random order, with neither a chronological or thematic sequence apparent. They include many of Degenhardt's best-known songs, particularly from the five albums recorded between 1965 and 1969, a flourishing of productivity for the singer-songwriter.

It seems logical to ask why Degenhardt's songs hadn't been translated earlier, apart from a few isolated instances. Some of them, such as "Tonio Schiavo," the ballad of the life and death of an Italian *Gastarbeiter*, recorded in 1966, not only have become widely appreciated classics which show up in schoolbooks now, but have lost almost none of their power in half a century.

I asked Degenhardt in 1974 after a concert in Regensburg about touring in the USA, and he was clearly interested, but there was the challenge of non-German-speaking audiences. We discussed the idea of touring mainly to the German departments of several big American universities with students interested in the *Liedermacher* movement, then in full swing. I wondered about the sponsorship by some organization such as Munich's Goethe-Institut, but the idea never came to any fruition.

Degenhardt's gift as a songwriter in German is extremely hard to render in English, not least because of the cultural and political context of his songs, which are often about current events and attitudes. If the Anglo-American reader is unaware of these contexts, the songs inevitably lose some of their impact.

But Lhotzky has chosen not to load up his translations with notes, which was probably wise. This is not a scholarly edition but is clearly intended to be a singable collection. Whether that objective succeeds depends entirely on the reader's familiarity with the music; Lhotzky does point out that many of the songs are available on YouTube through Degenhardt's comprehensive website.

This book includes not only a thoughtful and insightful foreword by Lhotzky but also an extremely useful appendix listing the song contents (titles, not entire lyrics) from all of Degenhardt's recorded albums over his fifty-year career. Degenhardt was a politically engaged observer of Germany through its postwar ups and downs, not only the years of the Great Coalition of CDU and SPD, but up to and including reunification in 1990, after which he recorded nine CDs. Lhotzky includes only five song translations from this late period.

Traduttore traditore (the translator is a traitor) is no less true now than when it was first expressed in the context of translating Dante into French, and yet one would not therefore ask that translators stop trying. Lhotzky's attempts are a valuable service in sharing a good cross-section of one of Germany's most important *Liedermacher* with an Anglo-American audience.

Richard Rundell

David Trueba. *Blitz*. Translated from Spanish by John Cullen. New York: Other, 2016. 176 pages.

"Eventually I went back to sleep, and memory of the years we'd shared rolled through my mind, images evoked by nostalgia or spite," reflects Beto, the narrator and protagonist of David Trueba's 2015 novel *Blitz*, as he shares a Munich hotel room with the woman whose infidelity he has just discovered. Nostalgia or spite remain, generally, the underlying political message of this text, as some combination of these emotions leaves our narrator in a self-pitying quagmire. Explaining his decision to skip his flight back to Spain and stay in Germany after the landscape architecture conference that has brought them there, Beto tells us, "My inertia could be understood as petty revenge." Against his girlfriend, certainly. But, on a wider level, his inertia is a protest against the modern economy. The Eurozone crisis is the inevitable backdrop, the necessary explanation for this novel of crash, failure, and drift.