

Sunday in Flint

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Okay, so this is not a luscious landscape. This is the view from my Holiday Inn hotel room in Flint, Michigan, the view of the Chinese restaurant to which I walked across the parking lot for dinner last night, the HI having no restaurant of its own.

Flint is in a state of demoralizing economic decline, the auto industry here having collapsed.

But the arts here seem alive and well. Tomorrow I will speak at a nearby theater and then attend a production of THE GIVER at the smaller theater next door to that one. The arts — in the form of theaters, and library — are all in the same location; and from my quick glimpse yesterday during a tour of both theaters, they are fabulously designed and well maintained.

I have seen stage productions of THE GIVER many times in many different cities. Each of them is staged differently...it's one of the intriguing elements of theater, that a play leaves latitude for the director and set designer to create individual elements. I got a peek backstage here in Flint and can tell already that today's production will be very different; but I won't make any comments until I've actually seen what they're doing.

In the meantime, I have just replied to an email—again, no details until anything becomes official, if it ever does—from an opera company that would like to create an opera from THE GIVER. It makes me think, oddly, of the old...was it Dutch Boy?...paint company ads, where a can of pain was being poured over the globe. I think the catch-phrase was "We Cover the

Earth!" Well, I am starting to feel as if THE GIVER is covering the earth! I think I posted on this blog, a few days ago, covers of the book now in Vietnamese. and Serbo-Croatian.

Although there is always the risk that people will rise up *en masse* screaming, "Enough! ENOUGH!" still I think it's kind of wonderful that in many, many cultures, young people are responding to, discussing, thinking about, the issues in the book...issues that confront us all, more and more.

This morning I replied to an 18-year-old reader in Taiwan, who was so intrigued, reading THE GIVER in English, that he—I think it was a he; no way to know; no name at the end of the email—read it also in Chinese, to compare.....and said, sadly, that it was not a very good translation. I had suspected that, mostly because the cover of the book in Chinese shows someone on skis; and of course there are no skis mentioned in the book, so I have guessed that perhaps "sled" was mis-translated.

I remember many, many years ago, a writer named Ilse-Margret Vogel (sadly she has since died) wrote to me to tell me she had read my book AUTUMN STREET in both English and German, and wanted to tell me what a beautiful translation the German was. I appreciated that enormously because there is simply no way for me to know that.

(Actually, I could now ask my Germany daughter-in-law. But at the time Ilse first got in touch with me, my son had not yet married his Margret)

The art of translation, of course, requires not only a command of the language but also an appreciation of the writer's tone and subtlety, and an ability to re-create both cadence and nuance. I remember years ago, when I was in graduate school, taking a course in Chinese poetry which of course I read in translation. But I made a point of reading more than one translation of each poem and sometimes they were SO different, almost unrecognizable as the same text.

I remember, too, meeting once with the Finnish translator of my Anastasia books, and her describing how difficult it was to translate word-play of any kind...and there is a lot of it in those books.

Tags: Untagged