

Ekelöf, Gunnar. *Selected Poems*. Translated by W. H. Auden and Leif Sjöberg. With an Introduction by Göran Printz-Påhlson. Penguin Books, 1971. 141 pp.

Gunnar Ekelöf is probably the most distinguished Swedish poet of this century. As Göran Printz-Påhlson points out in the Introduction, Ekelöf is a difficult "learned" poet in the Eliot-Pound tradition. Like these two poets, Ekelöf, too, had a great interest in formal experimentation. His first published poetry was surrealist in form; his last verse, in the "Byzantine" trilogy, has a forceful and superficially simple style.

The *Selected Poems* include translations from the first two parts of the trilogy, *Dīwān över Fursten av Emgiön* (*Dīwān over the Prince of Emgiön*, 1965) and *Sagan om Fatumeh* (*The Tale of Fatumeh*, 1966). Göran Printz-Påhlson's Introduction gives a sketch of Ekelöf's poetic career; the Foreword, by the translators, gives helpful background to these particular poems. Ekelöf has said that he felt the *Dīwān* poems were written by someone else, who used him as a medium. On the title page of the Swedish edition, *Dīwān* is represented not as "by" Ekelöf but rather "interpreted by" (tolkad av) him.

Both *Dīwān* and *Fatumeh* are poems of suffering. The speaker in *Dīwān* is tortured and blinded (possibly a projection of the throat cancer from which Ekelöf was suffering, and which was to kill him). He is conceived as being of mixed Armenian and Kurdish stock, half Christian and half Gnostic. This may reflect the Arab-Byzantine heritage of Digenis Acritas, a hero of an eleventh-century epic on whom the Prince is partially modelled. It may also be an externalization of Ekelöf's own feelings, for he always felt himself to be alien, "late on earth" (the title of his first book). Some consolation is offered the Prince by his worship of a black Madonna (e.g. in the poem "Ayiasma" /purifying well/). The Madonna is black from the smoke of the many votive candles lighted by her worshippers. The black Madonna is a kind of cosmic goddess; another female figure, whose relationship to the Prince is shadowy, complements the Virgin, the icon of compassion, by offering compassion in the concrete.

The central figure of the *Fatumeh* poems is a woman who suffers, not because of importance, as in the Prince's case, but because she is unimportant. *Fatumeh*, a young courtesan, is loved by a prince and bears his child; she is abandoned by him and taken into a harem; cast out of the harem, she again has to live by selling her body.

The result of Auden's and Sjöberg's collaboration as translators is a triumphant success. There is every reason to be grateful to Auden, or his memory, for having undertaken such a difficult enterprise as translating Ekelöf. To be sure, he had excellent help from Sjöberg, who has published articles on Ekelöf and also translated *En Mølina-Elegi* (*A Mølina Elegy*) with Muriel Rukeyser; Sjöberg and Rukeyser have also published *Selected Poems of Gunnar Ekelöf* (Twayne, 1967), a fine collection mainly of earlier poems.

All in all, the translation is outstanding: carefully worked out, at once sensitive and bold.

There are only some minor criticisms to be made. Auden has translated "Ängel! hur länge / skall du fortfara att väcka mig . . ." as "For how long, Angel / are you going to keep on waking me." The loss of the assonance and consonance of "ängel—länge" is probably inevitable; but it seems to me the first line would have been more forceful if the word order had remained unchanged. I am also somewhat uneasy about the choice of "Lady" for Ekelöf's "Jungfru." Perhaps Auden has rejected "Virgin" because of its Christian overtones—which, however, are shared by "Jungfru" albeit to a lesser degree—but it is a pity to lose the allusion to the Virgin Goddess, a figure that is central to Ekelöf's poetry. Yet these are carpings at a great and important translation. One is full of admiration for the translators, who have captured Ekelöf's individual tone, have achieved lucid translations without simplifying this difficult poet, and, best of all, have given us a volume that is poetry in its own right. As an example that, in its perfection, seems representative of the whole collection, I have chosen the following poem:

Barberaren lät jag skära ut
vad som blev kvar av ögonen
och bränna bort varet
med glödande järn
Detta är de blinda sångarnas land
av sådana har funnits många
Min hustru leder mig vid min hand
en käpp har jag skurit mig
Vem vet att vi varit furstar
men även sådana fåglar föder Hon
med nödtorftig spis
liksom de fåglar jag ännu hör sjunga
Jag hör nu vad jag en gång såg.

I let the barber cut away
What was left of my eyes
And sear away the pus
With a hot iron
This is the land of the blind singers
There have been many like them
My wife leads me by the hand
And I have cut myself a stick
Who now remembers that we were princes?
Yet even such birds She feeds
With barely adequate food
Like the birds I still hear singing
Hearing now what I once saw.

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Lindquist, Emory. *An Immigrant's Two Worlds: A Biography of Hjalmar Edgren*. (Augustana Historical Society, Publication No. 23.) Augustana Historical Society, Rock Island 1972. Pp. 97.

Emory Lindquist's province is Swedish-Americana, especially the history of Swedish-Americans in Kansas and Nebraska. His published works include a study of the Smoky Valley region (1953), a biography of Olof Olsson (1970), and a bibliography of sources on Protestant churches in Kansas (1956). Meticulous research and a knack for ferreting out pertinent sources characterize each of these works. For example, in Lindquist's first two books (both about his native city of Lindsborg, Kansas), he utilizes a wide range of documentation: printed and archival materials, local songs and poetry, personal reminiscences, and graphic arts. An excursion into a wider field of inquiry, a centennial review of the literature concerning John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, displays the same distinctive scholarship. He cites and paraphrases an abundance of contemporary reviews and commentaries,