Reviewed by John Herbert Cunningham

Dorothea Grünzweig was born near Stuttgart and began her German and English literature studies in Tübingen. Eventually she moved to Oxford, where she came under the influence of the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins.

*Glass Voices lasinäänet* was translated by Derk Wynand, but except for a small blurb on the back cover, there is no introduction to this volume. As this is not a bilingual edition, the question persists as to how much of the English version is Wynand’s creation and how much is Grünzweig’s. The translations are top notch.

The work of Hopkins seems to have fallen until relatively recently into desuetude. However, there are signs of a minor revival. On the Canadian front, the poetry of Melanie Siebert is an example of his influence and, on the international front, Grünzweig’s. Furthermore, the Oxford World’s Classics reissued in 2008 Hopkins’s *Selected Poetry* and, in 2009, *The Major Works*, which includes all of his poems as well as some prose.

Hopkins revelled in the creation of neologisms through the melding of words. These neologisms take on dimensions of meaning different from those of the words newly joined. The practice creates a wrinkled, brittle type of poetry which is, at the same time, as delicate as the lace doily your grandmother or great grandmother would spread upon a tabletop to protect the finish. Grünzweig delights in the same practice.

Already the title of the opening poem, “Winterhawking Greeningforce,” demonstrates the influence of Hopkins, as well as Grünzweig’s predilection for unusual line breaks. Here is part i:

> The windows thrown open Easter  
> between them and the fields  
>     the dam still  
>     out of night eyelevel  
> melting but into a  
> faint June rise. (7)
The first line deserves consideration for a number of reasons. Hopkins, with his sprung rhythm, reverted to a modified Anglo-Saxon verse, where a line is divided into two equal parts by a caesura. This is accentual, not accentual-syllabic, verse, where each part of the line has (in this case) two stresses. The other notable line break in the poem quoted above is the penultimate one, where the article “a” ends the line. This line may also be considered a sprung rhythm line with a caesura between “but” and “into,” each half having only one stress, and would justify having the line end on the article “a,” which is generally considered undesirable in accentual-syllabic. However, even this edict appears to be more observed in the breach as even those considered the best of poets (Don McKay and Karen Solie are two examples) have ended their lines on articles and other weaker parts. Ending on an article will sometimes create a dramatic rhetorical line break. The foregoing observations hinge on the assumption that German is similar in structure to the English; the inclusion of the German versions of these poems would have been highly desirable.

Another interesting section appears in part ii of “The Find”:

Waning waxing mountains
their expansive sense of staying put even if
there are mountainstill times
such as the moonbreak
when they wholly shroud themselves (25)

Hopkins isn’t the only possible reason why worlds would collide. There is also the nature of the German language, which creates new words through the combining of existing ones. One wonders whether “mountainstill” is not more due to the latter. This stanza is notable for its interesting internal half rhyme of “waning” with “staying.”

“The Obligato Voice” highlights a couple of additional elements of Grünzweig’s verse which we find in the lines: “a little girl sit down in his lap / in this lapland I sing with him” (31). The first is the playfulness of “lap” and “lapland” where, as a result of the first, the meaning of the second is doubled, implying both the safety and security of the land of the father’s lap, where the child listens to her father’s stories, and the fact that Grünzweig writes this while living in Finland. The second is the lack of punctuation, not just in these two lines, but throughout Grünzweig’s poetry.

Grünzweig’s revival of Hopkins is a welcome thing and it meshes well with her Germanic heritage. As powerful as this influence is, she is able to master it to the extent that she retains elements of herself which blend well, creating a unique and enjoyable poetic style.
John Herbert Cunningham is a Winnipeg writer. He reviews poetry in Canada for *Malahat Review, Arc, Antigonish Review, Fiddlehead* and *The Danforth Review*, in the U.S. for *Quarterly Conversations, Rain Taxi, Rattle, Big Bridge* and *Galatea Revisits*, and in Australia for *Jacket*.

Buy *Glass Voices lasinäänet* at McNally Robinson Booksellers (click on the line below): http://www.mcallyrobinson.com/product/isbn/9781894543491/bkm/true/dorothea-grnzweig-derk-wynand-glass-voices-lasinnet