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The Stephen Spender Prize

for poetry in
translation

A Celebration 2004–14

Noma Dumezweni
Patricia Hodge
Michael Pennington

Directed by
Joe Harmston

7pm, Thursday 12 March 2015
Faraday Theatre, The Royal Institution

Front cover

Stephen Spender

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Back cover

Natasha Spender celebrating her 90th birthday

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The Stephen Spender Prize for poetry in translation



Susan Bassnett

The initial impulse for this prize came from a desire on the part of the Stephen Spender Trust to pay tribute to Stephen Spender's interest in translation. Spender was himself a translator, and his poetry reflects the breadth of his cultural and linguistic interests. The plan to create a prize for poetry translation came at exactly the right moment, for interest in foreign languages in the UK was at a low ebb, following the Blair government's mistaken policy of abolishing compulsory foreign language learning in schools. Language teachers were feeling demoralised, and we hoped a poetry translation prize might send a more positive message and encourage linguistic creativity.

At our preliminary meeting (present were myself, Robina Pelham Burn and the late Daniel Weissbort) we agreed that the competition should be for young people, so we set an age limit of 30, with a separate category for those still at school. We agreed that a poem from any language could be submitted, no longer than 60 lines, though extracts within that limit from longer works were acceptable, also that every entrant should produce a brief commentary on their translation. The idea behind this was to invite self-reflection on the process of choosing a poem, and on the way in which a translator creates a translation. This has proved to be an important part of the

competition; some of the comments shed light not only on the strategies used by translators but also on the personal significance of a particular poem.

After the first year, two major changes took place. We were delighted by the number of young people with an interest in poetry and translation, but had to respond to the complaints from translator-poets over 30 who asked why they had been excluded. We were also amazed and impressed by how young some of the entrants were, and in recognition of a particularly talented nine year old, Matthew Spender offered to fund a separate category for younger entrants. The prize then shifted to its present format, of three categories, one for entrants aged 14 or under, one for those aged 18 or under, and a category open to everyone.

Over the decade of its existence the prize has flourished, with thousands of entrants of all ages. Our youngest winner was nine, our oldest 87. Some translators are complete novices, some are well known as poets and as translators. We judge anonymously; all we have is a box of translations, with the originals and commentaries. We all read everything, and write brief comments on each entry, since we need to justify our choices at our meeting. I retired as judge last year, having been on the panel since the prize began, and can say that over the years the rate of consensus among the judges has been high. Some translations are so good that they leap out at us; in some cases we may find that we like a poem in English but are not qualified to judge it as a translation since it is in a language in which we are not competent, so it is sent out to an expert in that language. This means that the translators are not restricted to a narrow range of mainly European languages, but can range across the world as they think fit.

Judging this prize has been enjoyable, illuminating and humbling. Stephen Spender's memory has been well served by the thousands of poet-translators who have produced such memorable poems.

Introduction

Over ten years there has been enormous variety in the winning poems of the Stephen Spender Prize but a consistent level of excellence, and the number of poems which have subsequently been published in book form is evidence of this: Jane Draycott's translation of the Middle English poem *Pearl*, for example, which was a Poetry Book Society Recommended Translation, and Iain Galbraith's translation of Jan Wagner's 'Quince Jelly' which was this year's winner, and will be published later in 2015 by Arc Publications. The prize serves as a stimulus, it makes readers (and publishers) take notice of poetry and translation and it encourages translators to have faith in their work. Tonight's reading is a celebration of a prize which has genuinely changed the way readers and poets think about poetry in translation.

Our programme is full of vitality and celebration. It draws on the winning poems over the decade, and also those poems which were commended. We've taken care to choose a number of poems translated by teenage and child translators – as they are the future of translation. In picking the poems we have looked for contrasts of mood and tone, of language and culture. We wanted to show the range of the translators' skills and voices, we wanted to hear poems from Bengali, Welsh, Latin, Medieval French and many other languages, and we wanted to be moved, amused, entertained and provoked by the poems. There were many other accomplished poems we might have chosen, but this selection pleased us, because it captured the extraordinary colour and vigour of all the winning work.

Sasha Dugdale

Editor of *Modern Poetry in Translation*

The readings

Selected by Sasha Dugdale

Paul Batchelor

'The Damned' from *Inferno* Canto V by Dante Alighieri, translated from the Italian

Rosemary Brook-Hart

'Age Hangs on You' by Pierre de Ronsard, translated from the French

Damayanti Chatterjee

'Omolkaanthi' by Nirendranath Chakraborty, translated from the Bengali

Neil Croll

'The School House' by T H Parry-Williams, translated from the Welsh

Jane Draycott

From *Pearl* (Section IV: lines 181–240), translated from the Middle English

Sasha Dugdale

'Memory's Sideways Glance' by Elena Shvarts, translated from the Russian

Alistair Elliot

'Venice' by Mihai Eminescu, translated from the Romanian

Duncan Forbes

'On the Ceiling' (to Giovanni da Pistoia, ca. 1510) by Michelangelo Buonarroti, translated from the Italian

Thomas Franchi

'To a Nose' by Francisco de Quevedo,
translated from the Spanish

Iain Galbraith

'Quince Jelly' by Jan Wagner,
translated from the German

Imogen Halstead

Amores I.I by Ovid,
translated from the Latin

Seán Hewitt

'A Jackeen Keens for the Blasket' by Brendan Behan,
translated from the Irish

Kaarina Hollo

'Stillborn 1943: Calling Limbo' by Derry O'Sullivan,
translated from the Irish

Robert Hull

Epigrams, Book 3, Number 44 by Martial,
translated from the Latin

Emily Jeremiah

'Theorem' by Eeva-Liisa Manner,
translated from the Finnish

Karen Leeder

'Childhood in the Diorama' by Durs Grünbein,
translated from the German

Gwyneth Lewis

'The Wind' by Dafydd ap Gwilym,
translated from the Welsh

Sam Norman

'Andromache' from Book 22 of the *Iliad* by Homer,
translated from the Ancient Greek

Allen Prowle

'Poppies' by Attilio Bertolucci,
translated from the Italian

Meghan Purvis

'The Collar' (anon),
translated from the Anglo-Saxon

John Richmond

'The Retreat from Moscow' by Victor Hugo,
translated from the French

Esther Sorooshian

'The Frog' by Francis Ponge,
translated from the French

Michael Swan

From *Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes* by Rainer Maria Rilke,
translated from the German

Jane Tozer

from *The Lament of the Gorgeous Helmet-Fettler*
(stanzas 55–59), translated from the medieval French

John RG Turner

'Sobriety', Book III, Poem 12, by Paul Verlaine,
translated from the French and Italian

Mary Weatherburn

'A Small Garden' by Rin Ishigaki,
translated from the Japanese

Seamus Heaney

'From the Republic of Conscience'

Stephen Spender

'Dolphins'

The translators

Paul Batchelor has published a book of poems, *The Sinking Road*, and a chapbook, *The Love Darg*. After working as a freelance writer for seven years, he is now a lecturer in English Literature and Creative Writing at Durham University.

Rosemary Brook-Hart entered the competition in 2014 while studying for her A levels and completing an Extended Project Qualification on Pierre de Ronsard. She is now reading French and Spanish at Wadham College, Oxford.

Damayanti Chatterjee won the 14-and-under category in 2012 when she was just 12. She is now studying for her GCSEs and attempting to translate a collection of well known Bengali poems.

Neil Croll's education was in science and his career in computers; poetry and (natural) languages are leisure pursuits. He has translated poems from German, Spanish and Welsh for local poetry groups.

Jane Draycott is a tutor in creative writing at the universities of Oxford and Lancaster and has won numerous awards for her poetry. *Pearl* – her first translation – was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation.

Sasha Dugdale's translation won second prize in the inaugural year of the prize and was later published by Bloodaxe in *Birdsong on the Seabed*, a collection of poems by Elena Shvarts. She is Editor of *Modern Poetry in Translation*.

Alistair Elliot (born 1932) was sent to the US during WWII. A classicist who kept up his school French and added Italian and some Spanish and Portuguese, he has published eight books of his own poems and eight of translations.

Duncan Forbes has twice won the Spender Prize with translations from Italian and Latin. His poems are published by Enitharmon and, since retiring as a Head of English, he has been a Hawthornden and Royal Literary Fund fellow.

Thomas Franchi is studying for his A levels at Dulwich College. He hopes to read medicine at university.

Iain Galbraith teaches poetry translation at the University for Applied Arts in Vienna and his translation of Jan Wagner's Selected Poems, a Poetry Book Society Recommended Translation for summer 2015, will be published by Arc Publications in April 2015.

Imogen Halstead entered in the 18-and-under category but her translation so impressed the judges that she was awarded first prize in the Open category. Having read Classics at Cambridge, she is now training to be a barrister in chancery law.

Seán Hewitt was reading English at Cambridge when he was commended in 2012. He is now studying for a PhD at the Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool and working on a pamphlet of poetry with Arts Council funding.

Kaarina Hollo is lecturer in Irish at the University of Sheffield. Winning in 2012 spurred creativity, with subsequent publication of poems and translations in Irish and English. She values the friendship with Derry O'Sullivan that arose from meeting at the award ceremony.

Robert Hull was a teacher in schools for many years, and later in tertiary education. He has published seven collections of poetry, including three for children, and three books for teachers, as well as numerous other titles for children.

Emily Jeremiah is Senior Lecturer in German at Royal Holloway, University of London and a longstanding judge of the Schlegel-Tieck Prize for German Translation. 'Theorem' was published in *Bright, Dusky, Bright* (Waterloo Press, 2009).

Karen Leeder has been Professor of Modern German Literature at New College, Oxford since 1993. She has published widely on modern German literature, especially poetry, and translated a number of German poets.

Gwyneth Lewis was Wales's first National Poet. The author of many books of poetry in both English and Welsh, she has also written non-fiction, librettos and radio plays, and has recently returned from a term as visiting professor at Princeton University.

Sam Norman translated 'Andromache' while in his last year at school, having been commended for his translation of Pindar in 2013, and will be going to Magdalen College, Oxford in October 2015 to read Classics.

Allen Prowle's translation of Bertolucci led him to translate Rocco Scotellaro, first for a pamphlet published by *Modern Poetry in Translation* and then with Caroline Maldonado for a dual-language book published by Smokestack Press.

Meghan Purvis's translation of *Beowulf* was the Poetry Book Society's Recommended Translation for summer 2013. She received her PhD from the University of East Anglia, and is currently on the MFA fiction programme at North Carolina State University.

John Richmond has worked in English teaching and educational broadcasting. He describes reading, writing and translating poetry as 'a part-time occupation but psychologically essential preoccupation'.

Esther Sorooshian translated 'The Frog' while working on a translation project that formed part of her International Baccalaureate diploma studies. She is in her last year at Christ's Hospital school and hopes, after a gap year, to study English at university.

Michael Swan has published several volumes of poetry but it is for his books such as *Practical English Usage* that he is known worldwide and received the British Council's Lifetime Achievement Award for services to English language teaching.

Jane Tozer is a serial winner of the Stephen Spender Prize and her translations have appeared in several magazines and anthologies. She works as a Castle Guide at St Michael's Mount, Cornwall and belongs to the Falmouth Poetry group.

John RG Turner holds an honorary visiting fellowship in French at the University of Leeds, where he is also Emeritus Professor of Biology. Before winning third prize in 2013, he was commended five times and won the John Dryden Prize for Literary Translation.

Mary Weatherburn studied Japanese at Durham University and worked in Japan for Google and local government. Now pursuing a marketing career in New York, she continues to be involved with Japanese through part-time voluntary, teaching and translation work.



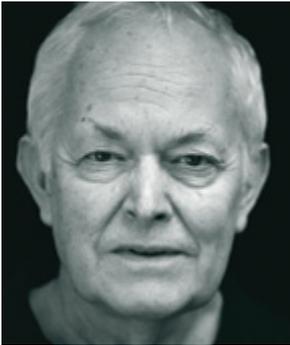
Noma Dumezweni

An Associate of the Royal Shakespeare Company, Noma Dumezweni won an Olivier Award for *A Raisin in the Sun* at the Young Vic. Recent theatre credits include *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *A Human Being Died that Night*, and she has appeared in film and on television in *The Incident*, *Out of Darkness*, *Frankie* and *Midsomer Murders*. Her reading of *Stories in the Stars* by Susanna Hislop was the Radio 4 Christmas 2014 Book of the Week.



Patricia Hodge

Patricia Hodge's extensive stage work ranges from *A Little Night Music* to *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. She won an Olivier Award for *Money* at the National Theatre and was recently acclaimed in *Relative Values*. Her television credits include *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, *The Naked Civil Servant*, *Rumpole of the Bailey* and *Hotel du Lac*. She played Miranda's mother in *Miranda*.



Michael Pennington

Michael Pennington's new book *Let Me Play the Lion Too* has just been published by Faber. Recently a triumphant King Lear in New York, he has been a leading actor for 40 years in London's West End, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre and his own English Shakespeare Company. Other books include *User's Guides* to three Shakespeare plays, *Sweet William* and *Are You There, Crocodile?: Inventing Anton Chekhov*.



Joe Harmston, director

Joe Harmston has been a theatre director since leaving Birmingham University in 1990. He has directed over 80 productions in the UK, USA and Europe. Highlights have included *The Lover* and *The Collection* by and starring Harold Pinter at the Donmar and *The Father* in a new version by Laurie Slade at Belgrade Coventry for which he was nominated for Best Director. He has a long history of directing literary events and galas and created *The Word Bites Like A Fish* with Natasha Spender.

The Stephen Spender Trust

Stephen Spender

Stephen Spender – poet, critic, editor and translator – lived from 1909 to 1995 and the Stephen Spender Trust was set up in his memory by his widow Natasha Spender. Its activities include two poetry translation prizes, Translation Nation (translation workshops in primary and secondary schools) and Translators in Schools (a training programme for translators and teachers interested in using translation creatively in the classroom).

The Stephen Spender Prize in association with the *Guardian*

Entrants of the annual Stephen Spender Prize translate a poem from any language, ancient or modern, into English, and submit both the original and their translation together with a commentary of not more than 300 words. The commentary is intended to shed light on the translation process and give a voice to the translators, allowing them to explain and justify their decisions. There are three categories – Open, 18-and-under and 14-and-under – and the prize routinely attracts translations from more than 50 languages. The 2015 competition, which closes on 22 May, will be judged by Josephine Balmer, Katie Gramich, WN Herbert and Stephen Romer.

“Restores one’s faith in human nature as well as human artistry” Guardian, November 2014

The Joseph Brodsky/Stephen Spender Prize in association with *The London Magazine*

The biennial Joseph Brodsky/Stephen Spender Prize is a worldwide prize for the translation of Russian poetry into English. Founded with the blessing of Maria Brodsky and Natasha Spender, the prize celebrates the two poets’ friendship and the rich tradition of Russian poetry.

“The Brodsky/Spender Prize launched my translating career” Katherine Young, 2011 winner

Translation Nation

Translation Nation is a project with Eastside Educational Trust which has won two EU prizes for innovation. At primary level it raises the profile of community languages within schools and develops participants’ creative writing. At secondary level it aims in a playful way to encourage language-learning, celebrate the linguistic diversity found in our schools and generate a curiosity about world literature, as well as opening participants’ eyes to the many career opportunities open to those who speak other languages.

Translators in Schools

Translators in Schools is a professional development programme created and delivered by award-winning translator Sarah Ardizzone, teacher Sam Holmes and the Stephen Spender Trust that involves engaging imaginatively with mother tongues and other languages by means of multilingual workshops that support National Curriculum objectives in English and modern foreign languages.

“The children raved about the Translators in Schools workshop on the way back to school; they shared it with a passion and urgency with peers in class in a manner that demonstrated a fundamental shift in thinking and perception... It was one of those professional opportunities that changes you. It opened up a whole new realm of possibilities in the classroom. It was priceless”

Mike Flowers, Hillcross Primary School

Future plans include opening the Stephen Spender Prize to translators on the other side of the Atlantic and delivering Translation Nation workshops throughout the UK.

stephen-spender.org
translatorsinschools.org
translation-nation.herokuapp.com

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