

THE  TIMES

Stephen Spender Prize 2007

brimmed with their wine, so sweet
e m'inebriat
it made me drunk.
d'un vino così dolce così fosc

de az a tûz, amely a testbôl of
yes, but flames that turn the human
varazsol, benne nem langolt
into an altar, have never burnt in he

op þæt colle ærð — cunne gearwe
hwider hreþra gehygd — hweorfa
man who is set upon swearing an oat
þæt ic sceal gelyfan wele — þu ge
ould wait until he knows himself wel

for poetry in translation

**Winner of the
14-and-under prize**



Josie Chubb
'Sound of the Bell'
by Pierre Reverdy
(French)

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



FIRST
Jenny Harris
Odes I.IX
by Horace
(Latin)



JOINT SECOND
Clare Bristow
an extract from
'The Wanderer'
(Anglo-Saxon)



Daniel Hitchens
'A Discussion
of the Poem'
by Christoph Meckel
(German)

**Winners of the
Open category**



FIRST
Allen Prowle
'Poppies'
by Attilio Bertolucci
(Italian)



SECOND
John Richmond
'Lemons'
by Eugenio Montale
(Italian)



JOINT THIRD
Peter Zollman
'Aeneas and Dido'
by István Baka
(Hungarian)



Gordon Wallace
an extract from
Canto V of *Inferno*
by Dante
(Italian)

Commended

Ana O'Shaughnessy-Gutierrez
'To an Old Elm Tree'
by Antonio Machado
(Spanish)

Jamie Gore
'Tomorrow at Dawn'
by Victor Hugo
(French)

Commended

Clare Bristow
an extract from 'The Wife's Lament'
(Anglo-Saxon)

Alice Malin
'Ode to a Chestnut on the Ground'
and 'Ode to a Watch at Night'
by Pablo Neruda
(Spanish)

Emily Tesh
an extract from *Electra*
by Sophocles
(Ancient Greek)

Commended

Elizabeth Stanley
'To the Jew who
Walked Away'
by Leen Deij
(Esperanto)

Mike Mitchell
'The Denotation
of Babel'
by Helmut Krausser
(German)

Stephanie Norgate
an extract from
Aeneid II
by Virgil
(Latin)

Jason Warren
an extract from
Tristia
by Ovid
(Latin)

J. S. Tennant
an extract from
Metamorphoses XI
by Ovid
(Latin)

Nicholas Slater
an extract from
'Orpheus. Eurydice.
Hermes'
by Rilke
(German)

Introduction

It is true that each year the same languages dominate and there are no prizes for guessing that these languages are French, German, Latin and Spanish (in that order), though this year Hungarian knocked Italian from fifth place. But each year more languages are represented – 37 in 2007 – and while there were no entries from Bengali, Bulgarian, Sanskrit or Yiddish this year, we saw for the first time translations from Catalan, Finnish, Lëtzebuergesch, Serbian, Slovenian and Ukrainian. The variety of entries, from the utterly familiar to poems encountered for the first time in languages with which the judges are not conversant, makes the judging all the more interesting.

The translator Daniel Hahn, whose translation of *The Book of Chameleons* by José Eduardo Agualusa recently won the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, has written of ‘the eternal problem faced by every translator – finding the balance between

literal fidelity and the equivalence that makes for fidelity of reading experience’. It is rare for translators to have the opportunity to explain their approach and justify their decisions and it makes for fascinating reading, sometimes prompting admiring responses from the judges at the solutions found. As more than one judge testifies below, the commentaries that accompany each entry (an aspect of the prize that A. S. Byatt described as ‘splendidly intelligent’) can be not only illuminating but also moving.

Thanks must go to this most amiable panel of judges, who were expert and efficient in equal measure; to Erica Wagner, Literary Editor of *The Times*, for her invaluable promotion of the prize in the weekend book section; and to Arts Council England, without whose financial support in 2007 this prize would not have run.

Robina Pelham Burn

Director of the Stephen Spender Memorial Trust

Judges' comments



This year's entries were impressive in their diversity and range, from languages new to the prize such as Wolof and Lëtzebuergesch, to a marked increase in entries from the languages of ‘new’ Europe, such as Romanian and Hungarian (it was also uplifting to see how, despite the recent threat to its place on university and school syllabuses, German proved second only to French in popularity). As ever, entrants' commentaries, too, illustrated an impressive range of approach and engagement, with those who provided fascinating discussions of technical strategies sitting alongside those who had a more personal story to offer, and almost all revealing how poetry in translation – not to mention the practice of translation itself – strikes deep at the heart of many entrants' lives (Gordon Wallace's account of the comfort offered by Henri de Régnier's poetry during his wife's decline from Alzheimer's was particularly moving). Many entries also illustrated the wider, political importance of translated poetry, such as Elizabeth Stanley's ‘To the Jew who Walked Away’, translated from Esperanto and commended in the Open Category, or Karen Margolis's translations of Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger, written shortly before the poet's death in a Nazi labour camp at the age of eighteen. It was heartening, too, to read of several entrants who were making their first attempts at poetry translation, discovering how it can enrich their experience as both readers and writers.

This was, of course, particularly the case for our entrants in the 14-and-under category where this year the judges' shortlists were – for once! – in agreement. We were all struck by the deftness of Josie

Chubb's translation of Reverdy's ‘Sound of the Bell’; it is a short piece but she gave us a real sense of a unified poem, not just in her version but in her thoughtful commentary. Other entries which caught my eye in this regard were Jac Rees's version of Verlaine's ‘Song of Autumn’ and Alexander Walton's ‘October’ by Anatole Le Braz, both of which showed promise, although in the end neither made it on to our winners' list.

In the 18-and-under category, as in previous years, we were impressed by the standard of the classical entries although these were noticeably fewer than in the past, particularly from Greek. However, Jenny Harris's striking haiku version of the Horace *Odes* I.IX was an exceptionally worthy winner, a bold and beautifully readable version of a poem which can throw the most experienced of classical translators. Choosing between extracts from longer works and complete, shorter poems is always a difficult task but in Clare Bristow's versions of Anglo-Saxon, again notoriously difficult to translate, and Daniel Hitchens's confident translation of Christoph Meckel's tricky ‘A Discussion of the Poem’, we found two skilled exponents of each task. I was also very impressed with Emily Tesh's commended extract from Sophocles' *Electra* which illustrated an impressive understanding of dramatic dialogue.

Our Open category seemed aptly named this year as, in a field of even but perhaps less immediately striking entries than previously, each of us initially found different candidates for commendation. In the end we were all agreed on the quality of Allen Prowle's beautifully executed translations of Attilio Bertolucci. We were also impressed by new ways of looking at ancient texts such as Jason Warren's radical condensing of Ovid's *Tristia* or Stephanie

Norgate's relocation of Virgil's *Aeneid* II to a modern battlefield, which both received commendations. It was cheering, too, to see poems from different, more oral traditions such as Georgina Collins's translation of the Senegalese poet Mame Seck Mbacké's ‘Twilight’, our first entry from Wolof, or Laurence James's simple translation of the Welsh ‘village poet’ Jack Oliver. This is what translation does: it brings us new traditions and new worlds, while keeping our old ones alive and vital.

Josephine Balmer



Judging this prize is as exciting as it is pleasurable. I enjoyed reading the hundreds of translations and commentaries, and enjoyed also the excitement of the final judges' meeting and the revelation of the names of the winners. This year the judges came quickly to a consensus, though we all had our special favourites. I noted with particular pleasure some of the splendid Italian translations, three of which found their way onto our Open winners list. I also enjoyed those candidates who sent in two versions of the same poem, exploring different stylistic and linguistic techniques that made me look again at the originals.

The commentaries are fascinating, because they reveal the processes by which translators arrive at their final version and provide an account of what they have learned through translating. Some translators take pains to explain their strategies, others confess to more intimate relations with a poet or a poem. It was very moving to learn how translating a particular poem had helped some people cope with bereavement or terminal illness, and testifies to the

Judges' comments

eternal power of literature to heal. There were a number of translations of poems about the Holocaust, written in many languages, some extremely powerful, and one of the winning entries, a translation from the Hungarian of a poem by István Baka, retells the painful story of Dido and Aeneas in a particularly memorable and utterly contemporary manner.

As with last year's entries, there were some very strong translations of classical poems, especially in the 18-and-under category. I am convinced that this reflects some excellent teaching of classical literature and a revival of interest in the ancient world more generally. Unfortunately, this cannot be said of many of the translations from languages such as French, German and Spanish. Some of the translators had made a valiant stab at a poem, but had failed due to their totally inadequate knowledge of grammar and syntax. Time and again we rejected poems full of mistranslations, often of quite simple sentences. This, sadly, appears to reflect the absence of much serious grammar study in the GCSE or A level syllabus, a point that many teachers have made to me. The choice of what to translate was also a problem for some candidates, and several people, especially in the 18-and-under and 14-and-under categories, chose poems that were either far too complex for them to undertake or, in contrast, were extremely simple exercise pieces. Some of the weakest translations in all categories were of rather banal poems that did not offer much possibility of creativity to the translator. This is especially true of much of Prévert, though perhaps I am biased here.

Formal considerations also varied a great deal. A number of translators tried their hand at rhymed verse, though unless you have experience of using rhyme this is often a strategy that leads nowhere except to contrived, forced lines and clichés. Happily, there were also some examples of very skillful use of rhyme and rhythmic patterns. The winning translation of a passage from Dante's *Inferno* deliberately avoided any form of rhyme and opted instead for a structure that, as the commentary states, 'paragraphed the text as required by the logic and by the English'.

What is so valuable about this competition is that it demonstrates every year not only how many people there are actively engaging in translation from many languages, but also how important poetry is in a society that sometimes seems cynical and overly materialistic. I am humbled by the talent of both poets and translators and, as in previous years, excited by the new poets I have discovered through the judging process.

Susan Bassnett



Judging *The Times* Stephen Spender Prize for the first time, I was struck not only by the evident enthusiasm for poetry from an impressive array of languages, but also the willingness of contestants to stretch the possibilities of English and find new ways of saying. Many contestants translated well-known poems; though translating a 'classic' presents difficulties of its own; not least of which is the rich shadow-life such a poem already has in English. Others made a point of quarrelling with existing translations, and hoped to communicate what made the poem tick in a fresh new way. Others again set out to reveal a more private passion, a relatively unknown contemporary poet, who was being fetched into English for the first time.

A facet of this competition which was difficult to gauge in advance was the commentary on the submitted translations. Quite a number of submissions failed to take full advantage of this opportunity, simply offering a biographical account of the poet in question. But at their best, these commentaries revealed a rich understanding of the mechanisms of the original poem as well as the thought processes which had led to certain lexical or technical decisions. I was, however, unprepared for the often moving biographical testimony, which showed just how important a particular poem had been at a pivotal moment in someone's life, sometimes accompanying them through many years as a kind of touchstone.

I also learned a good deal about how English accommodates certain voices most easily and struggles with others. Rhyme is a case in point. It was almost always possible to tell on reading an English poem in free verse whether the original had been rhymed or worked closely with rhythms. Of course it is not always necessary to rhyme a poem in English in the same way as it has been rhymed in the original. Indeed there are occasions when to follow the original would mean sabotaging the poem in English – a language in which it is far harder to rhyme unobtrusively. However simply abandoning any attempt at rhyme often means sabotaging the poem in a different way. The English felt broken, lacked the essential tension that had given the original its power. There are no ready answers, but I for one missed a more thoughtful use of para-rhyme, that staple of contemporary English poetry.

The judges agreed quickly on the 14-and-under entries; the 18-and-under category impressed with the confidence of the winning submissions. The boldness to be simple is something that experienced

translators often struggle with. The boldness to be radical, as in the wonderful haiku versions of Horace, is exceptional. Hardest was, perhaps inevitably, the Open competition. I was sorry that I could not persuade my fellow judges of the merits of Mike Mitchell's brilliantly sassy translation of Helmut Krausser's 'The Denotation of Babel', a real discovery for me, and regretted too that my own enthusiasm for a haunting version by Angus Turvill of the Japanese poet Nomura Kiwao's 'A Gentle Hinge' was not shared by my colleagues. However, the painstaking sifting and re-reading of the final round allowed translations of real stature to emerge, on which we had no difficulty in reaching agreement. These were poems that obeyed the first and perhaps the only binding rule of translation: that they work as poems in English. The first line of Gordon Wallace's Dante (my own personal favourite) resonates with me even now. But all of these prizewinners and commended entries have taken that essential step. Cut adrift from their original context, they have found a new and vital life, a new home.

Karen Leeder



The motives for translating can be many and various, and showcasing a language is one. This year Esperanto was touted as a language of neutrality in a period of international tension;

Ukrainian and Georgian signified cultures resurfacing following the break-up of the Soviet empire and Turkish the steady eastern extension of Europe; Tagalog represented the constellation of languages of South East Asia, a vast, rich and complex cultural region still little known in the West; an Afrikaans poem served as a reminder of a culture much more humanly attractive than memories of the apartheid system would suggest. There are other translations that are the products of the 9/11 syndrome. Triggered by acutely critical and distressing events, they include one fine and moving example in memory of a wife claimed by Alzheimer's disease. And then there are the products of the Housman effect – 'the poem makes my hair stand on end.'

Cultural trends can also be clearly discerned, such as signs of a rapidly emergent multicultural Britain. Alongside an ancient aboriginal language such as Welsh there are many others recently become native. Whereas many of these could be readily predicted, others – such as Romanian – could not. Over the coming decades this linguistic enrichment of British culture could result in a translation boom such as the USA has enjoyed since the Second World War. On the other hand, what is gained from this multilingualism may barely

outweigh the catastrophic consequences of the appalling decline of language teaching in the British education system. And there is one paradox worth pondering: natural bilingualism may be as much of a curse as a blessing for a translator. The linguistic and cultural inwardness with which a translator is thus privileged is offset by the danger of unconscious linguistic interference, of double exposure, of producing an English text subtly ghosted by its 'foreign' source. It is a problem I experience not infrequently in Wales, a country whose bilingualism is already almost two centuries old.

In general, the single greatest fault seemed to me to be an insensitivity to the language of form – to the way the complex structure of a poem constitutes its meaning. To apologise for failing to reproduce the rhyme is beside the point unless one realises what this may signify – namely a failure to realise the generative matrix of sound and rhythm that is a poem's core identity. A poem's vivid figurativeness may be a distraction here, giving the impression that to translate the tropes is enough to guarantee capture of the text.

That said, I continue to be astonished

at the number of translations that had the power to possess me. And, as always, several of my favourites failed to make the final cut. Among these were a sumptuously evocative version by Nicholas Slater of Rilke's great meditation on loss, 'Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes'; a free, yet sensitive, account by J. S. Tennant of the dismemberment of Orpheus from the *Metamorphoses*; and Jack Farchy's spirited, ingenious rendering of an enigmatic piece by Khlebnikov.

M. Wynn Thomas

Son de Cloche

Tout s'est éteint
Le vent passe en chantant
 Et les arbres frissonnent.
Les animaux sont morts
Il n'y a plus personne
 Regarde
Les étoiles ont cessé de briller
 La terre ne tourne pas
Une tête s'est inclinée
 Les cheveux balayant la nuit
Le dernier clocher resté debout
 Sonne minuit.

Pierre Reverdy

Sound of the Bell

All has faded away.
The wind passes, singing
 And the trees shiver.
The animals are dead.
Nobody remains.
 Look,
The stars have stopped shining!
 The Earth has stopped turning!
One head is bowed,
 Hair sweeps the night.
The last steeple standing
Tolls midnight.

*Translated from the French
by Josie Chubb*

Josie Chubb's commentary

I chose this poem as I recognised Pierre Reverdy as a distinguished surrealist poet and I thought it would be interesting to try to grasp the atmosphere that he is able to create with French in English. Also, I think that each sentence shows a distinct picture of the night, therefore I thought it would be a challenge to show the reader the same images in English as in the French.

I tried to translate the French as accurately as possible, but sometimes the words that were used stood out for all the wrong reasons and I had to find others with similar yet more fitting meanings. For example, 'clocher' is literally translated as 'bell tower', but I thought that this sounded

clumsy and did not fit in with the dark yet elegant sense of the poem, so I decided to use 'steeple' instead.

Another sentence I had difficulty translating was 'les cheveux balayant la nuit'. To me this gave a vivid picture of the wind crashing into a long haired, low headed woman, suddenly sending her hair flying across the black sky. I decided to translate 'balayant' as 'sweeps' yet I still do not think that this implants in the reader's head the image that I had imagined.

In some cases I have changed the tense. 'La terre ne tourne pas' should be written in English as 'the Earth does not turn'. But for the sake of poetry, I thought that

slight repetition would be the making of these two lines, which, in all other senses, are linked.

In this poem, Reverdy decides not to use any punctuation. In lines 6, 7 and 8 it seemed necessary to add punctuation, otherwise it is hard to understand how these lines are being said. I interpreted it as two quite shocked sentences, so this is why I have used exclamation marks at the end of lines 7 and 8.

Overall I think that I have captured the significance of the dead of midnight, keeping all the beauty in English that Reverdy evokes in French.

Winners of the 18-and-under category

Odes I.IX

Vides, ut alta stet nive candidum
Soracte, nec iam sustineant onus
silvae laborantes, geluque
flumina constiterint acuto.

Dissolve frigus ligna super foco
large reponens, atque benignius
deprome quadrimum Sabina,
O Thaliarche, merum diota.

Permitte divis cetera, qui simul
stravere ventos aequore fervido
deproeliantis, nec cupressi
nec veteres agitantur orni.

Quid sit futurum cras, fuge quaerere et,
quem fors dierum cumque dabit, lucro
appone, nec dulces amores
sperne puer neque tu choreas,

donec virenti canities abest
morosa. Nunc et campus et areae
lenesque sub noctem susurri
composita repetantur hora,

nunc et latentis proditor intimo
gratus puellae risus ab angulo
pignusque dereptum lacertis
aut digito male pertinaci.

Horace

Odes I.IX

Look at how it stands
Gleaming white with deep snowfall,
Mount Soracte there;

And the creaking woods
Groaning under all the weight;
Rivers sharp with ice.

Drive away the cold,
Piling logs upon the fire
With a lavish hand:

Thaliarchus, pour
Generously from the jar
My four-year-old wine.

Leave the gods the rest,
Even when the winds make war
On the seething sea,

They will calm them down;
Cypress and old mountain ash
Will no more be stirred.

Ask the future not
How many days you have left:
Count them all as gain.

While you're green, young, free
From fretful greyness, don't shun
Sweet love and dancing.

Now in parks and squares,
Softly whispered in the night,
Secret rendez-vous:

Look for them again –
Pleasing laughs from a secret
Corner that betray

The girl hiding there;
A token snatched from her arm
Or teasing finger.

*Translated from the Latin
by Jenny Harris*

Jenny Harris's commentary

Staring out of my window at the falling snow, wondering what to translate, my mind was drawn to this Horatian ode. At the time I studied it, it frustrated me; I felt Horace leapt from topic to topic too quickly, with no conclusion at the end to link his thoughts together. Now, however, I prefer to think of it more like a painting: this is not a poem to be read once through from start to finish and then left behind; we must rather enjoy the evocative images one by one and then go back and contemplate them all together, from snow-covered Mount Soracte to

the laughing girl at the end. We can reflect ourselves on how they are pinned together by the Epicurean message, 'quid sit futurum cras, fuge quaerere', whose central position in the structure reflects its importance to the ode.

Haiku may seem an odd choice to translate a Latin poem into English, but the Greek Alcaic stanzas Horace chose were not an entirely natural choice for Latin. It is appropriate to the subject matter of nature and changing seasons, and it has allowed me to retain more of Horace's word order in terms of emphases on beginnings and ends

of lines and enjambement, which I feel are important to the flow of the poetry.

I have been able to devote whole lines to Latin words whose meanings could not be easily summed up, like 'large' or 'repetantur'. While trying to be very faithful to the sense of the original, I have replaced the specifically Roman 'campus' with the modern equivalent 'parks' to make the meaning clearer to the non-classical reader. I found 'secret rendez-vous' a more interesting translation of 'composita...hora' than a literal rendering, implying, as Horace does, the excitement of illicit love affairs.

The Wanderer (lines 64–115)

For þon ne mæg weorþan wis wer ær he age
wintra dæl in woruldrice. Wita sceal geþyldig
ne sceal no to hatheort ne to hrædwyrde
ne to wac wiga ne to wanhydig
ne to forht ne to fægen ne to feohgifre
ne næfre gielpes to georn ær he geare cunne.
Beorn sceal gebidan þonne he beot spriced
oþ þæt collenferð cunne gearwe
hwider hreþra gehygd hweorfan wille.
Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið
þonne eall þisse worulde wela weste stondeð
swa nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard
winde biwaune weallas stondap
hrime bihrorene hryðge þa ederas.
Woriað þa winsalo waldend licgað
dreame bidrorene duguþ eal gecrong
wlonc bi wealle. Sume wig fornong
ferede in forðwege sumne fugel oþbær
ofer heanne holm sumne se hara wulf
deaðe gedælde sumne dreorighleor
in eorðscræfe eorl gehydde.
Yþde swa þisne eardgeard ælda Scyppend
oþ þæt burgwara breahntma lease
eald enta geweorc idlu stodon.
Se þonne þisne wealsteal wise geþohte
ond þis deorce lif deope geondþenceð
frod in ferðe feor oft gemon
wælslehta worn ond þas word acwið:
Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago?
Hwær cwom maþþungyfa?
Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon seledreamas?
Eala beorht bune eala byrnwiga
eala þeodnes þrym. Hu seo þrag gewat
genap under nihthelm swa heo no wære.
Stondeð nu on laste leofre duguþe
weal wundrum heah wyrmlicum fah.
Eorlas fornoman asca þryþe
wæpen wælgifru wyrd seo mære
ond þas stanhleoþu stormas cnyssað
hrið hreosende hrusan bindeð
wintres woma þonne won cymed
nipeð nihtscua norþan onsended
hreo hæglfare hæleþum on andan.
Eall is earfoðlic eorþan rice
onwendeð wyrda gesceaft weoruld under heofonum.
Her bið feoh læne her bið freond læne
her bið mon læne her bið mæg læne.
Eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð.
Swa cwæð snottor on mode gesæt him sundor æt rune.
Til biþ se þe his treowe gehealdeþ ne sceal næfre his torn to rycene
beorn of his breostum acyþan nemþe he ær þa bote cunne
eorl mid elne gefremman. Wel bið þam þe him are seceð
frofro to Fæder on heofonum þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð.

The Wanderer (an extract)

No man in the world may call himself wise
Before he has lived out his share
Of winters on earth. A wise man must be
Not too hasty, but patient and fair.
Nor too passionate he, nor too feeble in war,
Nor too free, nor too greedy with gold,
Nor too eager to boast before he well knows
His worth, and how much he may hold.
A man who is set upon swearing an oath
Should wait until he knows himself well,
And knows the way that his will shall be turned
In times that are troubled and fell.
Wise men must know what this world will be like
When its wealth is all wasted and bare.
Even now, many places on this middle-earth
Stand forlorn in the frosty-cold air.
The ruins of buildings, the walls in the wind,
The cellars for wine that now fall,
The lord and his men, lacking joy in this life,
Lying dead by the wall.
Some were borne from this world by battle or bird,
And one the grey wolf bore away,
And one, a brave man, in a barrow was laid,
Washed with tears, and hidden from day.
Even so, long ago, the Creator of man
Rained ruin down onto this earth
So the work of great beings stood barren and bare
With no sound of men's songs nor their mirth.
The man who has strayed in deep thought, and has known
The ills that Creation has wrought –
The long-ago deaths, the darkness of life –
Might speak thus, out of his thought:
Where is the horse now? Where the brave man?
Where are the treasures that fall?
Where are the seats for the feasting?
And where are the joys of the hall?
Alas, the bright cup. Alas, the brave man.
Alas for the princes so keen:
That time is now passed under shadow of night
As though it had never been.
So all that remains is the worm-graven wall
As a monument wondrous high
To the heroes who, thanks to the hunger of fate
and the spear, have been lost, left to die.
The storms are now striking these wintry stones,
The tempest is clenching its vice.
The night-shades are coming, the north wind is sending
'Gainst men, fierce hail, biting ice.
All the realms of the earth under heaven above
Are with sorrow unstopably wrought,
And all fortune and friends and mankind and all kin
Pass away, as this world comes to nought.
Thus spoke the wise man as in secret he sat,
All wrapped in his riddles alone.
O blessed the man who can keep his own faith
and can keep his heart's troubles unknown,
Unless he can cure them by will from within.
And happy the man who looks round
For comfort and grace from our Father above,
For there all our safety is found.

The Wanderer: Clare Bristow's commentary

Old English is not completely foreign to a Modern English translator, as the most basic vocabulary is largely unchanged. However, the more I learn, the more I realise how much of the vocabulary has been lost. There are dozens of synonyms for 'mind' or 'heart', for instance, that it is hard to do justice to. Moreover, the poetry has a strict, concise structure that suits a highly inflected language but is impossible to render completely into Modern English,

although devices such as alliteration and repetition can still be used.

Above all, Old English poetry was made to be spoken. My aim is to make these translations memorable for a reciter today. Therefore I have not changed the arrangement of the subject matter, but given structure and patterning to a straightforward translation. In 'The Wanderer' this takes the form of end-rhyme and, as in the original, four 'beats' in each line. I have tried not to

use a conspicuously Latinate word where a Germanic synonym is available, so as not to obscure its character and origin.

The 'Wife's Lament' and 'The Wanderer' are powerful elegies. I like how much they leave to the imagination – about the speaker's identity, for example. They are worth translating, because they tell us much about Anglo-Saxon culture but also address universal subjects like grief and bad weather.

Rede vom Gedicht

Das Gedicht ist nicht der Ort, wo die Schönheit gepflegt wird.

Hier ist die Rede vom Salz, das brennt in den Wunden.
Hier ist die Rede vom Tod, von vergifteten Sprachen.
Von Vaterländern, die eisernen Schuhen gleichen.
Das Gedicht ist nicht der Ort, wo die Wahrheit verziert wird.

Hier ist die Rede vom Blut, das fließt aus den Wunden.
Vom Elend, vom Elend, vom Elend des Traums.
Von Verwüstung und Auswurf, von klapprigen Utopien.
Das Gedicht ist nicht der Ort, wo der Schmerz verheilt wird.

Hier ist die Rede von Zorn und Täuschung und Hunger
(die Stadien der Sättigung werden hier nicht besungen).
Hier ist die Rede von Fressen, Gefressenwerden
von Mühsal und Zweifel, hier ist die Chronik der Leiden.
Das Gedicht ist nicht der Ort, wo das Sterben begütigt
wo der Hunger gestillt, wo die Hoffnung verklärt wird.

Das Gedicht ist der Ort der zu Tode verwundeten Wahrheit.
*Flügel! Flügel! Der Engel stürzt, die Federn
fliegen einzeln und blutig im Sturm der Geschichte!*

Das Gedicht ist nicht der Ort, wo der Engel geschont wird.

Christoph Meckel

A Discussion of the Poem

The poem is not a space where beauty lives.

You're here to discuss salt searing in an open wound.
You're here to discuss death and blackened tongues.
The fatherland, which makes you think of iron boots.
The poem is not a space where truth is prettified.

You're here to discuss blood spouting from wounds.
The anguish, the anguish, the anguish of dreaming.
Cast-offs, atrocities, broken-down utopias.
The poem is not a space where hurt is softened.

You're here to discuss the angry, the duped, the hungry
(no-one is celebrating the stages of satiation).
You're here to discuss devouring, being devoured,
destitution and self-doubt, the annals of suffering.
The poem is not a space where the dying are consoled,
where hunger is satisfied, where hope is transfigured.

The poem is the space of truth maimed to the point of death.
*His wings! His wings! The angel tumbles, his feathers
scatter wildly, blood-soaked in the storm of history!*

The poem is not a place where the angel lives.

*Translated from the German
by Daniel Hitchens*

Daniel Hitchens' commentary

This poem is marked out by its bleakness, and I wanted to replicate that in my translation. With the second, third and fourth stanzas, the sentence structure is simple, but I tried to find the most effective vocabulary. Only occasionally did this involve changing the meaning; but, for example, 'poisoned tongues' doesn't sound quite right in English, and nor does 'salt, that burns in wounds'.

The major decision was how to translate the repeated 'Hier ist die Rede von...', which again loses its power in a literal translation. I opted for the accusatory 'you': Meckel is

challenging his reader's preconceptions.

At times Meckel works very closely with sound, so I tried to keep up: the 's' and 'ung' sounds in the line about 'Sättigung' are clearly meant to be mimetic of something overstuffed, so I used the same effect with the 'a' and 's' sounds. Unfortunately, I couldn't find an English equivalent for the brilliant shift from 'Schönheit' to 'geschont'; the closest I could manage was the switch from 'space' to 'place' and the slight change in the meaning of 'lives'.

Elsewhere, the difference between German and English presented opportu-

nities: the single word 'Schmerz' carries a whole number of meanings, of which 'pain' is only the most obvious. I wanted a sense of long-lasting injury, because this is a poem about 'die Geschichte' and our relationship to it.

I chose this poem because it is powerful, but also because there is a nagging contradiction: if poetry has to be purged of beauty, then why is there something so magnificent about the final image? Meckel's real target is over-simplification: I hope to have retained some of the layers of meaning.

I Papaveri

Questo è un anno di papaveri, la nostra
terra ne traboccava poi che vi tornai
fra maggio e giugno, e m'inebriai
d'un vino così dolce così fosco.

Dal gelso nuvoloso al grano all'erba
maturità era tutto, in un calore
conveniente, in un lento sopore
diffuso dentro l'universo verde.

A metà della vita ora vedevo
figli cresciuti allontanarsi soli
e perdersi oltre il carcere di voli
che la rondine stringe nello spento

bagliore d'una sera di tempesta,
e umanamente il dolore cedeva
alla luce che in casa s'accendeva
d'un'altra cena in un'aria più fresca

per grandine sfogatasi lontano.

Attilio Bertolucci

Poppies

This is a year of poppies. When, between May and June,
I came back home again, our fields
brimmed with their wine, so sweet, so dark,
it made me drunk.

From cloud-banks of mulberry
to the grass and the grain, ripeness was all,
spreading in gentle heat and dawdling sleepiness
through this world of green.

Halfway through my life I saw my sons,
grown men, escaping out of sight,
freed from whatever binds
the swallow to its flight

across a stormy evening's fading glow.
And, as is human, my sorrow eased
when the house lit up again,
for another supper, the air cooled

by a far-off flurry of hail.

*Translated from the Italian
by Allen Prowle*

Allen Prowle's commentary

Attilio Bertolucci's poetry has many of the qualities I admire in that of Edward Thomas, several of whose poems he translated into Italian. Both poets shunned the rhetorical, bardic traditions, so often, in both countries, burdened with the mission and zeal of nationhood. Both were vulnerably sensitive human beings. Their poetry is a poetry of the private place, a usually elusive haven from personal distress and national upheaval; they crafted a language, not literary, but spoken, and a poetic line which carried the cadences of speech. When I worked on my translation of 'Poppies' I kept listening for Thomas's voice, for Thomas's version, if you like. I

began to feel like a go-between, for whom the past is two foreign countries, but where they did not do things too differently from each other.

Even within the tight space of its seventeen lines, 'Poppies' has three distinct movements: it begins in the lushness and languor of summer in the Emilian countryside to which the poet has returned; then the painful memory intrudes of the departure of his sons and the recognition of his inability to hold together what he most loved; finally, there is the consolation of reunion and the comforting ritual of conviviality. Stress is inescapably the ruling

principle of English verse, but I have avoided fixed metrical patterns, imposing on the line the accents of speech in order to be as faithful as possible to the states of mind and feeling conveyed in the original. At the end, before that last line which refuses to belong to the neatness of the preceding quatrains, I have 'cooled' the air rather than 'refreshed' or 'freshened' it, as it seemed more in keeping with the tenuousness of things, with, as Bertolucci and Thomas both knew, their inveterate changeability.

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I limoni

Ascoltami, i poeti laureati
si muovono soltanto fra le piante
dai nomi poco usati: bossi ligustri o acanti.
Io, per me, amo le strade che riescono agli erbosi
fossi dove in pozzanghere
mezzo seccate agguantano i ragazzi
qualche sparuta anguilla:
le viuzze che seguono i ciglioni,
discendono tra i ciuffi delle canne
e mettono negli orti, tra gli alberi dei limoni.

Meglio se le gazzarre degli uccelli
si spengono inghiottite dall'azzurro:
più chiaro si ascolta il susurro
dei rami amici nell'aria che quasi non si muove,
e i sensi di quest'odore
che non sa staccarsi da terra
e piove in petto una dolcezza inquieta.
Qui delle divertite passioni
per miracolo tace la guerra,
qui tocca anche a noi poveri la nostra parte di ricchezza
ed è l'odore dei limoni.

Vedi, in questi silenzi in cui le cose
s'abbandonano e sembrano vicine
a tradire il loro ultimo segreto,
talora ci si aspetta
di scoprire uno sbaglio di Natura,
il punto morto del mondo, l'anello che non tiene,
il filo da disbrogliare che finalmente ci metta
nel mezzo di una verità.
Lo sguardo fruga d'intorno,
la mente indaga accorda disunisce
nel profumo che dilaga
quando il giorno più languisce.
Sono i silenzi in cui si vede
in ogni ombra umana che si allontana
qualche disturbata Divinità.

Ma l'illusione manca e ci riporta il tempo
nelle città rumorose dove l'azzurro si mostra
soltanto a pezzi, in alto, tra le cimase.
La pioggia stanca la terra, di poi; s'affolta
il tedio dell'inverno sulle case,
la luce si fa avara - amara l'anima.
Quando un giorno da un malchiuso portone
tra gli alberi di una corte
ci si mostrano i gialli dei limoni;
e il gelo del cuore si sfa,
e in petto ci scrosciano
le loro canzoni
le trombe d'oro della solarità.

Eugenio Montale

Lemons

Listen to me. Proper poets only like to stroll
amid the kinds of plants whose names are rare:
acanthus, privet, box. But I love roads
which lead to grassy ditches where,
from half-dry puddles, boys scoop up
a few emaciated eels:
green lanes which run along the ditches' edge
and drop between the tufts of giant reeds
down to the orchards, to the lemon trees.

It's better that the blue should swallow up
and hush the chatter of the birds.
We hear more clearly than the whispering
of friendly branches in the scarcely moving air
and catch a scent we cannot disassociate
from earth: a restless sweetness raining on the heart.
The place performs a miracle of peace
on troubled and distracted minds;
poor we may be, but here we gain
our share of riches, and that is
the smell of lemons.

These are the silences, you see, in which
things give themselves away, seem ready
to betray their final secret.
We may be about to find a flaw of Nature.
We are at the dead point of the world,
the link that will not hold,
the disentangling thread that finally
will take us to the heart of something true.
The eyes search everywhere,
the brain requires an answer... then it yields, disintegrates:
effect of perfume overflowing most
when day most languishes.
These are the silences in which
we glimpse in every fleeting human ghost
a certain disarranged Divinity.

But the illusion fails. Time drags us back
to noisy cities where we see the blue
in patches only, up between the roofs.
The rain is wearying the earth. Now winter's tedium
weighs on the houses, light turns miserly,
the spirit bitter.

Then, one day,
glimpsed through a half-shut gate,
there in the courtyard trees
the yellows of the lemons are on show.
The chill which gripped our hearts relents
as sunlight's golden trumpets
pour their songs into our souls.

*Translated from the Italian
by John Richmond*

John Richmond's commentary

This wonderful early poem by Montale catches, first, the intensity of Montale's feeling for the area of the Cinque Terre, north of La Spezia, where year after year, as a child and a young man, he spent the long summer holidays with his family. The local boys scrabbling for eels; the sense of lostness within great heat; the outpouring of admiration and love for the simple but luxurious gift of the scent of lemons: all this works marvellously as a straightforward tribute to a place. But Montale was already moving into modernism, and the central passage of the poem goes beyond description into a fantasy about underlying

truths beneath the appearance of our sense-bound existence. The end of the poem returns reassuringly to the known; amid a chill, dreary urban winter, lemon trees, seen by chance, gloriously revive the poet's spirits and his faith in life.

Montale's verse is free-ish, but with some discipline about line length, and bound together by plentiful though irregular use of rhyme. My translation maintains something of his freedom, though I have dropped into the iambic more persistently than does the original. On the other hand, my rhymes are more occasional than those in the original. With regard to form, I have

tried to follow Montale's example; while anything is possible, not anything goes.

The hardest lines to translate were several in the midst of the poem, where it takes some head-scratching to work out what Montale might mean. In particular, I was determined not to leave the three verbs 'indaga accorda disunisce' as perplexing in the translation as they are in the original! Whether the clearing away of ambiguity I have attempted has identified Montale's intention without sacrificing the mystery and the power of the poem at that point is for others to say.

Aeneas és Dido
‘Így hát a nagy ember elhagyta Karthágót...’
(Jozsif Brodskij: Dido és Aeneas)

1. Dido, királynôm, nem látlak soha.
A hullámok meanderei kéken
futnak, s mint Ariadne fonala,
vezetnek új hazába, hol a népem

tán Minotaurusszá változik bús
nászunk után – miatt? – hisz labirintus
bejáratául tárult szép öled,
s mi összbogozott, a gyűlölet

fonalaként fog visszagombolyodni
néped kezébe népemnek kezéből.
Találkozom, hát véled újra – végül

együtt fogunk mi árnyakként bolyongni;
s a vér-iszamos csatatereken
is vágytól siklós öled keresem.
2. Fanyar a búcsú? Fanyarabb a bor
s a borszín tenger, melybe rózsaujját
a hajnal mártja. Vérünk bárha forr,
jó tudni: fenn, Olimpuszon mi újság;

különben fuccs a bornak és a kéjnek,
és Gorgó-fôt növesztenek az éjek,
ránk ég a virradat, mint Nessus-ing.
Irigyebbek a mi isteneink,

Dido, de késô lenne már cserélni.
Megnyugtató mégiscsak, hogy az égből
megüzenik gyakran, hogy mitévô

legyek, – nem kell a döntéstől se félni.
Máglyára lépsz, ha elhagylak? Na és?!
Nem én akartam – égi rendelés.
3. Mellettem alszik már Lavinia;
keményebb húsú, ifjabb, mint te voltál;
de az a tűz, amely a testből oltárt
varázsol, benne nem lángolt soha.

Mindegy – csak szüljön, kéj nélkül foganva
teljen meg évről évre, mint a kamra!
Hideg szeműek s idegen, latin
beszédűek lesznek a fiaim.

Új – még kicsiny – hazámat isten óvja!
Miért fáj jobban Karthágó, mint Trója?
S bár oldalamról annyian kidőltek,

miért csak azt az egyet — hervatag
szépasszonyt: téged hívlak napra nap?
Dido, királynôm, gyűlölöm e földet.

István Baka

Aeneas and Dido
‘So the great man left Carthage...’
(Joseph Brodsky: ‘Dido and Aeneas’)

1. I never see you now, Dido, my queen.
The blue meanders of the wavy seas
will roll like thread from Ariadne’s skein
and lead me to a land where refugees

may change into a Minotaur, following
our melancholy union (or owing
to it?). Your parting thighs opened the doors
toward that lustful labyrinth of yours.

Our bond, a thread of hate, will unravel,
and coil from our hands to your people’s hands.
So we shall meet again and as we travel,

roaming shadows, across war-tainted lands,
on every site where blood and wetness lies
I’ll seek your hot, desire-wetted thighs.
2. A harsh farewell? The wine is harsher still,
and the wine-hued sea where rosy dawn dips
her fingers. Never mind our love, the thrill,
I need fresh Olympian news and tips

or else all wine and lust will fall to dirt,
sunrise will roast us like a Nessus shirt
and night will threaten with a Gorgon-head.
Our gods are envious, don’t be misled

my Dido. First, it’s too late for a change,
second, it’s comfort that Heaven sends word
telling me what I have to do, and third,

when facing judgment you should never cringe.
You choose the stake if I move off? So what?
It’s not my wish. The gods have hatched the plot.
3. Our bed. Lavinia slumbers. Not a stir.
She’s younger, firmer-fleshed than you could claim,
yes, but flames that turn the human frame
into an altar, have never burnt in her.

Conceiving and bearing without any joy,
she fills up like a larder every year.
My sons will be cold eyed, puzzling to hear,
all Latin speakers and strangers to Troy.

God save my new, still unimportant place.
Why do I miss my Troy much less than Carthage?
Although I’ve lost most of my valiant band,

why you alone enjoy the moot advantage
of me still yearning after your fading grace?
Dido, my gracious queen, I hate this land.

*Translated from the Hungarian
by Peter Zollman*

Peter Zollman’s commentary

István Baka was 47 years old when he died after a long, devastating illness in 1995. I feel very close to him and to his poems.

In this translation I tried to recreate the mix of Baka’s somewhat heightened diction and his use of colloquial expressions like ‘thrill’, ‘Olympian news and tips’, ‘so what?’, ‘the gods have hatched the plot’.

There is a wonderful, deep-toned two-letter word, ‘öl’, in Hungarian. It means ‘lap’ but it is closer to the crotch and further away from the knees. It also describes the vagina in its full erotic sense without even the slightest vulgar or scientific resonance. In this poem I translated it twice as ‘thighs’ (in the context of the surrounding words).

Elsewhere I used different expressions.

Baka, like many Hungarian poets, remained committed to formal poetry through most of his life and I believe that presenting these three sonnets of uncompromisingly strict form and exuberant imagery the translator’s duty is to pass on this rich contrast to the English reader.

Inferno, Canto V
(lines 28–87)

Io venni in loco d'ogni luce muto,
che mugghia, come fa mar per tempesta,
se da contrari venti è combattuto.

La bufera infernal, che mai non resta,
mena gli spirti con la sua rapina;
voltando e percotendo li molesta.

Quando giungon davanti alla ruina,
quivi le strida, il compianto e il lamento;
bestemmian quivi la virtù divina.

Intesi, che a così fatto tormento
enno dannati i peccator carnali,
che la ragion sommettono al talento.

E come gli stornei ne portan l'ali,
nel freddo tempo, a schiera larga e piena:
così quel fiato gli spirti mali;

di qua, di là, di giù, di su gli mena.
Nulla speranza gli conforta mai,
non che di posa, ma di minor pena.

E come i gru van cantando lor lai,
facendo in aer di sè lunga riga;
così vid' io venir, traendo guai,

ombre portate dalla detta briga;
per ch'io dissi: 'Maestro, chi son quelle
genti, che l'aura nera sì gastiga?'

'La prima di color, di cui novelle
tu vuoi saper,' mi disse quegli allotta,
'fu imperatrice di molte favelle.

A vizio di lussuria fu sì rotta,
che libito fe'licito in sua legge
per torre il biasmo, in che era condotta.

Ell'è Semiramis, di cui si legge,
che succedette a Nino, e fu sua sposa;
tenne la terra, che il Soldan corregge.

L'altra è colei, che s'ancise amorosa,
e ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo;
poi è Cleopatras lussuriosa.

Elena vedi, per cui tanto reo
tempo si volse; e vedi il grande Achille,
che con amore al fine combatteo;

vedi Paris, Tristano'; e più di mille
ombre mostrommi, e nominommi a dito,
ch'amor di nostra vita dipartille.

The Punishment of the Carnal Sinners
(from Inferno, Canto V)

The place I'd reached has never heard of light.
There howling reigns – a sound like storms at sea
when driving winds from different quarters clash –
for there an unremitting, hellish storm
hurls spirits rudely torn from earthly life
tumbling and buffeted in its harrying wake.
Each time these spirits face their ruin again
they scream and sob and, giving vent to grief,
blaspheme against our Lord's authority.
It came to me: this torment is the lot
of those who're damned for carnal sins in life,
whose reason founders as their senses feed.

As starlings when cold winds once catch their wings
are tossed about in huge and tight-packed flocks
so these unhappy ghosts are hounded too
hither and yon, now up now plunging down,
no hope to bring them comfort, not of rest
nor even diminution of their pain.

And then as cranes, migrating, *kirrh* and *kroobk*
to help them keep in touch in their long lines,
dark shades loomed into view, their cries of woe
brought to me also by the spiteful winds,
so prompting me to say: *Master, who
are they, so sadly battered by these lowering gales?*

The first whose story you now wish to hear
replied the man assigned to be my guide
was empress over many tribes and tongues
but so far prey to sensuality
that she proclaimed lust lawful in decrees
to exculpate herself on charge of sin.
She's Semiramis, and one reads that she
reigned after Ninus, having been his wife,
in those ungodly lands the Sultan rules.

Next Dido, love-beguiled, who killed herself
and so betrayed the ashes of her spouse;
there, lust-enraptured, Cleopatra comes.
That's Helen, cause of long-protracted wars,
long years of grief; god-like Achilles too
betrayed in final combat, seeking love.
There's Paris, Tristan... and a thousand shades
he pointed out, and named each one by name,
who'd lost their lives for love of carnal sin.

Inferno, Canto V
(lines 28–87)

Poscia ch'io ebbi il mio dottore udito
nomar le donne antiche e i cavalieri,
pietà mi giunse, e fui quasi smarrito.

Io cominciai: 'Poeta, volentieri
parlerei a que' duo, che insieme vanno,
e paion sì al vento esser leggieri.'

Ed egli a me: 'Vedrai, quando saranno
più presso a noi; e tu allor li prega
per quell' amor che i mena; e quei verranno.'

Si tosto come il vento a noi li piega,
mossi la voce: 'O anime affannate,
venite a noi parlar, s'altri noi niega.'

Quali colombe, dal disio chiamate,
con l'ali alzate e ferme al dolce nido
vengon per l'aer dal voler portate:

cotali uscir della schiera ov'è Dido
a noi venendo per l'aer maligno,
sì forte fu l'affettuoso grido.

Dante Alighieri

The Punishment of the Carnal Sinners
(from *Inferno*, Canto V)

I'd held myself in check to hear my guide
name these high lords and ladies now long dead
but then, bewildered, gave my pity rein
and so spoke up: *Oh, Laureate, I long to speak
with those two there, so close they might be one,
who seem to float so lightly on the wind.*
And he replied: *Your chance will come when they
approach us here; invite them in the name
of Love, for that's what drives them, and they'll come.*
The wind had barely time to bring them near
when I was calling: *Breathless spirits, come
and speak with us if that be not forbidden.*

As homing pigeons, glad to glide to roost
and well-loved nest, on steady outspread wings
may bend their soaring skills to beat strong gales,
so they now quit the troop that Dido leads
and drifted down despite malicious gusts,
drawn by the force of my imploring cry.

*Translated from the Italian
by Gordon Wallace*

Gordon Wallace's commentary

My starting point in trying to achieve yet one more translation from *Inferno* was to bring myself more closely to grips with what Dante was saying and to gain a better understanding of the spirit of his age. My second consideration was to find a continuous passage of no more than 60 lines which was self-contained and self-explanatory. Without too much difficulty I could have made several selections of purple passages but felt that to be fair to the original I should not pick and choose only from juicy bits.

I decided in the end to attempt a passage on the carnal sinners. This immediately precedes the meeting with Paolo and Francesca. *Inferno* is not an epic but there are in this passage three extended similes of near heroic proportions. Dante's starlings (lines 40–45), short-winged fluttering birds, provide a fine metaphor for those who allow the winds of their lusts to blow them hither and yon without much attempt on their part to take control of their lives. Stronger, steadier, long-winged cranes (lines 46–51) make a braver attempt to

follow a straight path but are none the less battered by the gales of lust. Paolo and Francesca (lines 74–87), having surrendered completely to their earthly desires, simply soar on their passions wherever the gales carry them until, like homing pigeons, they are summoned to account by Dante under the guidance of his mentor Virgil.

I have deliberately eschewed any attempt at terza rima or other rhyme, and have paragraphed the text as required by the logic and by the English rather than replicating the three-line stanzas of the Italian.

About the Stephen Spender Memorial Trust

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 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 2007 by Arts Council England, 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 Rutgers 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 February 2009 to coincide with his centenary, 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, and 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.

Contacting the Trust

For further information about the Stephen Spender Memorial Trust and its activities, please contact the Director of the Trust:

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The Stephen Spender Memorial Trust

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