

■Book Review

Concentric Circles – A Brief Review

Andreas PREISS (Germany)

Published in 2009 by PUNTA in Serbia, *Dōshin'en* 同心円 (English: *Concentric Circles*; ISBN 978-86-7990-046-3) is a collection of 66 poems by haiku poet NATSUIISHI Ban'ya 夏石 番矢 (pen name of INUI Masayuki 乾 昌幸; born 1955; professor at Meiji University).

The book opens with an introduction by the Serbian translator and writer Dragan J. RISTIĆ and then features one poem per page, totaling 88 pages. The introduction can be read in Serbian, German, English, French, Macedonian, or Bulgarian. The actual poems are available in Japanese, Serbian, German, Macedonian, as well as Bulgarian. They are divided into two sections. The first, titled *Concentric Circles*, goes from pages 17 to 68, while the second, titled *Wings of Prague and Macedonia*, goes from pages 69 to 86. Both sections have previously been published independently of each other.

The section titled *Concentric Circles* is originally based on *Kokū wo tsuranuki* 虚空を貫き (English: *Through the Air*; ISBN 978-48-7944-103-4), which Shichigatsudō 七月堂 brought out in 2007. This was a *renku* (linked verse) collaboration between NATSUIISHI Ban'ya and the Portuguese writer Casimiro DE BRITO. It is important to note though that the 100 poems of *Through the Air* are in Japanese, Portuguese, English, and French rather than those languages used for *Concentric Circles*.

It is also interesting to note that later in 2007, the Indian publishing house Cyberwit.net already added Spanish and Lithuanian translations to the original quadrilingual version of the 50 poems by NATSUIISHI Ban'ya to rerelease them as part of *Mugen no rasen* 無限の螺旋 (English: *Endless Helix*; ISBN 978-81-8253-072-0).

Wings of Prague and Macedonia can also be found in the first issue of 2007 of the international haiku magazine *Gin'yū* 吟遊 (*Ginyu* 33: 2-5.). The magazine only features Japanese, English, and Macedonian versions of these verses though. *Wings of Dust in Macedonia* resulted from a trip to Macedonia by NATSUIISHI Ban'ya, who attended the 9th Ohrid P.E.N. Conference in 2006.

This version of *Concentric Circles* is hardly one of the major works of NATSUIISHI Ban'ya. Also, the book is indeed proof of how challenging poetic translations often are. One would be wrong though to dismiss it purely on these grounds.

Instead, *Concentric Circles* needs to be understood as a great opportunity for those who are unable to enjoy haiku in Japanese to nonetheless get a sense of what contemporary Japanese poetry can be like. The book is, therefore, a worthy attempt at spreading this poetic form over the globe. It offers to present the modern take on haiku by NATSUIISHI Ban'ya to an audience that might just be surprised to experience for themselves that for example the absence of a season word and a rigid 5-7-5 structure can indeed produce a positive poetic effect which is still clearly identifiable as haiku.

龍の背中を出てくる朝日マケドニア

Ryū no senaka wo dete kuru asahi MAKEDONIA

From behind the dragon's back
emerges the morning sun,
Macedonia

As this example (based on page 84) hopefully suggests, those readers of *Concentric Circles* with advanced knowledge on the subject won't be let down either. It can hardly be denied that NATSUIISHI Ban'ya creates truly international poetry based on a firm traditional foundation; he can break conventions in a way that the resulting poems are at once natural yet challenging.

Natsuishi, Ban'ya. 2009. *Koncentrični Krugovi*. Niš: PUNTA. (ISBN 978-86-7990-046-3)