

Shrines of Upper Austria by Phoebe Power (Carcanet)



Phoebe Power was a winner of the Foyle Young Poets in 2009, received an Eric Gregory Award in 2012 and a Northern Writers' Award in 2014. Her debut collection, *Shrines of Upper Austria*, was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation and received the 2018 Forward Prize for Best First Collection. Her poems have been published in journals and anthologies including *The Rialto*, *Oxford Poetry* and *The White Review*. She has recently collaborated with other artists on projects including a live performance of her pamphlet *Harp Duet* (Eyewear, 2016), and *Christl*, a video installation involving poetry, visual art and sound. She currently lives in York. phoebepowerpoetry.wordpress.com

Reviews

This brings to mind one of Vahni Capildeo's most oft-quoted lines on language in her Forward Prize award-winning collection *Measures of Expatriation* (Carcanet Press, 2016): "Language is my home, I say; not one particular language." Multilingualism is the norm in our postcolonial world, and Power sheds light on this important subject by portraying her own particular relationship to English and German in poetic form. Certainly, readers are not left entirely baffled – there is a glossary at the back of the book should the precise meaning of each German word prove to be of interest. I think this is a better way of guiding the reader towards multiple layers of understanding; first, with the foreign language simply savoured as a form of musicality within the unglossed text, then, later perhaps, as something to be precisely understood. (The Poetry School)

The poems in *Shrines of Upper Austria* take their bearings from the landscapes and local detail of Austria – where Power has travelled – sometimes incorporating and assimilating whole lines of German among the English. Several of the poems draw from the life-story of her Austrian grandmother, Christl. Power says that ‘You can never be sure how readers will engage with your work when you write it – readers are all different – so knowing that some people have connected with it is truly a joy.’ Her enthusiasm with different modes of engagement has included adapting her poems into collaborative video installations and performance pieces, featuring harps, electronica and a flood-destroyed piano. (The Forward Foundation)

children

after Egon Schiele: Stadtende

sheen and clank
snakes to this colour town
this shout! and noise –

those letterboxes squeezed
to points – faces raised
to roofs! crammed

aqua violet orange
– figures getting down
from window frames

swung open –
raised arms and bended –
scarlet and yellow trousers!

children running
verging the dark
world of tree and linelessness

calling from the roofs
and from the giant
leaves – dark-green!

Ice Rink

slippery translucent globe
lit pink, or blue, or light green.
cutting through the top

like milk or foil or egg or skin
and sliding on parallel lines, then
crisp surface, ridges raised.

plastic-covered blades. beat:
synthetic girl's voice
pops around this indoor space.

friends hold hands; littlies
shuffle in their spacesuits
hanging on to penguins;

parents loosely dance behind.
this jolly light world
of flying and seeing;

the jolly bright world

Production Line of a Small Gift for the Ladies

While she scissor-curles the ribbon
Sara knots the cellophane.

While she tightens cellophane
Eleni cuts the ribbon up.

While she snips the ribbon-lengths
Frau G. bunches up the cellophane.

While she screws up cellophane
Isis lays the shells on sand.

While she organises shells
Lucas sprinkles sand on glue.

While he spreads the gluey sand
Frau S. squeezes out the glue.

While she zigzags glue on card
Felix cuts the cellophane.

While he cuts the plastic up
Marleen cuts the sheets of card.

While she cuts around the squares

Johannes sits and sorts the shells.

Discussion Ideas

- [Here's the Schiele painting referred to in 'children'](#). Do you need the painting to appreciate the poem? Is the poem an interpretation of the poem, or a commentary on it, or something else altogether?
- Are the leaves in 'children' 'dark-green!', or does 'dark-green!' refer to the call the children are making? Is it possible to be certain? Which version do you prefer?
- Why might there be no mention of the temperature in 'Ice Rink'? Is the jolly world of the ice rink actually that jolly?
- Who are 'the ladies' mentioned in 'Production Line of a Small Gift for the Ladies', and what is their relationship to the people in the poem? Is it possible to use the poem as an instruction manual to recreate the gift? If not, why might that be?
- Would you rather receive the gift mentioned in the poem, or work on its production line?

Other books by Phoebe Power

Harp Duet (Eyewear, 2016)

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