Now has the weather dropped his
Le temps a laissé son manteau
Of howling wind, cold, rain and
De vent, de froideur et de pluie

Doch jene Wolke blühte nur M.
And yet the cloud, it only flowered for
Und als ich aufsah, schwand sie scho
And, as I looked back, vanished in t

Then fiercer than longing came the
More ūn me lyste my drede aros.
I didn’t stir or dare to call
I stod ful stylle and dorste not calle:

for poetry in translation
**Joint winners of the 14-and-under prize**

- Paula Alonso-Lalanda
  - ‘Let’s Go to the Market!’
  - by Gloria Fuertes
  - (Spanish)

- Scarlett Koller
  - ‘Roundelay’
  - by Charles d’Orléans
  - (French)

**Winners of the 18-and-under category**

**First**
- Daniel Galbraith
  - *Amores LV*
  - by Ovid
  - (Latin)

**Second**
- Iwona Luszowicz
  - ‘In Remembrance of Marie A.’
  - by Bertolt Brecht
  - (German)

**Third**
- Rupert Mercer
  - *Catullus VIII*
  - (Latin)

**Commended**

- Arabella Currie
  - ‘Eclipse’ by Archilochus and
  - ‘Cupid Does Not Have Wings’
  - by Eubulus
  - (Ancient Greek)

- Daniel Galbraith
  - ‘The Lay of Fáfnir’
  - from *Poetic Edda* (anon)
  - (Old Norse)

- Katharine Gray
  - ‘First Love’
  - by Shimazaki Toson
  - (Japanese)

- Oliver Moody
  - ‘Copa Surisca’
  - (anon)
  - (Latin)

- Michael Warner
  - *Amores LVI*
  - by Ovid
  - (Latin)

**Winners of the Open category**

**First**
- Imogen Halstead
  - *Amores I* I
  - by Ovid
  - (Latin)

**Second**
- Jane Draycott
  - an extract from *Pearl*
  - (anon)
  - (Middle English)

**Joint Third**
- Emily Jeremiah
  - ‘Theorem’
  - by Eeva-Liisa Manner
  - (Finnish)

- Peter Rumney
  - ‘Alone in Solitude’
  - by Petrarch
  - (Italian)

**Commended**

- Duncan Forbes
  - ‘To His Soul’
  - by Hadrian
  - (Latin)

- Laura Napran
  - ‘Snow’
  - by Cathal Ó Searcaigh
  - (Irish)

- John Richmond
  - ‘Boaz Asleep’
  - by Victor Hugo
  - (French)

- The Rev Mervyn Wilson
  - an extract from *The Consolation of Philosophy*
  - by Boethius
  - (Latin)

- Peter Rumney
  - ‘Alone in Solitude’
  - by Petrarch
  - (Italian)

- Thomas Hughes
  - ‘Unsaid’
  - by Aliette Audra
  - (French)

- Paula Alonso-Lalanda
  - ‘Let’s Go to the Market!’
  - by Gloria Fuertes
  - (Spanish)
The number of languages represented continues its inexorable climb; the figure of 27 which seemed so impressive in 2005 looks paltry next to the 42 of 2008. While, as always, French, Spanish, Latin, German and Russian dominated, the judges were pleased to see translations for the first time from Albanian, Belarusian, Hausa and Vietnamese. This year this also brought what may be the shortest ever entry, a text message from Catullus: ‘I h8 + I luv. / Y, u may ask. I dunno. / But ‘strue + kills me.’

The judges’ shortlists were reassuringly similar in the two junior categories. Despite an initial lack of consensus in the Open group, there were no fights, no raised voices (though a verse ‘rhythmically inert’ was heard as one judge vetoed a translation from Polish being championed by another), and from the disparate shortlists emerged a list of winners with which all declared themselves happy. So impressed were the judges by the translation of around 30 or so entries that caught our notice to varying degrees. Often the commentaries produced the most heart-stopping moments as entrants related how their chosen texts had reverberated for them through the years, whether from remembrance of a lost love or a grief that still haunted them decades later. Others translated poems for a family occasion, such as a child’s wedding, or to bring their own pleasure in a work to a new, wider audience. All revealed the passion that our entrants feel for their poems year after year, making the task of judging so rewarding. As previous Spender winner Jane Tozer wrote on translating the Anglo-Norman romance Tristran – just one of many worthy entries which caught the eye but, regrettably, narrowly missed out: ‘Memories that once howled wolfishly now sing like Muses’.

Josephine Balmer
Director of the Stephen Spender Memorial Trust

In a splendidly wide-ranging year for The Times Stephen Spender prize – with entries offering gnomic four-line Welsh folk verses alongside novel-length Vietnamese epics and entrants’ ages stretching from 10 to 93 years – the true victor emerged as a familiar Spender favourite, the two-thousand-year-old verse of Latin poet Ovid. The judges often debate the importance of choosing the right poem to translate (not to mention the difficult but essential task of putting aside our own preferences – and prejudices – about such chosen originals). But although a translation can only be as good as its source text, it is also the case that complex, multi-faceted texts, such as Ovid’s sinuous Amores, can prove treacherous for the unwary or inexperienced translator, slipping through their fingers as they try, in vain, to pin it down. Bearing this in mind, the achievement of our overall prize winner, 18-year-old Imogen Halstead, is only the greater, tackling Ovid’s notoriously difficult metrical, mythological and literary in-jokes and references with an ease and maturity beyond her years. She provided one of the best entries of this and indeed any year, outclassing, as our final judging shows, even the many fine adult entries.

Ovid triumphed again in the 18-and-under category where Daniel Galbraith’s almost equally fine version of Amores 1.5 admirably captured the playful sensuality of the original. As in previous years, classical entries here remained the most consistently impressive, with Rupert Mercer’s refreshingly teasing Catullus VIII and Arabella Currie’s inventive versions of Ancient Greek lyric particularly outstanding. It was reassuring, too, to see translations of little-known, non-examination texts such as Oliver Moody’s lively version of the late Latin ‘Copa Surisca’ alongside Old Norse (another entry from the versatile Galbraith), while Iwona Luszowicz’s beautiful rendition of Brecht’s German and Katharine Gray’s assured translation from Japanese – skilfully replicating the original’s strict syllabics – offered welcome attempts at contemporary texts.

There were also some very interesting choices from our youngest entrants. Scarlett Koller’s translation of Charles d’Orléans’s ‘Rondel’ impressed with its attempt at the original’s rhyme scheme. We also enjoyed the verse of our youngest entrant Paula Alonso-Lalanda’s ‘Let’s Go to the Market!’, as well as the maturity of Thomas Hughes’ version of French poet Aliette Audra, all of which offered fine attempts at capturing the integrity of their original poems.

The Open category also fielded some excellent versions of lesser known texts. Alongside Timothy’s Allen’s gripping Vietnamese tale, we were also very taken with Jane Draycott’s stately rendering of the Pearl poet’s Middle English and Emily Jeremiah’s delicate interpretation of Eeva-Liisa Manner’s ethereal Finnish (I also admired Adrian Pascu-Tulbur’s compelling translation of George Topârceanu’s Romanian and Roger Cockrell’s of Joseph Brodsky’s Russian, although both failed to make the final cut). In contrast, Duncan Forbes took a well known, almost clichéd text, Hadrian’s poem to his soul, and made it new again with great verve. But with few outstanding entries, the competition was indeed open this year with a core unanimousely selected as the winner of the 18-and-under category that they ended up voting it the winner of the Open category – an unprecedented occurrence and a great achievement by 18-year-old Imogen Halstead.

My thanks to judges Josephine Balmer, Susan Bassnett, Karen Leeder and Wynn Thomas, who read and made notes on every entry; to Erica Wagner, Literary Editor of The Times, for not only publicising the prize in the Books section but also giving work experience to some of the younger winners; and to Hawthornden Castle, where four previous winners, aged 20–75, spent three productive and cosseted weeks in April working on translation projects. The final vote of thanks must go to the Old Possum’s Practical Trust, for its generous financial support.

Robina Pelham Burn
Director of the Stephen Spender Memorial Trust

Judges’ comments

Translating poetry well requires a special talent. A good translator has to be firstly a sensitive reader, able to grasp the nuances of the original writer and to comprehend the way in which the poem is structured. Then the translator has to build upon that reading and recreate the poem in another language, taking care to remain close, though not slavishly so, to the original while not sacrificing good poetry on the altar of literalness. In short, a good translator of poetry has to be Janus-faced, looking backwards at the original, forwards towards a new set of readers. The success of the poem in translation is entirely the responsibility of the translator.

Introduction
This year, there was one outstandingly good translation, incredibly produced by someone who is only 18. What makes this so good is that the translator has struck just the right balance, demonstrating a thorough understanding of the original and able to construct a poem that works brilliantly in English. That the author was writing 2,000 years ago adds to the problems the translator had to face, for when a poem comes from a culture distant in time as well as place, the task of the translator is so much harder. The principle decision to take is whether to try and modernise the poem or to try and convey a sense of its antiquity in some other way. The judges noted that this year there were some very fine translations of ancient poetry, and all those we singled out had decided on a contemporary recreation. We even had one translation wittily written as a text message.

The range of languages submitted this year was wider than ever, the selection of poems very broad ranging, with some tiny poems such as the splendid Latin poem by the Emperor Hadrian and some extended narrative poems. In making our final assessment we took account of the different kinds of difficulty: sometimes a short poem in what appears to be simple language can be extremely difficult if not impossible to translate, for the simplicity is deceptive. Narrative verse presents another set of problems, for this is a convention that is not in the contemporary mainstream in English. We admired the way some translators had selected extracts from longer poems, such as the translation from old Norse and the extract from Pearl. This involves a lot of thought and careful editing, which we felt deserved to be acknowledged.

Sadly, the impact of the government’s decision to take literature out of modern languages A levels is starting to appear in the submissions, though paradoxically, the emphasis on textual commentary in A level Classics is reflected in some of the very fine translations and commentaries of ancient texts.

What I love about this judging process is not only the pleasure of reading the great variety of work submitted but the often very moving personal stories that some translators generously share with us in their commentaries. This demonstrates more clearly than anything else could how important translation is to so many people. When you translate a poem, you enter into its world, and that world may hold a special significance which you seek to share. The good translator is someone who has a special relationship with a poem written in another language and is then able to make a reader who is unacquainted with the original feel that the poem is also theirs.  

The 14-and-under category produced a small number of excellent entries of very different kinds. Scarlett Koller’s translation from French of the highly-wrought ‘Rondel’ by Charles d’Orléans showed great ingenuity in this most challenging of forms, the roundelay. But equally, the judges were beguiled by the genuine sense of fun and freshness of Paula Alonso-Lalanda’s translation from Spanish of ‘Let’s Go to the Market’ by Gloria Fuertes. The commentary which accompanied the poem explained that Paula’s classmates had enjoyed the poem’s craziness. The judges did too. It is excellent to know that pleasure in sound and wordplay is reaching the classroom in this way.

The 18-and-under category demonstrated an extraordinary strength this year, across the board, but especially in the Classical languages. It seems that as the A level modern languages boards banish literature from their syllabuses one by one, this is where the passion for poetry has taken root. All the judges noted the way many entrants had been demonstrably touched by a particular poem from a distant culture, but importantly had been determined to make it their own in a modern idiom (even to the point of a memorable SMS version of Catullus in the Open category by Daniel Watkins). But the commentaries also demonstrated that this is where the basic mechanics of reading poetry are still being reliably taught (rhyme, scansion, etc – things often disastrously amiss in the Open category).

I loved Daniel Galbraith’s translation from Latin of Ovid’s Amores I.V for its sheer sexiness, so cleverly caught in the sound-shapes of the poem. As soon as I had read ‘The shutters were half open-half closed, / With a quasi-lumberlight, a dusky light, a day-to-night light’, I knew this was a potential winner. I was particularly pleased to see Iwona Lusisowicz’s translation of Brecht’s ‘In Remembrance of Marie A.’ in second place. This deceptively simple poem is extremely difficult to translate. I know because I have tried it. Iwona first heard the poem in the Oscar-winning film The Lives of Others and tracked it down to translate it. What she perhaps doesn’t know is that it is also set to music and that despite the old man persona of the poem, Brecht wrote this when he was young and cheekily gave it an alternative title ‘Sentimental Song No. 1004’ (one more than Don Juan’s legendary conquests). Instinctively – and doubtless with much hard work too – she managed to capture the rhymes and rhythms of the piece and also that slightly tongue in cheek lyricism. One also has to admire a contestant who goes through at the end striking all their ‘long-loss’ bygones’ and ‘erstwhiles’. Absolutely right: and very Brechtian to boot. The third place prize winner Rupert Mercer produced another wonderfully confident modern version of the classics, this time of Catullus’ half-serious half-mocking Poem VIII and an excellent commentary. Among the commended translations perhaps I could single out Arabella Currie’s wonderfully vivid translation from Ancient Greek of ‘Eclipse’ by Archilochus. I certainly missed this on a first reading, but coming back to it discovered a real poetic talent at work: ‘the sun in blackness like / a coin behind a thumbnail’. Someone to watch.

The judges were delighted that, exceptionally, another of the 18-and-under Classical poems won through to triumph in the Open category too. Imogen Halstead’s translation of Ovid’s Amores I.I is certainly publishable – with a breathtaking metrical confidence. The Open is always the most difficult to judge, because this is where almost inevitably, and despite one’s best efforts, one’s own personal experience and taste come to bear. I was interested to note that it was almost always possible to tell after reading the English version what language the original had been written in. My own tastes have been schooled by the spare diction of the German and East European traditions and I know I find it harder to warm to the highly wrought voices from the Russian or the French, for example (perhaps also why I pushed for Peer Rumney’s rather bleak version of Petrarch to be commended). I am, though, always pleased to be proved wrong. This year it was Jane Draycott’s delicate and exquisitely rendered Pearl that grew on me especially and I was pleased to be introduced by Emily Jeremiah to the Finnish of Eeva-Liisa Manner and in Laura Napran’s sensitive translation to the Irish of ‘Snow’ by Cathal Ó Searcaigh. But the real surprise for me was Timothy Allen’s marvellously lyrical translation of an extract from Nguyễn Du’s ‘Broken Heart, New Lament’, the Vietnamese national poem. This is poetry from a tradition completely foreign to the English ear and with quite different demands. I enjoyed the way the translator had set about finding a solution for the ‘rhyming’ of sharp and flat tones which simply has no meaning in a non-tonal language. The beautifully unobtrusive sound structure of the poem and its air of

Susan Bassnett
As for the commentaries, they were as unpredictable and compelling as ever. For one candidate, translation was an act of solidarity with a marginalised indigenous people; for another, it constituted an attempt to bring Finnish to wider attention. The lack of a Belarusian dictionary was complained of; long-lost love was touchingly commemorated. Poetry demonstrated its power to survive even the obscenities of the concentration camps and the terrors of the Kobe earthquake. Differently impressive were the subtle characterisations of individual lyrics and the trenchant discussions of the issue of form that accompanied some entries. Notable sensitivity, and critical acumen, was exhibited by some in their thoughtful selection of passages for translation from much longer works. There was much becoming modesty and the occasional glimpse of ill-advised self-confidence.

Particularly taken by the translation by Jane Draycott of Middle English passages from *Pearl*, I was struck by how a mundane contemporary event – the ‘loss’ of a child on departure for university – could summon resonant new music from an old, usually rather musty, song. Elsewhere, I found attempts at translating narrative verse particularly welcome, not least because they challenged the tedious modern monopoly of lyric. Philip Higson’s version of Rollinat’s ‘La Vache au Taureau’ (‘The Cow Put to the Bull’) may have failed to find widespread support, but I admired its deft deployment of rhyme in the act of telling a basic, age-old story.

Once again, I somewhat grudgingly recognised that quality of original text did have a bearing on one’s response to translation. Even the fond kiss of a besotted translator repeatedly failed to magic a plain, dowdy original into seductive translated form.

Poetry may not travel as comfortably across linguistic and cultural boundaries as do art and music, but translation is an indispensable servant of its aspiration, at least, to do so. As the best of these entries demonstrate, it can sometimes survive the journey in tolerable shape, although somewhat culture-lagged, no doubt, a little tongue-tied, still struggling with the currency, and not altogether comfortable with the mores. And even when it arrives more dead than alive, as, sadly, happens not infrequently, its attempt can still have something of the heroic about it. It is therefore good to know that competitions like the Spender Prize still offer the incentive of a passport, and gratifying to see how many apply for one, year after year.

*M. Wynn Thomas*
I am English and I live in England and both my parents are Spanish so we speak Spanish at home. My mum used to read Gloria Fuertes' poems to me when I was younger and I always thought they were funny. I think Gloria Fuertes likes to play with words just like children do. Many of the words in her poems don’t even make sense but the stories make me laugh!

It was not easy to turn her poem into English so I just tried to imagine how would Gloria Fuertes have written the poem if she had written it in English. She wouldn’t like the words not to rhyme and the story had to be quite silly too.

I don’t think I have made a perfect translation but I think Mrs Fuertes would have liked it because I showed it to my friends at school and they thought it was funny and a bit crazy and I know myself that the story is still the same.

联合十岁以下奖得主  

Paula Alonso-Lalanda’s commentary

¡A La Feria!

Un duro nos queda;  
No te pongas seria  
Y vete a la feria  

Compra una oveja;  
Si no la quieres blanca,  
Cómprala negra.  

Compra un borrico;  
Si no lo quieres grande,  
Cómpralo chico.  

Compra un carrarro;  
Si no lo quieres de lata,  
Cómpralo de barro.  

Compra unas botas;  
Si no las quieres nuevas,  
Cómpralas rotas.  

Compra un capacho,  
Sombrerito de niña  
O de muchacho.  

Gloria Fuertes

Let’s Go to the Market!

If you only have a penny,  
That’s not many  
Don’t get serious, just stop,  
Remember we’re going to a shop.  

Buy yourself a lamb or a sheep  
But make sure that it is cheap  
Black or white it doesn’t matter  
It can be thin or a bit fatter.  

Buy yourself a donkey  
Make sure it’s not a monkey  
Short or long, even plump or skinny  
Or even maybe big or mini.  

Buy yourself pots and pans  
Tin’s great so get it if you can  
Pans and pots made of clay  
So don’t just turn away.  

Buy yourself a pair of shoes  
Go to the shop so you can choose  
Get them new or even old  
Buy them creased or without a fold.  

Buy yourself a nice new bag  
Or a hat that has still got its tag  
For any gender girl or boy  
It is there for you to enjoy.

Translated from the Spanish  
by Paula Alonso-Lalanda
Scarlett Koller’s commentary

When I was told of the prize in school, I decided to enter it because I love literature and languages, and this prize combined the two. I chose to translate a French poem because I have spoken French nearly all my life as a second language, and I find it a beautifully descriptive tongue. I found a very old book in the school library entitled *Les Cent Meilleurs Poèmes de la Langue Française*. I read the book, and soon found this poem, which I particularly enjoyed.

I encountered several problems in translating this poem. One problem was the inevitability that any poem will never be as good in translation as the original, and as I am something of a perfectionist, I found it difficult to cope with. I also had some problems in that *rondel* is a specific form of fifteenth century French poetry involving only two rhymes, and the English language, while comprising many words, does not always have a word to fit the metre and the rhyme in question. Some words were somewhat archaic, and it was only with difficulty that I could find them in an old French dictionary. Rondel does not appear to have any specific translation into English; the closest word I could find was ‘roundelay’. Also, *orfévrerie* does not appear in many French–English dictionaries and I could only find it in an old French dictionary which defined it as a silver- or goldsmith’s shop or gold/silver plating. As the poem is very much emphasised by the rhyme and metre of the *rondel* form, I have attempted to preserve the original form as much as possible. However, for rhyming I was forced to use some slant rhymes after changing the word order many times. In French, there are many more words that share endings than in English, which made the translation slightly harder.

---

**Rondel**

Le temps a laissé son manteau  
De vent, de froidure et de pluie,  
Et s’est vêtu de broderie  
De soleil rayant, clair et beau.  
Il n’y a bête ni oiseau  
Qu’en son jargon ne chante ou crie :  
Le temps a laissé son manteau  
De vent, de froidure et de pluie.  
Rivière, fontaine et ruisseau  
Portent en livrée jolie  
Gouttes d’argent d’orfévrerie ;  
Chacun s’habille de nouveau.  
Le temps a laissé son manteau  
De vent, de froidure et de pluie.

**Roundelay**

Now has the weather dropped his veil  
Of howling wind, cold, rain and hail,  
And robed himself in radiant trail  
Of pure, clean and brilliant sun.  
Not a single bird or faun  
Does in his cant not call or trill;  
Now has the weather dropped his veil  
Of howling wind, cold, rain and hail.  
River, spring and rushing run  
All in shining liv’ry tail’d  
In drops of glorious silver mail;  
Each dresses himself once again.  
Now has the weather dropped his veil  
Of howling wind, cold, rain, and hail.

*Charles d’Orléans*  
*Translated from the French by Scarlett Kolle*
It was a scorcher – a sweltering afternoon.
I reclined on the couch.
There shutters were half-open-half-closed,
With a quasi-lumberlight,
A dusky light, a day-to-night light
Or a dawny light, a night-to-day light.
Shy girls require this hazziness:
In it they want to hide their bashfulness.

Look – Corinna! Loosely dressed
With parted hair tucked over her ivory neck
Like sexy Semiramis, the exotic Queen
Or loose Lais, the harlot.
I tore off her scanty tunic,
But she grabbed it back –
Albeit half-heartedly, and so
I was the victor, she self-betrayed.

There she was in front of me, nude;
On her body no blemish to be seen.
Oh, what shapely shoulders!
What arms I’ve seen and touched!
What curvaceous breasts, fit to be caressed!
Her smooth belly below her elegant bosom!
What a long, slender side! What a thrilling thigh!
But why single out fragments of her form?
Nothing was unworthy of praise.

At last I clasped her naked form to mine.
You can fill in the rest yourself.
Then, breathless, we both eased up.
Oh, let every noontime turn out like this for me!

Translated from the Latin
by Daniel Galbraith

I chose to translate this poem as it is my favourite of the selection from Ovid’s Amores that we are studying for A level Latin. I find it particularly striking because of its filmic nature and the vividness of the picture Ovid paints for us of the seduction scene: we get a real sense of his pleasure in describing the moments before the act of love, but also his tongue-in-cheek wit and skill as a poet.

I decided to opt for a rather more loose approach to translating the Latin than usual, as I felt it was more faithful to the mood and tone of the poem. For this reason also I decided to choose free verse – in my view blank verse would have been too rigid for the subject matter.

I separated the poem on the page into stanzas, which I thought emphasised the dramatic unfolding of the action.

Sonority was also important for me when translating this, as I tried to evoke the languid sensuality of the scene through the sounds of the words themselves; eg ‘quasi-lumberlight’ which to an extent reflects the Latin ‘quaesilvae lumen’ (4). I also used alliteration, perhaps even more than Ovid, to aim for a similar effect – eg ‘sexy Semiramis’ for ‘formosa Semiramis isse’ (11), or ‘thrilling thigh’ for ‘iuvenale femur’ (22). However, this meant that I lost some exactness of meaning; nevertheless I was willing to sacrifice this in order to achieve the sound I wanted.

One problem I encountered was how to retain Ovid’s clever, teasing way of leaving a lot up to the reader’s imagination – it was difficult to encapsulate this suggestiveness, and I have ended up with something more direct and explicit; eg ‘loose Lais, the harlot’ for ‘multis Lais amata viris’ (12). On the other hand this phrase is a definite undercut, so I was keen to draw attention to the line. Another issue was whether to keep the level of detail in the translation; in the end I chose to favour compression and succinctness over precise correspondence (hence lines 5–6 of the translation).
There was a day, a day in blue September,
When under a plum tree’s boughs afresh with green
Encircled by my arms I gently held her:
My love, so still and pale she seemed a dream.
Above us in the searing sky of summer
There was a cloud my eyes long lingered on
It was so white and higher than all the others
And, when I looked back, was already gone.

Since that day’s close so many moons in silence
Have swum across the sky and sunk below.
No doubt the plum trees too, by now, are fallen
But what befell my love, you want to know?
I must admit, I cannot quite remember
And yet I do know what you’re trying to say.
As for her face, I really can’t recall it
I only know: I kissed it some blue day.

The kiss, the kiss, I would have long forgotten it
But for that cloud I saw up in the sky
The cloud I know still, and will know forever
It was so white and came down from on high.
Perhaps the plum trees, even now, are flowering
The woman might have her seventh child to raise
And yet the cloud, it only flowered for minutes
And, as I looked back, vanished in the haze.

Translated from the German
by Iwona Luszowicz

I first encountered this poem while watching
the film Das Leben der Anderen. The relatively simple way in which Brecht
portrays the cloud’s transience lends the poem an understated beauty which struck me
immediately; it was this beauty that came to mind when I was trying to decide on a poem
to translate, and the task of trying to transfer the essence of the original into English seemed
as if it could be a fulfilling one.

The factor that made translating the poem most difficult was my decision to stick to the original rhythm and rhyme-
scheme, their regularity reinforcing, at least for me, the sad inevitability of the cloud’s passing. There are instances – such as the
half-rhyme of ‘green’ and ‘dream’ – where I have not been successful in my aim to stick
exactly to the original regularity, or where I have had to use periphrasis, metri gratia,
though I would rather not have done so (e.g. the trees are ‘afresh with green’ as opposed
to simply ‘young’). Equally, I could not
come up with an appropriate two-syllable word to directly translate schönen (line five), using instead the transferred epithet
of ‘searing sky’ to try to convey the sense of the original.

A further difficulty consisted in
overcoming my tendency to use overly nostalgic words and phrases, which are absent in the original and which gave my
first draft a self-absorbed, self-pitying tone quite unlike Brecht’s. Consequently, all
the ‘long-lost’s, ‘bygones’ and ‘erstwhiles’ I originally included had to go; I hope
that the tone of my final draft is more in keeping with that which Brecht originally intended.
Recently, I read Helen Dunmore’s *Counting the Stars*, a vivid fictional account of the trajectory of Catullus’ affair with the married ‘Lesbia’. The novel made me return me to the poems with fresh eyes, appreciating their ageless theme of the paradoxical nature of love. Poem VIII, with its mingled determination and desolation, is one of my favourites.

I have translated it in free verse, feeling that this would be a more flexible and modern way to convey the poet’s shifting moods. I have also taken liberties with the punctuation for the same reason. By translating *quondam* as ‘only a few weeks ago’, the reader can feel how raw these feelings are and how Catullus is still both in love and lust with his faithless mistress: ‘yes, it was bliss’. I have inserted a break in the verse after this to imply the remembrance of happier times. These memories are then interrupted by harsh reality, and I felt instinctively that Catullus’ anger and contempt with himself for his self indulgence would be reflected in bitterness against his lover, hence the dismissive tone of ‘she’s a woman’, although this is nowhere in the original. Again, the vicious tone of *scelesta* which I have translated as ‘whore’ led me to conclude that farewell was too gentle for *vale*.

The rhetorical questions he asks towards the end of the poem suggest that he suspects that, far from being lonely, Lesbia will never be short of male company. I also felt that he is torturing himself with memories of when he was the one touching and kissing her and the suggestion of a serpent coiling around her prey seemed a fitting way to recall him to reality. The punctuation of the last line and introduction of an exclamation mark signal a return to pragmatism and the end of the poem.
As I was writing solemn metre
Of violent wars and slaughter,
And made the next line shorter.
So thus my war-like drumbeat changed
To Love’s inferior measure
And I, a bard, was so demeaned
For Cupid’s idle leisure.
’What’s this?’ I cried, ‘Who gave the right
Of meddling to you, boy?
The Muses rule my lofty verse,
It’s not your nursery toy!
Should Venus seize the arms of war
While Hera fans Love’s flames?
Or Ceres rule the wooded hills,
Diana till the plains?
Apollo with his shining locks
Could not take up the spear,
While Mars attempts to tune the lyre
With war-cry deafened ear.
But, Cupid, you already rule
A great and powerful sphere,
Why then should you aspire to change
My verse? Why interfere?
Perhaps your realm now covers all
To Helicon’s leafy dell.
Is Phoebus’ lyre no longer safe?
Will that be yours as well?
Each time that I begin my page
And write in warlike length,
The second line cuts short too soon
And undermines my strength.
Besides, I lack a fitting theme
For Love’s less weighty beat,
I have no long-haired boy or girl
To make my verse complete.’
No sooner had I thus complained
When Cupid snatched a dart,
An arrow made to seal my fate
And destined for my heart.
He curved the bow across his knee,
And speaking thus, he drew:
‘O Bard, take this to be your theme!’
And out the arrow flew.
Alas! That boy has piercing shots,
Unerring did he fire,
And now in my once empty heart
Roar flames of my desire.
So let my work in six feet rise,
And fall in five once more,
I bid farewell to epic themes,
I’ll write of Love not War.
Come, wreathe your golden brow, my Muse,
With myrtle of the sea,
My verse will scan eleven feet
I’ll bow to elegy.

Translated from the Latin
by Imogen Halstead
Imogen Halstead's commentary

I chose this poem because I love Ovid's facetious, irreverent style. I felt it would translate well into English as much of the humour comes through the incongruous situation, a poet being compelled to write against his will, rather than word play. However, the poem presents some difficulties in translation as the main joke of the poem is based around the necessity of using particular metres for different styles of Latin poetry. Ovid claims he wants to write of 'violent wars', a subject which would require the weighty dactylic hexameter of epic. Cupid has different ideas and by 'stealing a foot' from every second line he transforms the metre into elegiac couplets, the metre of love poetry. I tried to convey Ovid's derision of 'lighter' metres and their subject matter by including lines 5–8 ('So thus...idle leisure') of my own composition. I hope this also explains the change of form which Cupid has caused with his interference. I attempted to convey Ovid's self-parody of his pride by using the archaic word 'bard'. Similarly, I hope to have conveyed his derision of Cupid through the references to his youth such as 'nursery toy'. There are other allusions which are hard to bring across to a modern audience. In the first line Ovid uses the heroic diction of the Aeneid's opening which would immediately link the two works in the minds of his audience. This is not so prominent in the English; however, I tried to make the link through the word 'epic' used later on.

I tried to maintain Ovid's light-hearted style by adopting a bouncy rhythm for my translation. In keeping to a regular metre and rhyme scheme I have attempted to indicate the strict scansion of the poet's elegiac couplets. It is hard to do justice to the clever construction of Ovid's verse but I hope I have managed to convey the mood and general sense of fun.
Pearl (Section IV: lines 181–240)

More þen me lyste my drede aros.
I stod ful stylle and dorste not calle;
Wyth yȝ open and mouth ful closd
I stod as hende as hawk in halle.
I hoped þat gostly wat
þat porpose;
I dred onende quat schulde byfalle,
Lest ho me eschaped þat I þer chos,
Er I at steuen hir mo t stalle.
Pat gracios gay wythouten galle,
So smoþe, so smal, so seme slyt,
Ryse vp in hir araye ryalle,
A precios pyece in perle pyȝt.
Perle pyȝt of ryal prys
Pere moȝt mon by grace haf sene,
Quen þat frech as flor-de-lys
Doun þe bonke con boȝe bydene.
Al blysandwe wyth waȝ his beau biys,
Vpon at sydeȝ, and bounden bene
Wyth þe myrreste margarys, at my deuyse,
Pat euer I seȝ et with myn ene;
Wyth lappe large, I wot and I wene,
Dubbed with double perle and dyȝte;
Her cortel of self sute schene,
Wyth precios perleȝ al vmbepyȝte.

A pyȝt corouneȝ set wer þat gyrl
Of mariorys and non oþer ston.
Hȝe pynakled of cler quyt perle,
Wyth flurted flowreȝ perlet vpon.
To hed hade ho non oþer wyrle;
Her here leke, al byr vmbegon,
Her semblaunt sade for doþ oþer erle,
Her ble more blazȝ þen whalleȝ bon.
As schorne golde schyr her fax þenne schon,
On schyldereȝ þat leghe vnlapped lyȝte.
Her depe colourȝ set wOnted non
Of precios perle in porfyl pyȝte.

Pearl (an extract)

Then fiercer than longing came the fear.  
I didn’t stir or dare to call  
to her: wide-eyed and silent as a hawk  
in a great hall I waited there.  
I knew that what I saw was spirit  
and I feared for what might follow –  
that within my sight she’d disappear  
before I could come close to her.  
So smooth, so small, so delicate,  
this graceful, innocent girl now rose  
before me in her royal robes,  
a precious creature set with pearls.

Now, like a vision granted, showered  
in a setting of jewels fit for a queen  
this child as fresh as a lily-flower  
stepped downward towards the stream.  
The fine white linen she wore seemed woven  
with light and where its sides hung open  
was laced with borders of pearls far paler  
and prettier than any I’d seen before.  
The sleeves of her robe fell long and low,  
stitched in with double rows of pearls;  
her skirts of the same fine linen were trimmed  
and seeded all over with precious gems.

But the girl wore one thing more: a crown  
composed entirely of ice-bright pearls  
and no other stone, tipped and figured  
with flowers, each petal set with a perfect gem.  
She wore no other decoration  
in her hair which in its falling framed  
a face as white as ivory  
and noble in its gravity.  
Her hair like hand-worked gold shone  
and flowed unbound around her shoulders,  
the chalk-white pallor of her skin as pure  
as all the fine-set pearls she wore.
Jane Draycott’s commentary

The 14th century dream-vision *Pearl* is one of the British Library’s greatest treasures – no one reading the poem in the original could fail to be moved by the vivid expression of grief with which the poem is charged from the very first stanza, and which connects the modern reader to the poet’s experience like an electric arc across the centuries. Yet like the lost pearl/girl of its narrative, the poem still remains tantalisingly beyond the reach of today’s general reader, other than in scholarly versions. That seems a terrible shame.

The *Pearl* poet appears very close, and his dream world as much like our actual dreams as the conventional literary kind. What is more, his English is not that mysterious, but lies quite visible, if somewhat wobbly and indistinct, like stones at the bottom of a stream. One of the most significant difficulties has been to resist the mesmeric appeal of some of that just-about-accessible diction and syntax, and of the poem’s powerfully end-stopped rhythms, double stitched into place by the strongly audible rhyme-scheme.

In trying to relay my own experience of the poem for a modern ear, I have deliberately aimed towards a more fluid and echoing character while retaining a clear connection with other aspects of the poem’s harmonic patterning – the tetrametric line, the *concatenatio* of chain-linking phrases, and in particular the drive and energy of the poet’s alliterative phrasing.

As a parent of daughters about to leave home, and as someone who has written more than my own fair share of poems about loss in the past, working at close quarters with the *Pearl* poet has felt to me more like an extraordinary arrival than a departure, even though this is the first piece of translation I have undertaken.

Winners of the Open category

*Py3t* wat3 poyned and vche a hemme
At honde, at syde3, at ouerture,
Wyrth whyte perle and non oþer gemme,
And bornyste quyte wat3 hyr usture.
Bot a wonder perle wythouten wenme
Innyde3 hyr breste wat3 sette so sur;
A manne3 dom m0st drys3ly demme,
Er mynde m0st malte in hit usture.
I hope no tong m0st endure
No sauerly saghe say of þat sy3t,
So wat3 hit clene and cler and pure,
Þat precios perle þer hit wat3 py3t.

Where her skin met the white of the linen
at her wrists, her throat and on every hem,
were set pearls with the pallor of no other stone.
The whole dress shone like an icy stream
and there at the heart of it all on her breast
lay a single immaculate pearl far greater
than all the rest. To tell its true measure
or worth would test a man’s mind to the limit –
I swear no singer however inspired
could summon the words to capture the sight
of that pearl, so perfect, so faultless, so pale
and placed in the most precious setting of all.

*Py3t* in perle, þat precios pyece
On wyþer half water com douþ þe shore.
No gladder gome heþen into Grece
Þen I, quen ho on brymme wore.
Ho wat3 me nerre þen aunte or nece;
My joy forþy wat3 much þe more.
Ho profered me speche, þat speche speche,
Enclynande lowe in wommon lore,
Ca3te of her coroun of grete tresore
And haylsed me wyth a lote ly3te.
Wel wat3 me þat euer I wat3 bore
To sware þat swete in perle3 py3t.

*Anon*

*Py3t* wat3 poyned vche a hemme
At honde, at syde, at ouerture,
Wyrth whyte perle and non oþer gemme,
And bornyste quyte wat3 hyr usture.
Bot a wonder perle wythouten wenme
Innyde hyr breste wat sette so sur;
A manne dom m0st drysly demme,
Er mynde m0st malte in hit usture.
I hope no tong m0st endure
No sauerly saghe say of þat sy3t,
So wat3 hit clene and cler and pure,
Þat precios perle þer hit wat3 py3t.


*Anon*

Translated from the Middle English
by Jane Draycott
The poems of Eeva-Liisa Manner (1921–95) are lucid yet mysterious. They are haunted by echoes, steps, shadows, reflections; but they evoke ghostliness with utter clarity. I wanted to translate 'Theorem' because as well as being characteristic of Manner’s oeuvre in terms of its style and imagery, it offers an aesthetic manifesto, a ‘theorem’ pertaining to poetry. I am also motivated by the fact that Manner’s work is shamefully little known outside of Finland.

When translating from Finnish, a key challenge is posed by the lack of articles in the source language. The translator must choose between ‘a’ or ‘the’. Another potential problem is the lack of genders in Finnish; the pronoun hän can mean ‘he’ or ‘she’. A further challenge is presented by the frequent use of the passive voice in Finnish; yet another, by the many references in Finnish texts to geographical features and varieties of (for example) fish and berries, which may not be known to the Anglophone reader. The first issue is salient here. In this translation, I opted for ‘the’ poem (not ‘a’), since this is a ‘theorem’, a generalising pronouncement. Later, I have ‘a’ worn-down threshold ‘but the stillness of shadow’. Why?

Stillness seems to me a general characteristic of shadow, whereas the ‘threshold’ of the poem gains power from its particularity, its singularity. And yet, I have ‘the door/house/sun/blue door’, since there could only be one of each item in the world that the poem is evoking and establishing.

In this way, translating this poem raises philosophical questions regarding the nature of the particular and the general: appropriate, since Manner is often interested in such issues. I define my approach to her work as respectful but vigorous: sensitive both to the original and to what works and pleases in English.
Truyện Kiều

Trần năm trong cội ngủơi ta,
Chữ tập chữ mènh khéo la ghẹt nhau.
Trải qua một cuộc bể đau,
Những dấu trống thả mà đầu đốn lòng.
Là gì bái sắc tướng phong,
Trời xanh quen thời mà hông đánh ghen.
Cao thơm lăn gờ trước denn,
Phong tình có lúc còn truyền sữ xanh.
Ràng: Nam Gia-tình tiêu Minh,
Bồn phương phảng lạng hai kinh chữ vảng.
Có nhà viên ngoài ho Vương,
Gia tự ngằng cảng thường thường bức trung.
Một tài cơ thọ rốt lồng,
Vương Quan là chữ nội dòng nho gia.
Đầu lòng hai á tổ nga,
Thúy Kiều là chị em là Thúy Vân.
Mai cô thật cách tưởng thân,
Một người một vẻ mưu phân vẹn mưu.
Vân xem trang trọng khác với,
Khôn tránh đầy dạn nét ngoài nở nang.
Hoá cười nước Ngọc thơ doan trang,
Mấy thu nước tốc tuyệt hương mà đa.
Kiều càng sắc sảo mơn mà,
So bẹ tài sắc lại là phần Hơn.
Lấn thứ thủy nhật xuân son,
Hoá ghen thụ thảo thần liều hôm kềm xanh.
Một hai hương hương mực ngoại thành,
Sắc đăng đến một tài dính hoa hai.
Thống minh vẫn sẵn tình trời,
Pha nghệ thì hóa đo mưa ca ngầm.
Cung thương lâu bất ngâm,
Nghe riêng ảnh dưới hồ cầm một trường.
Khúc nhỉ tay lụa nên xông,
Một thiên Bạc mềnh lai càng nào nhơn.
Phong lưu rát mục hống quản,
Xuân xanh xã tôi tài tuần cặp kẻ.
Em đêm trường rủ mân chê,
Tướng đông ong bồm dì về mặc ai.
Ngày xuân con lên đa thơi,
Thêu quang chín chúc đa ngoài sâu mưu.
Cô non xanh tàn chân trời,
Cánh lệ trăng đếm một vài bông hoa.
Thanh mình trong tiệt tháng ba,
Lê là lạo mô hội là đập thành.
Gần xa nò nhạc yên anh,
Chị em sắm sửa bồ hành chở xuân.

Broken Heart, New Lament (an extract)

It’s an old story: good luck and good looks
don’t always mix.
Tragedy is circular and infinite.
The plain never believe it,
but good-looking people meet with hard times too.

It’s true.
Our ending is inevitable:
long years betray the beautiful.

This manuscript is ancient, priceless,
bamboo-rolled, perfumed with musty spices.
Sit comfortably by this good light, that you may learn
the hard-won lesson that these characters contain.

It is the time of the Ming Dynasty. Jiajing is on the throne.
The empire is peaceful. An educated man
named Vương has three children:
two daughters, Kiều and Vân,
and a handsome son, Vương Quan.

The sisters are slender as saplings and lovely
as snow fresh fallen from a winter sky.
The gentle glow of a full moon
might remind you of the round face of Vân.
Her words sparkle, precious as jewels,
and her smile is as soft as rose petals.

But Kiều is still more beautiful. Her eyes
are dark and troubled as November seas.
Spring flowers envy her grave beauty
and the mountain ash shivers with jealousy
whenever she passes by.
Her smile flashes like a thunderbolt.
A fine painter, singer, and poet,
she makes mournful melodies on her lute:
the saddest and the sweetest is Cruel fate.

Young men buzz beyond the outer wall:
bees among the honeysuckle.
Swallows and spring days fly like shuttles
over green lawns splashed with white petals
from the branches of the pear trees.

It is April, the Feast of Pure Light, when families
visit the graves of their ancestors: pulling weeds
and burning incense. Like orioles or swifts,
people flit about. The sisters and their brother dress up
and step outside.
I have chosen Kiêu because Vietnam’s national poem deserves to be more widely known. The original itself is a ‘translation’: nearly two centuries ago, Vietnamese diplomat Nguyễn Du Du turned a Chinese historical novel into an extraordinary work of art. There was something in the life of this long-dead Chinese courtesan that resonated with his own life, and it is a mark of his genius that generations of Vietnamese continue to find Kiêu’s story vividly relevant today.

Vietnamese is far from English. The colour xanh, for example, normally translates as ‘blue’, while lục is what we call ‘green’, but the boundary between these two shades is not in a European place. It is tempting to translate cỏ xanh as ‘blue grass’, because of the surprising image, but it is not what Nguyễn meant.

Nguyễn understood well that translating a poem means making something new – he originally planned to call his poem Đốm Trrieben Tân Thanh ‘Broken heart, new lament’ both to acknowledge his debt to the Chinese original, and to make a claim for the freshness of his own work.

I have not attempted to mimic the conventions of Vietnamese poetry. The syllabic six-eight couplet might be technically possible to imitate in English as a purely abstract exercise, but the ‘rhyming’ of sharp with flat tones has no meaning in a non-tonal language.

Everyone in Vietnam knows Kiêu: these opening lines are still quoted on market stalls in Saigon, and in the corridors of Hanoi, and by farmers in the rice fields of Cần Thơ. Through half-rhyme and variable metre, I have tried to recreate those features of Kiêu that I think best account for its popularity and longevity: the sharpness and wit of couplets that both drive the narrative and frequently succeed as mini-poems in their own right.
Stephen Spender – poet, critic, editor and translator of poetry – lived from 1909 to 1995. The Trust was set up in his memory to promote literary translation and to widen knowledge of 20th century literature, with particular focus on Stephen Spender’s circle of writers.

The Times Stephen Spender Prize
The aim of this annual prize, launched in 2004, is to draw attention to the art of literary translation and encourage young people to read foreign poetry at a time when literature is no more than an optional module (if that) in A level modern languages. Entrants translate a poem from any language – modern or classical – into English, and submit both the original and their translation, together with a commentary of not more than 300 words. There are three categories (14- and-under, 18-and-under and Open) with prizes in each category, the best entries being published in The Times and in a commemorative booklet produced by the Trust. The prize is promoted by The Times and has been sponsored in 2008 by the Old Possum’s Practical Trust, to whom the Trust is very grateful.

Translation grants
Since its inception, the Trust has given approximately £42,000 in grants for the translation of contemporary writers into English. Recipients include Index on Censorship for two special issues of creative work, one on banned fiction and the other on banned poetry; Modern Poetry in Translation; the Harvill Press, for a bilingual edition of poems by Rutger Kopland; The Way We Are, a multilingual anthology of writing by children and young people from Waltham Forest; the Aldeburgh Poetry Trust, to bring to the festival exiled Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti, the Iraqi poet Fadhil Al-Azzawi, and Aharon Shabtai with his translator, the poet Peter Cole; the British Centre for Literary Translation, to bring five Eastern European translators to seminars and the BCLT’s summer school; the Great Women Poets tour, which brought translation workshops to schools around the country; and the Children’s Bookshow Outside In: Children’s Writers in Translation, which saw foreign writers and illustrators taking part in events in seven cities, with workshops in 40 schools.

The archive programme
In May 2002 the Trust presented the British Library with a collection of Stephen Spender’s non-fictional, published prose. Representing around one million words of mainly essays and journalism, the archive covered 70 years, from 1924 to 1994. It was compiled by postgraduates, financed by a grant from the British Academy, and was supervised academically by Professor John Sutherland and by Lady Spender. The 821 items, from 79 published sources in Britain, Europe and the USA, are catalogued chronologically and also alphabetically by source. The Trust’s online version can be searched and sorted according to a variety of categories via the Trust’s website: www.stephen-spender.org

Lady Spender is currently collating and annotating Stephen Spender’s journals, which will be published by Faber in 2009, Spender’s centenary year, while Mark Kermode has been digitising the important photographic archive held by Lady Spender, which comprises photographs taken by Stephen Spender and her from the late 1940s up until the 1990s.

Events
The Institute for English Studies, University of London, hosted a successful one-day symposium in January 2001 on ‘Stephen Spender and his Circle in the 1930s’ with contributions on Edward Upward, Isherwood, Auden, Spender and MacNeice, with an unpublished article on these poets written in the Thirties by Isaiah Berlin; the speakers were a combination of those who knew Spender and his circle at first hand and scholars working on them today.

In May 2004, three of the Trust’s Committee members – Seamus Heaney, Tony Harrison and Harold Pinter – very generously agreed to celebrate the publication of Spender’s New Collected Poems with a reading of his poetry and some of their own. They were joined by Jill Balcon (widow of Stephen Spender’s friend, C. Day Lewis) and Vanessa Redgrave. The 90-minute programme was devised by Lady Spender and directed by Joe Harmston; all 900 seats of the Queen Elizabeth Hall sold out.

On 21 February 2007 (the 100th anniversary of W. H. Auden’s birth) a reading of Auden’s poetry was held at the Shaw Theatre, the result of a collaboration between the Trust and the British Library. Lady Spender, who knew Auden well, selected the readers (all poets themselves): James Fenton, John Fuller, Grey Gowrie, Andrew Motion, Sean O’Brien, Peter Porter and – in recognition of the years Auden spent in the United States – American poet and academic Richard Howard; the programme was devised by Lord Gowrie, a founding member of the Stephen Spender Memorial Trust and an Auden scholar, and featured poems predominantly from the 1930s and 40s, as well as ‘Auden in Milwaukee’, written by Stephen Spender in 1940.

Stephen Spender’s centenary in 2009 will be marked by a poetry reading on the evening of Thursday 26 February and an academic seminar on Friday 27 February, both events taking place at the Institute of English Studies.
The Stephen Spender Memorial Trust

PATRONS
Lady Antonia Fraser CBE, Lord Gowrie PC, Drue Heinz DBE, David Hockney CH, Wole Soyinka, Lady Spender

PRESIDENT
Sir Michael Holroyd CBE*

COMMITTEE

*Also a Trustee

Registered charity number 1101304
Company limited by guarantee number 4891164
Registered in England at
3 Old Wish Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex, BN21 4JX
Cover image © the Estate of Humphrey Spender