IN OTHER WORDS

SUMMER 2013 / No. 41

The Norwich-Jakarta Relay

Shakespeare in Translation

Is Translation Theory of Any Practical Use?

A Translator on Parnassus
Published by the British Centre for Literary Translation with the support of the Translators Association

The British Centre for Literary Translation (BCLT) is Britain’s leading centre for the development, promotion and support of literary translation and contemporary writing from around the world. It is part of the School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia and a National Portfolio Organisation of Arts Council England. BCLT aims to promote translation and translated literature, encourage the production of translated literature, support professional literary translators at all stages of their career, share models of best practice, and generate and encourage academic debate. Regular activities include the annual Sebald Lecture (named after the Centre’s founder, W.G. “Max” Sebald), an internationally recognised Summer School, co-organising the Literary Translation Centre at the London Book Fair and co-sponsorship of the John Dryden Translation Prize. BCLT also publishes New Books in German and the anthology of work by new translators, First Lines.

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In Other Words The Journal for Literary Translators
Summer 2013 Issue 41

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In Other Words – The Journal for Literary Translators
Editor: Daniel Hahn Editorial Board: Katharina Bielenberg, Ollie Brock, B.J. Epstein, Kate Griffin, Cecilia Rossi, Samantha Schnee, Shaun Whiteside (Translators Association)
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I’m sure some will disagree with my assessment, but it does feel to me as though things have changed significantly for the literary translation profession in the last few years, at least for those of us in the UK, and changed mostly for the better. Among the several and varied reasons for this – or, perhaps, the symptoms of this? – are the establishment of a flourishing Literary Translation Centre at the London Book Fair and the International Translation Day events held on or around September 30th. As I write this, we’ve just vacated our home at the Book Fair for the fourth year, and we meet next week to programme our fourth ITD. Among their many benefits, both of these are places where translators don’t just meet and talk to one another, but are integrally part of the wider publishing world, where translators and publishers are part of the same conversation. When ITD is at its best, it isn’t just two hundred translators gathered in a room picking at the problems; it’s two hundred people who are translators and also editors and publicists and festival directors and agents and funders, figuring out ways to solve them. I haven’t been around this profession long compared to most IOW readers, so I’m hesitant to generalize about “the way things used to be” in relations between translators and publishers, but I get the sense that only a decade or so ago there could sometimes be at the very least a suspicion, if not occasionally outright antagonism. That is not, it feels to me, the prevailing mood nowadays. For the most part, I’m pretty sure we all want the same things, and working together we stand a better chance of getting them.

Last year the Translators Association hosted an “industry day”, where publishers spoke to an audience of translators about their work, how they make their decisions, about their budgets and cash-flow and margins, about how they see the industry today. It was modelled on a day we had run for the new translators in our mentorship programme, but it turned out that even veteran translators felt they had a lot to learn. The day was heavily oversubscribed, and I hope we’ll be able to repeat it. After years spent complaining that publishers don’t understand us, and don’t appreciate what we do, it was clear that, frankly, most of us didn’t really understand what it is that they do, either. We should. In that spirit, I’ve commissioned for this issue a series of seven short pieces from people who work in the chain of jobs that leads to a translation getting from an author to a reader (only excepting the translator her-/himself, from whom we hear often enough). So there are words from an agent, a commissioning editor, a copy-editor, a sales
manager, a publicist, the literary editor of a newspaper and a bookseller. In each case I’ve asked them to do two brief things – to describe what their job entails, and to consider how this job changes when they are dealing with a work in translation, if it does change at all.

(There’s one final participant in that chain, of course, whom we haven’t forgotten. What, after all, is the job of the reader of a translation? That is perhaps the biggest question of all. For the answer to that existentially significant question, you’ll have to wait for the appropriately-numbered issue 42. I’ve asked one of my own favourite writers and readers, the novelist Ali Smith, to tackle that one for us, and it will be worth the wait.)

As usual, the varying work that translators themselves do occupies IOW’s “Translators at Work” section, whether it’s participating as “translator in residence” at Poetry Parnassus, the crazily ambitious festival that brought the world’s poetry to London last summer; or travelling from Amsterdam to Norwich to Jakarta for an experiment in relay translation. We all know that literary translators often do other kinds of translation, too, so we have Lulu Norman considering the particular challenges faced when attempting the translation of cookery books; and the remarkable Patricia Crampton recalls her very first job, in 1947, which saw her bringing her fresh-out-of-university language skills to a job translating at the Nuremberg trials. Canan Marasligil is one of this year’s translators in residence at the Free Word Centre, a role that challenges and expands ideas about what it is that a literary translator does – she describes her work on page XX. We have the second part of Paul Michaels’s introduction to his work as a British Sign Language interpreter, following on from his piece in issue 40. Our regular “Close Reading” slot looks at the translation by Tony Bianchi of a short passage of writing in Welsh. And among all the practising translators, we have one lapsed translator, too, in the pseudonymous person of Boris Akunin, bestselling crime writer and one-time literary translator from Japanese to Russian; the full text of his 2013 Sebald Lecture, which was delivered earlier this year, begins on page XX.

The “Perspectives” section is the usual jumble of various and interesting things. The three regular slots are occupied by a “Publisher Focus” profiling the work of Pushkin Press; following the season of translation events at last year’s Edinburgh International Book Festival, which we reported on in the last issue, “The IOW Interview” meets the festival’s director, Nick Barley; and this issue’s “A View from…” piece takes us to Ireland to see how literary translators are faring there.

We began this year’s London Book Fair with what we called, rather grandly, a UK-US “summit”, born out of a feeling that while Anglophone translators from around the world are increasingly working in the same market, we haven’t been
very good at communicating with one another. So a group of six of “us” and six of “them” got together for an afternoon, to learn about the situation in each other’s country, to exchange ideas about how to solve problems, to discuss how we might collaborate better in future. There will be more news as all this develops, but for now, Susan Bernofsky shares her first observations from that first meeting on p.XX, considering the differences between the working conditions on opposite sides of the Atlantic.

It sometimes feels as though Anglophone novelists who understand and appreciate translation are in rather short supply (for honourable exceptions, see especially the articles in recent issues by Naomi Alderman and Meg Rosoff) – and we’ll be looking at that in issue 42, too; for this issue I’m delighted to have been allowed to reprint a piece by Hilary Mantel, in which she considers, and appreciates, the work of Ine Willems, the author of her Dutch translations.

UEA has just hosted a conference on translation from Scandinavian languages, bringing together both translators and academics in the field; translator Eric Dickens has sent a report from that conference, which you’ll find on page XX. The strange position occupied by In Other Words for two decades now means that it’s been constantly entangled in the question of how to resolve the tension between academic and practical attitudes to literary translation – and whether even to try? And although under my editorship I’ve tried to be clear about the primacy of practising translators as the readers of this publication (what you’re holding in your hand is a journal for literary translators, not a translation studies journal, which is another kind of creature entirely), I’m always keen for the conversations that are happening in the academy to be a part of the tapestry of things we engage with. For this issue, I’ve invited Jean Boase-Beier to contribute her thoughts about how we build that bridge. On page XX she asks the fundamental question, “Is Translation Theory of Any Practical Use?”

And so, almost-finally, to the special focus of this issue, which is Shakespeare in translation. As usual, it’s examined from a handful of quite different perspectives. Argentine novelist and translator Carlos Gamerro describes his relationship to Shakespeare, whom he has translated and who has come to influence his own writing work in surprising ways. Egyptian novelist Ahdaf Soueif remembers her mother, the author of an acclaimed translation of King Lear into Arabic; and we put ten questions to Frank Günther, Germany’s Shakespeare translator extraordinaire. Swedish theatre director Peter Böök shares his own thoughts about directing Shakespeare in translation. Sean Bye, himself both a translator and an actor, reports back from the “Globe to Globe” season, which last summer brought all of Shakespeare’s plays to the Globe theatre in London, each in a different
language. And to close the section, Imogen Taylor looks at a fictional translation of a Shakespeare play, the *Romeo and Juliet* that features in Mme de Staël’s novel, *Corinne*, and considers what it might reveal.

And we conclude the issue with the usual handful of tasty “In Brief” morsels, and Maureen Freely’s update on activities from the Translators Association; and that’s your lot.

Thanks as ever to our editorial board for their suggestions and support; and to Emily Rose for her help with this issue. The next issue will have a focus on “translation and politics”; and the issue after that, “translating the classics”. Contributions on these subjects, or any other, always welcome; as, of course, are comments on this issue, suggestions, requests, complaints. I’m at d.hahn@uea.ac.uk, as usual.

Welcome to issue 41. I hope you enjoy it.
I was in Oaxaca when I got the email inviting me to be Translator in Residence at the Southbank’s 2012 Poetry Parnassus. It seemed like a joke, as such a young translator, to have been selected as resident translator at one of the largest – and certainly most international – poetry festivals ever held in the UK, and I didn’t immediately respond. I was on my way to Juchitán, capital of Isthmus Zapotec culture and home of Víctor Terán, the neo-pastoral lyricist who toured the UK with the Poetry Translation Centre in 2010. Terán is a translator himself – his most recent book is an anthology of 40 world poets, translated into Zapotec – so he was eager to celebrate. He prepared a feast featuring armadillo roasted in its shell, dehydrated shark salad, iguana speckled with bright yellow fat deposits and cooked in a sauce that included its own hard boiled eggs, and tortoise eggs, a powerful aphrodisiac – according to Víctor – that is soft boiled before being torn slightly open with the teeth, filled with hot sauce and salt, and shot in a single motion. The tortoise eggs look like smashed ping pong balls. Technically illegal, though he insists that their use by the Isthmus Zapotec community is protected because of its cultural significance, Víctor’s mother-in-law is Juchitán’s biggest egg dealer, and as a young man dating her daughter he used to eat dozens at a time, “maybe a hundred,” he suggested. I asked why he doesn’t have more kids. He’d been careful.

As Translator in Residence I had the opportunity to participate in the Parnassus without the burden of representing any nation state. My official duties consisted of participating in or hosting a handful of translation-themed events and panels, and I was otherwise free to attend and participate in the Parnassus as I liked.

My most visual memory from the Poetry Parnassus is of Sudanese poet Al-Saddiq Al-Raddi, who has been translated into English by Sarah Maguire and Mark Ford, learning to hula-hoop with my wife, the poet Syd Shook. Gyrating his hips to spin a thin ring of purple plastic, which kept slipping down his tunic, Al-Raddi seemed to physically embody the initial awkwardness and eventual victory of literary translation.

I suspect the Travelodge bar set sales records that week, as poets and translators talked through the night, in Arabic, English, French, Spanish, and many other languages. Some traded books – I was given a translation of Classical Chinese poems into Scots. Ethiopian poet Bewketu Seyoum worked with translator Cheryl
Moskowitz almost every night, reciting his poems in Amharic and explaining their social backdrop. We were on the mountain.

When the Chilean poetry collective Casa Grande dropped poems over the Southbank from a helicopter, both children and adults clamoured to catch them spinning through the air or scoop them from the moist grass. I’d never seen such enthusiasm for poetry in translation. Maybe BCLT should invest in a helicopter.

My most rewarding experience as Translator in Residence was the English PEN Translation Slam I hosted, featuring translators Chris Schaefer and Gwen MacKeith translating Peruvian Parnassus poet Victoria Guerrero. In an effort to encourage Olympic competitiveness, I selected three judges from the audience, who were assigned the task of rating both translations on a scale from one to ten, based on the quality of the resulting poems in English and on their agreement with the translator’s individual decisions. With both translations available in the programme, I then led the audience through the original poem, asking both translators to explain their choices when divergent, and informally polling the audience about which renditions best reflected the meaning, sound, and spirit of the original Spanish.

Having grown up speaking Spanish, and now working as a literary translator, I forget how often people consider translation to be a simple mathematical process of one-for-one lexical replacement. I was surprised at the slam’s audience reaction, as literally dozens of spectators expressed their newfound appreciation for the literary translator. The slam showcased the types of decisions that translators must make when working through a text, as well as the close reading required to do so. (All three of us missed a Hispanicized Breton quote at the poem’s end, which Jamie McKendrick pointed out afterwards, suggesting that leaving the back-translated French original in the English-language version might serve as a radical solution to his effacement from our versions.)

Poet Victoria Guerrero had a better sense of what was involved in translating poetry. She answered several questions about the original poem, clarifying that “chicha” was indeed a genre of music, as Gwen had correctly decided, and did not refer to South American corn beer, which I had thought was a strange leap in imagery.

In the end, Gwen MacKeith prevailed by a small margin, owing, I think, to the Americanisms of Chris Schaefer’s translations, which presented another interesting topic of discussion about audience. Translation slams are one of the few events to offer a glimpse into the real work of the translator – the close reading of a text and the translator’s decision-making process. I hope to see them featured more frequently at literary festivals, universities, and book fairs, as I suspect they...
could inspire a new generation of literary translators to take up their dictionaries and start working.

Since the Parnassus I’ve kept in touch with several of the festival’s 204 poets. I’ve received packages from Congolese poet Kama Sywor Kamanda in Luxembourg and from Kristiina Ehin in Estonia. I’ve seen Al-Saddiq Al-Raddi twice in London, and Mexican poet Rocío Cerón in Los Angeles. My new publishing venture, Phoneme Media, will publish her innovative multimedia poetry collection *Diorama* in July. I’ve also begun several new translation projects, including Paraguayan poet Lia Colombino and Beninese poet Agnès Agboton. I follow dozens of other poets on Facebook, and they’re often the quickest to like my posts about translation. I think that’s because the Parnassus exemplified what we literary translators already know: that translation is a bridge to understanding and cohabiting the contemporary world, a quick and intimate route toward friendship – much like the Parnassus’s overflowing Travelodge bar, and as much a pleasure as it is an honour.

**A Translator on Parnassus**

Since we met at London Book Fair in 2011, BCLT has been working closely with Eliza Handayani and her Inisiatif Penerjemahan Sastra in Indonesia. Through the Inisiatif, Eliza is keen to increase the amount and improve the quality of literary translation in Indonesia. Most translation of foreign literature into Bahasa Indonesian goes via English as a bridge; there are few experienced translators working into Indonesian from other languages, except – for historical reasons – Dutch.

*We decided to explore this process in a creative way, setting up relay translation workshops that linked back to the BCLT Summer School in Norwich. In July 2012, our Dutch workshop, led by David Colmer, translated part of Gustaaf Peek’s novel, Dover, into English, while the Norwegian group, led by Kari Dickson, worked on*
an extract from Kjersti Annesdatter Skomsvold's second novel, Monsterhuman. And in October 2012, the four set off for Jakarta... Here, David, Kari and Kjersti share their experiences with us.

David Colmer: Exporting the Summer School

When asked to lead the Dutch-English group at the BCLT Summer School in Norwich and then take the workshop to Jakarta in the European autumn, I jumped at the chance, not because of a yen for travel, but because Indonesia was my first “foreign” country and Indonesian the first foreign language I attempted to learn (I don’t count New Zealand as foreign and I definitely don’t count high-school French as an “attempt”.) Although no Indonesian was required, I thought it opportune to resuscitate the elementary Indonesian I had spoken 25 years earlier and began revising, using the beginner’s guide that was dated even then.

The Norwich format is simple, single-minded even: led by an experienced translator who has been explicitly instructed to refrain from imposing their translational vision or taste, a group of translators produce a consensus translation in consultation with the author. I was sceptical but it worked far better than I had imagined. The plan for Jakarta was to take the resulting translation and repeat the exercise with a group of English-Indonesian translators, led by an experienced Indonesian translator and in consultation with the author and the Norwich group leader. The Dutch-Indonesian situation was complicated by the addition of a second group, working directly from the Dutch.

My first subversion was to impose my vision and taste by rewriting the consensus translation. This shouldn’t be seen as a lack of faith in the Norwich participants, but simply as recognition of the fact that in Jakarta I would be called upon to explain and justify the translation choice. I felt that I could only do that properly if they were my own choices. I also noticed that a consequence of consensus had been a consistent movement away from the original. With seven translators voicing reservations about the fluency or naturalness of particular phrases, there seemed to be a tendency to settle on “native English” formulations. For instance, rejecting the literal “[looking for a parking space] Tony drove round and round hoping someone might leave” in favour of the more common “waiting for someone to leave”. In the solitude of my own study, I couldn’t help but feel that “hoping” better expressed the protagonist’s state of mind. I also felt that the inevitable comparison of relay and direct translation would be more interesting if the source translation for the relay group was less affected by the compromises of consensus decision-making.

Emboldened by this unauthorized intervention, I also translated an additional
The Jakarta-Norwich Relay Translation

excerpt with minimal consultation with the author, Gustaaf Peek. This excerpt had been planned for Norwich, but left out because of time constraints. The reason for including it now was that it was set in Indonesia and therefore especially interesting for Indonesian readers and translators. Bringing a literary work home in translation is an additional challenge, requiring authentic dialogue, for instance, which is true to the region, class and background of the characters. In these cases the translation needs to satisfy a more rigorous standard than the original. The enthusiastic response of the group and their chilling performance of this passage during the final presentation justified this second liberty with the workshop format.

The Dutch-English-Indonesian group was fortunate to be led by Anton Kurnia, an author and editor and the translator of more than forty books, including works by Nabokov and Rushdie. Gustaaf divided his time between the direct and relay groups and I sat next to Anton to answer questions about the English. Anton and the participants discussed the text and possible translations in Indonesian and I was pleased that I was generally able to follow the gist of the conversation. Many of the discussion points were familiar despite the differences between the languages. Inefficiency, for instance, with Budi getting a few laughs by describing Rere’s option for the first sentence as “the choice when you’re being paid by the word”! His own first sentence suffered in turn from flattening, with the word sulit (“difficulty”) used in the translation of the absolute “couldn’t find anywhere to park”.

Indonesian is built up from root words that take on prefixes and suffixes to change form and meaning and much of the discussion seemed to revolve around finding the forms that struck the right balance between fluency and formality. For English translators, the corresponding discussions might have been about the merits of completely distinct words.

Indonesian is also characterized by a very large gap between informal spoken and formal written language. This meant that there was a lot of scope for making the narrative more colloquial without compromising the distinction with the dialogue. Choosing words like tak instead of tidak (both “not”), for instance. This discussion reminded me of the perennial issue of whether “to contract or not to contract”, a problem that arose several times in Norwich.

Cultural differences emerged and care was required to ensure that Indonesian readers pictured the scene correctly: tempat untuk parkir instead of tempat parkir for instance (“place to park” instead of “parking place”), as the latter would lead readers to imagine a car park rather than a street with cars parked on either side. Sometimes additional context proved essential. In Indonesian, for instance, the sexes of siblings is less important linguistically than their relative age, so should
they translate “sister” as adik or kakak (“younger sibling” or “older sibling”)? That required a quick search through the Dutch book to find information that wasn’t in the excerpts.

Writing about a foreign country and then having the nerve to take your writing to the country itself guarantees a critical audience, and some of the participants questioned the historical accuracy of the graffiti described in the excerpt. Here I failed dismally as the author’s representative, but fortunately Gustaaf arrived soon after to explain that in this passage he was referring to the build-up to the anti-Chinese riots of 1998, rather than the eve of the riots themselves, when the graffiti was limited to either crosses identifying targets or graffiti placed by the shopkeepers, identifying themselves, regardless of their true origins and religion, as pribumi Muslim (ethnic Indonesian Muslim).

There is much more to say but space is limited and the main thing is that the enthusiasm and commitment of the Indonesian participants fully matched the response I’d seen earlier in Norwich. The broader goal of the workshop was to launch a campaign to establish an Indonesian sister organisation to promote, improve and further literary translation in Indonesia and, from my perspective, the week could hardly have being more successful, either in showing what can be done or in establishing a seed group of translators to work with.

Kari Dickson: BCLT Summer School 2012 Plus

1. Norwich

Leafy green campus. Lots of Italian students. Walking. Rabbits.

Happily, summer coincided with the Summer School, and in every free moment, coffee, food and conversation spilled out onto the steps outside. So sitting on steps chatting, be it at lunch, or in the evening with a beer, or waiting outside Norwich library, is one of my strongest memories.

As it was the first time that I was going to run a workshop over four days, I was quite anxious about it. And I didn’t really know anyone. As people gathered, I hovered around, trying to glean as much information and as many ideas as I could from other workshop leaders who had done it all before. I met Kjersti, the Norwegian author, for the first time, and to be honest, we both seemed to be equally bewildered. I was quite surprised to discover that I didn’t know any of the participants in the Norwegian workshop, as it is a relatively select community, though I had met one of them before. But I needn’t have worried. We had a very balanced group and they were keen to work, share and learn, and Kjersti was a generous and open author. But she knows what she wants and at times pushed us to find a better solution, patiently explaining what she was trying to convey.
We launched into the text and our first major discussion came in the first line: how to write the sound of cow bells, given that it would later turn out to be the wire on flagpoles. Kjersti uses a lot of unusual compound nouns, so there were plenty of meaty words and cultural references to be unwrapped and repackaged. The participants worked hard, initially as one group, then in groups of three and two. In the afternoons, we went through the work that had been produced in plenary to reach consensus.

On the Wednesday afternoon we were joined by Erica Jarnes, from Bloomsbury, who went through the translated text with us from an editor’s point of view. I think we were all chuffed when she said how unified the text was, despite the fact that six people (well, eight really) had worked on it. It was the first time that editors had taken part in the workshops and I think it was a very valuable experience for everyone.

But it wasn’t only our text that was unified, the group was. Everyone seemed to work well together and was comfortable in each other’s company. I was struck, once again, by how important group dynamics are to the enjoyment of activities like this. The value of the workshop for many of the participants seemed to be the opportunity to meet, work and talk with other translators and to learn from each other’s experience, however long or short.

And for me personally, it felt like quite a watershed, as suddenly I was on the stage for the panel discussions, and not in the audience.

2. Jakarta


I was transported halfway across the world in a tin can and dropped in a bubble, and was enchanted. It was a bizarrely unreal experience that still feels very immediate. A great deal of time was spent being transported from one place to the next, looking through the car window at a city that was always moving, unfamiliar and outside.

Inside the bubble, I was there to do something familiar. Talk translation, work on the text we’d worked on in Norwich, but now with Indonesian translators.

The workshops and most of the seminar took place at the Eramus Taalcentrum, and we had to go through security checks to get in, albeit perfunctory. Again, the city was outside. And inside, there was a lot of talking. Through the seminar and workshops, I came to appreciate how fortunate we are to be working as translators in Europe, however much we may complain at times. We have the luxury of working directly from the source language, our conditions are comparatively very
good, if not always optimal. We can participate in workshops, meet regularly with other translators, and more often than not, have contact with the authors.

For most of the participants, if not all, in the Norwegian workshop, it was the first time that they had done anything like this. It was the first time the author was there in the room, available to them, and could answer questions directly. And there were lots of questions. It took a while, we were all polite, feeling our way, but as we progressed through the first and second days, the questions started to come thick and fast. With lots of laughter. Many of the questions were cultural and physical. What are support tights? How can snow be crunchy when it’s wet? What does windswept mean? I realized how important it is to understand the country, culture and literature that you are trying to translate into your own language, in a way that others can understand – and how much I’ve taken that for granted. If I was asked to translate a novel from Indonesian into Norwegian, via English, I would seriously struggle.

Which is why the issue of relay translation is so important, if books are to be fully understood and travel as widely as we discovered Big Bird and Kill Bill have. The Insiatif Penerjemahan Sastra is a big step in the right direction.

As the week passed, and the text moved from Norwegian via English to Indonesian, my role receded. It was strange to then be on the outside, and not know how the text had evolved in Indonesian as a result of our discussions, but I’m sure it was the better for it.

I shared my bubble with some wonderful people, not least those I’d met in Norwich. Perhaps I fell a little in love. A small part of my heart is still in Jakarta. So every night, when I brush my teeth with the toothpaste we were given in our welcome pack, I’m back there. I have no idea what the words on the outside mean. But I don’t want what’s inside to run out.

Kjersti Annesdatter Skomsvold: Keep moving away from your mother tongue

I go out the door from my room, the first morning in Norwich, seven rabbits are sitting in a row on the lawn, staring at me. I hesitate, before moving quickly past them, so they won’t have time to make up their mind. I’m scared of being revealed. Inside the seminar room, I stare at the seven translators; I’m trying to make up my mind about them, knowing that they will reveal me.

The text they are going to translate is the first chapter of my second novel, a novel that has not gone to print yet. I feel vulnerable, I’m thinking about whether the text is solid enough, that it will take being pulled and dragged, by these careful readers.

What’s most important for me when I’m writing is the language, that the
language of the author meets the language of the character in the book. In my first novel the translation was a challenge because the character’s quirkiness is shown through the strange words she chooses, and in the translation into English, it was hard to make the character seem odd – and not the translator. In the first chapter of my new novel, the language is characterized by streams of thoughts, switching between different tenses, and I use made-up words, often compound nouns. For several years I have worked on this book, it has been a pain and a struggle, and after a few hours of watching the translators in Norwich, it is good to see that struggle being transferred onto someone else. It is touching though, to see someone care as much about where I put the commas as I do myself. One could perhaps think that translating is a tedious sport to watch. But it isn’t, and I try to answer the questions about what I really mean to say as best as I can.

After five days of work, it’s time for the reading. They have all put so much of themselves into the translation, and I feel proud about them being proud about their work. It’s like my writing has become an animal with a will of its own, completely independent of me, which is exactly what I want for my books, that they will manage on their own.

Then the English text travels to the other side of the world. Outside the seminar building in Jakarta there are the tiniest cats I have ever seen; I could put them all in my pocket. Inside the building I meet the translators. I immediately feel that the translators from Norwich should be here and meet the Indonesian translators, like they were siblings, separated at birth.

I’m full of courage about the English text being translated into Indonesian, since the English translators managed to sort out the problems they encountered. But it turns out to be quite different problems this time. I tell them that in this text I think of “time” as something vertical instead of horizontal, that the present becomes something else because stories from the past and the future cast light on it. So when they tell me that there is only one tense of the verb in Indonesian, I almost cry. But they make it work, or so they tell me. I think that’s part of translation too, to completely leave my writing in the hands of someone else, to trust that they want the best for it, and I can tell by their questions that they do.

The main character ends up in the river during a rafting trip, after having fallen overboard, and she disappears down the rapids, on her back keeping her legs up so as not to get caught in the rubbish on the bottom, bikes and prams people have discarded, you can drown that way.

Q: But why is it bikes and prams in the river?
A: Because people throw them in there.
Q: But why do they do that?
A: To get rid of them, if one wants a new bicycle for instance.
Q: But why don’t you sell the old one? Sell the pieces?
A: Because we are very lazy.
Q: By saying “you can drown that way” – do you mean to drown in the same way that the prams and bicycles have drowned?

That is a beautiful thought – prams and bicycles disappearing down the river, waving with their handlebars, crying for help, before they sink to the bottom. I have never thought about this before.

To learn a language, and to learn about another language, is to go under the surface, all the way to the bottom, and I think I learned just as much about their culture as they learned about mine. I also learned more about the Norwegian language myself, since a language can only see itself in light of another. Most important, I saw my own writing in a new light.

Close Reading: Tony Bianchi
Siân Melangell Dafydd

T.H. Parry-Williams’s Casgliad o Ysgrifau was the choice of Welsh author Owen Martell, to discuss his “Book of a Lifetime” in the Independent recently – which was serendipitous, since Tony Bianchi and I had recently started translating extracts of these essays as part of the BCLT mentorship. The Ysgrifau brings together almost all of Parry-Williams’s essays published between 1928 and 1966 and we had agreed to include this in our portfolio of work, with a sense of duty for what ought to have reached English readers, and as an ultimate creative challenge. More appropriate than the word “essay”, for the Welsh “ysgrif”, perhaps would be one of Parry-Williams’s own choices of “Musings”, “Scraps”, “Reflections”, which are some of the titles of the original books from which the pieces are selected. And there, immediately, we fall on unsteady ground and scramble for suitable selections of words.
T.H. Parry-Williams himself had an incomparable sense of language. In “Borshiloff”, his Welsh is anchored in his home of Rhyd Ddu, near Caernarfon. However, he crosses borders. In an essay about dualities, opposites and borderlines, the language itself travels to South Wales, to France and Germany. And this is done with the ease of someone who can borrow words from the “other” languages, because they form part of his lexicon. Not only this, but Parry-Williams is an inventor of language. Then, hidden in a sentence will be a line of strict metre, cynghanedd, not drawing attention to itself but fitting seamlessly into the rhythm of his prose. What we have is a linguistic kaleidoscope.

In seeking the “right” word, while translating a text, the grass is often greener in another language. Tony Bianchi himself points out that an adequate translation for “bro” exists more in the German and French than English. In writing, T.H. Parry-Williams jumps these fences to greener pastures, but as translators, how do we follow him? How do we convey the “hymn of belonging” of that “young man from the Atlantic-facing mountains” while at once crossing borders in the same manner as he allows himself. This is the challenge: where do we place the barrier for ourselves? Here Tony Bianchi grapples with those very barriers, what to abandon and what “new” material a translator can bring to a text in its place.

For me, more than any other translation challenge, working on texts by Parry-Williams has stretched the creative and linguistic muscle to the limit. This may explain why, to date, so little of his work has been published in English. (Meic Stephens’s short 1987 selection The White Stone, is out of print and generally unavailable.) It may also go part way to showing why this deficiency ought to be remedied.
The emphatic pronoun “yntau” has no equivalent in English in this context. “There he is” puts the emphasis in the wrong place; “there is he” is awkward; “there’s himself” sounds like an Irishism. Repeating the name is best.

From St Paul to the Ephesians, one of several quotations that help inscribe the Welsh reader within the author’s distant, longed-for “bro”. The St James version, “the middle wall of partition”, is an ill fit in every respect, so I’ve omitted it and tried to compensate by inserting a new quotation in the next sentence (see below).

Beth bynnag am hynny am gyfnod yn fy mlynyddoedd cynnar a diniwed wele hwnnw, Borshiloff, **am y pared â mi**, a’r pared hwnnw dros dro fel rhyw ffin sylweddol rhwng gorrlewin a dwyrain. Dyna fyfí, y llanc o’r mynyddoedd a oedd yng ngolwg Môr Iwerydd, ar un ochr – llanc digon ofnus ei ysbyd ymysg estroniaid, a’i ymarweddiad yng ddigon ddefi ar y cyfan, ond ‘pechudur’ er hynny yn wyneb y Deddf; gŵr ifanc encilgar a myfyriol, a’i isfeddyliau ddyydd a nos ymgyrnhoi o gylch **ei fôr fach** yn y gorrlewin. Ac ar yr ochr arall i’r pared **dyna yntau**, o ororau’r dwyrain-agos, gŵr hollol hunan-hyderus, hyddysg yn nulliau ac arferion y byd hwn, ond **heb fod yn ymffrostio yn hynny ychwaith**. Dau fwyriwr oeddem, fel petai, mewn mwy nag un ystyr; a’n **myfyrdodau oedd prif ‘ganolfur y gwahaniaeth’** rhymgom – neu felly y bausid yn casglu ar unwaith wrth olwg pethau. Er mor gyfagos oeddem, **yr oeddem ar wahân ac yn wahanol**.

**Above:** an extract from “Borshiloff”, by T.H. Parry-Williams.
**Opposite:** Tony Bianchi’s translation of the same passage.
Be that as it may, for those few innocent years of youth, only a bedroom wall separated me from Borshiloff the Bulgarian, so that this meagre partition became, for a while, a kind of border between east and west. There was I, on one side, the young man from the Atlantic-facing mountains – nervous amongst strangers, of generally inoffensive demeanour, but still a ‘sinner’ according to that higher Law; an introspective, reticent fellow, preoccupied day and night with memories of home in the west. And on the other side, from the near-eastern borderlands, there was Borshiloff, self-confident, thoroughly schooled in the ways of the world, although without swagger. We were both students, in more ways than one, and yet it was our minds that most set us apart: at least, that is what one would have concluded from a cursory acquaintance. Despite our proximity we were, as Pantycelyn put it, merely ‘passing strangers’.

“bro” is an emotionally charged Welsh keyword, close to German “Heimat” and French “pays”, for which “home turf” or “native soil” are poor approximations. “Home”, pure and simple, risks being too domestic, insufficiently communal, but context partly redeems here.

A pertinent quotation from the Welsh hymn-writer which reinforces the author/intended-reader relationship, but my own choice, not the author’s, and serving a rather different function for most English-speaking readers. Is this defensible?
I am a translator in residence at the Free Word Centre in London and I am working on a wide range of activities, none of which include sitting down and translating. Here’s how and why…

The translation programme is part of Free Word’s commitment to invigorating translation: celebrating the UK’s linguistic diversity, encouraging more readers to engage with literature from around the world, demolishing cultural barriers and supporting the development of professional translators. Two translators in residence are appointed each year: the first year of the programme hosted Rosalind Harvey and Nicky Harman and throughout the 2013 winter and spring Ollie Brock and I have been working to find new approaches to translation through a curated series of live and online events and discussions, focusing on the cultural and political impacts of literary translation in French, Turkish and Spanish.

Being a translator in residence at the Free Word Centre does not involve working on a literary translation, on finishing a specific work or even sitting down to do actual translation work. At the Free Word Centre, translation becomes movement. Of course translation would always imply moving from one cultural context to another through language. Here I also mean literally moving from space to space, but also from medium to medium, moving beyond the page, and finally getting off the page.

My actual translation process happens each and every day. Not only when I sit down in front of my computer, with my online dictionaries bookmarked on my web browser and Google ready to tell me what that very weird expression I had never heard of actually means. Using my knowledge and passion for writing and stories I care about in the fields of contemporary Turkish literature and comics from Turkey, Algeria, the UK and more… I am building bridges, tunnels, enabling ferry crossings, training to be able to jump off the fence… or whatever metaphor you would find suitable to illustrate this act of generously sharing knowledge and making it available to new readers. I do this by co-curating an international comics festival, by editing a yearly anthology of contemporary authors, by writing articles for magazines about design or art… and by becoming a translator in residence in an organisation offering me the tools to make my translator’s dreams come true.

My work at the Free Word Centre started the day I was appointed, that is seven months before the official start of my residency. Since the beginning, I have built my programme around three main themes: author-related events, working
with schools and digital reach. I have concentrated my energy around three main authors from Turkey, building a long term approach to the way we present events, which are too often soon to be forgotten one-offs. Especially when it comes to authors foreign to the English-speaking readers, whether they are translated or not, chances are that many readers may never have heard of them, so it is important to develop readers’ interest step by step. I did this with the support of Free Word’s digital producer Sam Sedgman, as well as with other organisations based at Free Word, such as the Poetry Translation Centre and English PEN.

It is not enough to translate and publish, the work needs to reach readers and one of the translator’s roles is I believe to help get to those readers. The process starts with fairly simple and informal activities such as talking about the author within certain circles: friends and professional networks. Then acting on it through publicizing an interview, a book review or organising a book group. Finally, the author is invited to talk at an event and meet with a well-prepared, enthusiastic and even more curious audience. And if activities are recorded, on film, photo or audio, there are even more opportunities to continue promote that voice I was particularly keen on translating in the first place. Including authors and their works into existing events, such as European Literature Night, helps reach even more people and frees the writer from a forced exoticism, putting them in dialogue with their peers and achieving that universality we all long for, or at least I do as a translator.

Digital projects remain central throughout my work as a translator, such as the #100Turkeys we have developed to share a hundred facts, serious and fun, about Turkey on Twitter throughout my four-month residency, and the wide range of digital content we put forward through Free Word’s website and social media.

Working with schools is probably my favorite part of the residency as I truly believe in the potential in young people when you offer them the right tools to express their creativity. For me, these tools include comics, language and keeping one’s heritage alive through storytelling.

My work as a translator is a subjective one and I am highly attached to my independence. This residency offers the space to develop and express that freedom, which is key to developing a wide range of perspectives about Turkey or any country through its literature. Translation, for me, is never a solitary process, and this residency is just one example of that.
This text comes from a talk to ITI Scottish translators’ food and drink network in Inverness in June 2010. It is based on Lulu Norman’s and Sophie Lewis’s translation of the book Lebanese Cuisine by Andrée Maalouf and Karim Haïdar, published by Saqi books in 2010.

One

I often think of an ideal translation as one in which the translator might share the same breath as the writer, not just inhabit their words but depart from the same raw experience, the same root – like Samuel Beckett not so much translating himself as beginning again in another language with the same inspiration.

Perhaps the ideal way to translate a cookery book in particular would derive from that kind of approach, one that originates at the same source. You would go to Beirut or Paris (in this case), buy the ingredients, observe the author cooking in her kitchen or simply cook every recipe and, with the process vaguely in mind, write it down in your own words. Of course (though it would be an interesting experiment, and to cook as many recipes as possible is obviously the best way to approach any cookery book translation) neither author nor publisher would be happy with that kind of reinvention and financial and time constraints prevent cooking every recipe in the book, let alone flying to Beirut.

Originality in that sense is not what is desirable in a cookery book although, as in any literary work, invention is. As in any translation you need the freshness of language that will not identify it as a translation, which comes from the same kind of original thinking, the same kind of grass roots questioning of oneself, of what one knows and does not know and, equally, of the author and what she knows, as in any text – only more so.

In a cookery book you have to go back to the source in a far more literal and practical way than in a novel, interrogating the original author, interrogating the ingredients and methods of a recipe, the implements and gadgets used, as well as the language, and balance all that with what is possible or available, not just in the target language but in the target market, the target culture or the target kitchen. For although the book may transport the reader or cook in the UK to the markets of Beirut or a Lebanese village festival, and she may find out a lot about Lebanon and the Middle East on the way, she must also be able to get to her local Tesco and find the same or equivalent ingredients, as nearly as possible.
A translator of any book needs to reflect the author’s style and stories, to enter her world, and it is this ability to inhabit that we are needed for. Or more particularly in this case to cohabit, as a cook book must equally and practically inhabit the world of its reader, the English-speaking cook or would-be cook, bear in mind what world she lives in, what produce, appliances and ingredients are available to her. This is further complicated, in this case, by the author Andrée Maalouf being Lebanese by birth but having lived in France for some time so being necessarily influenced by French cuisine, its methods and tools. Although her stories for traditional recipes often derive from traditions in Lebanese villages or cities, her practical techniques are from French cooking and the majority of the ingredients are given as what is available in France, not in Beirut.

To give an example of the kind of translation we were dealing with, one problem we encountered had to do with what cream to use for ice cream recipes. The author stipulated that this should be 20% fat – called in French “crème fraîche liquide” (not “crème light”) – that it was used to make Chantilly cream and should not taste acidic. “Crème liquide” would normally translate as single cream.

Whipping cream is most often used for ice cream in UK recipes but Andrée did not specify “crème fleurette”. Single cream has the nearest fat content but all the recipes we looked at showed that neither whipping cream nor single cream can be boiled and every ice cream recipe in the book called for boiling. So we thought perhaps we needed to use double cream even if it has twice the fat content Andrée wanted; it is not sour and it is liquid.

Sophie’s mother told us that single cream boils up well; the Waitrose website, Delia, Nigella, the BBC and the Moro cookbook all use double cream for ice cream, with the odd one using whipping cream and one using a mixture of double and single. This left us even more unsure. Our conclusion was that whippability was more important than fat content, given the kinds of cream available in UK, none of which coincided with Andrée’s description. But for anything other than ice cream, in recipes requiring cream, we went via fat content.

This was certainly not translation as I’d known it.

**Two**

Panic is often the initial reaction when first glancing at a foreign text for translation and this was no different. The reaction is to scrabble around to try to control things, looking for exact equivalents, which is no more possible in a cookery book than in a novel. The panic lay in feeling that there had to be an exact equivalent for the style and that we must get that right immediately – which is odd as I wouldn’t feel that kind of imperative, for instance, if I were translating a political thriller.
I did not trust that the style would evolve just as it does for any book, in the
doiing of it, but imagined I had to find one and fit into it somehow, as if the right
voice was already out there somewhere for me to locate, imitate or crawl inside –
not, of course, bearing in mind that there are as many styles of cookery books as
there are books. In a sense it’s true that cookery has a special language: there are
set phrases e.g. water to cover / bring to the boil / remove from the flame / mix the
dry ingredients etc., but there is also wide latitude for your own style, and not of
course just in formulae such as whether to say “reserve” or “set aside”, “prepare the
evening before / the day before / the night before”, etc.

If the first reaction is an attempt to control, the next is to realize you need help.
So I plunged into various cookery books. I looked at many Middle Eastern cookery
books and those very dry, recipe-only Silver Spoon European compendiums. I
looked at books by Claudia Roden (whose style I thought most similar to Andrée
Maalouf’s: authoritative, cultured, elegant, third-person) and the Moro cookbook.
This only sent me into deeper panic. It was by looking at the extremes, the more
personal books by the chattier chefs with more casual styles (Jamie, Nigella or
Sophie Grigson), with their more intimate language or sensual description, which
helped, by showing what I did not want. It was those considered more eccentric
or idiosyncratic like Fergus Henderson or even Elizabeth David that also helped
me situate myself, made me realize that of course there is a whole spectrum of
possibility and that you can make it up yourself in the process: you inhabit and grasp
it rather than finding it at your fingertips, as you might in an imaginative novel say,
where often the concept or feeling simply springs into words.

Three

Of course the most important stage, the real test of cook book writing or
translation takes place outside the book – in the kitchen, in the mouth – and can only
be judged at the table. Sophie and I made two big meals for friends, preparing about
ten of the recipes at each, which was a vitally important step in throwing up more
questions, working out the separate stages to a recipe or better adjectives to use.

Being alert to what you don’t know, what you take for granted, was even more
important than usual; every translation for me becomes a kind of enquiry into my
own ignorance, since interrogating the other means interrogating myself, but also
makes the process one of endless discovery, I was constantly coming across things
I didn’t know or had never understood in my own culture or culinary experience.

I had little knowledge of raw ingredients beyond London markets, delis and
supermarkets. I never gave dinner parties, had never learned to cook “properly”
or with my mother, but had just taught myself from recipe books over time. I had
Translating Cookery Books

travelled a lot in northern Africa and a little in the Middle East but I think there was only one instance when that was of any use (when it came to describing the Lebanese coffee pot that makes coffee on the stove, which in the text was called a “cafetière”). It seemed that offering me the job based on my literary experience had not been the publisher’s best idea. Luckily Sophie had more experience and interest in cooking.

To illustrate this process of what you take for granted, one of the desserts in the book is called “osmallieh”, which in the photo that accompanied the text looked to consist of those very fine strands of that sugary pastry you often see in Middle Eastern or Greek pastries. The French text explained it was “‘une pâte speciale’ known as ‘cheariyé’, resembling white vermicelli, sold in Middle Eastern groceries”. The word “pâte” of course can mean pastry, dough or pasta in English. I made an assumption, probably because of that “resembling” vermicelli, that this was a special kind of prepared, possibly frozen pastry particular to the Middle East. So when I asked in a Lebanese grocer’s I was surprised to be led to the Italian dried pasta section and to actual dried vermicelli (known in Italian as “ciuffi d’angeli”: angel hair pasta). I spent quite a long time thinking this couldn’t be it before buying it. We call this pasta, but after you’ve boiled it, covered it in syrup and baked it, wouldn’t we call it pastry?

Translating a cookery book is more than ever, in Sophie’s words, a primeval soup of linguistic indeterminacy. The same problem occurred with bread recipes for “mouajanats”: for pastry and dough, the French word “pâte” is also used: I had no idea when you call pastry pastry or bread or dough, though I had some notion that dough becomes pastry after it’s cooked. If you don’t know dishes like “fatayers”, “sambousik”, “rekakats” or “mana’ish” and have no time to experiment with making them, you may not know which word to use, though photos in cookbooks can be a godsend. (I was later advised to call it dough if it contains yeast – e.g. bread dough, brioche dough – and if not, refer to it as pastry, which sounded fairly authoritative to me.)

Four

I soon realized that I needed other collaborators, or consultants: my friend the chef Jeremy Lee (then working at the Blueprint Café, now at Quo Vadis), for example, to tell me about British ingredients and methods (elementary but vital things such as you don’t say quails or partridges, but only use the singular, or the names of cuts of meat) and a relative put me in touch with Caroline Conran, who knew very well the difficulties of French cuisine and the names of obscure ingredients, as well as the language and phraseology of cookery writing. She in turn
put me in touch with interior designer Tarfa Salam, also an expert cook, who could help with the Lebanese side of things, as well as the transliteration of Lebanese words.

So I consulted cookery books, chefs, Tarfa, Caroline, a French friend of mine and of course everyone’s mum. I was not worried about spoiling the broth as I consulted each person on specific questions within their own area of expertise.

At the same time, a translator should never simply trust the experts or indeed the author, who is not in a position to know what works best here either in terms of the book’s style or ingredients available. This is why it’s good to have almost a panel of people for cross-checking and orientation, as such areas can be difficult to navigate; dictionaries and other resources are often of no use whatever. At one point, for instance, the author abruptly decided that in English “green onions” was what she wanted across the board for “cébettes”, which are in fact spring onions, though you would be hard pressed to find this in a dictionary (they are more usually called “ciboules”).

At such moments the value of exchanging images comes into play; it saves a lot of time and words to simply send a picture link for identification purposes. Sometimes we were really stuck on a point of interpretation and variant ingredients (for instance “oignons grelot”, which Andrée had described as “small onions which are often white but can also be yellow but different from shallots; they are used in pickled onions but bigger”). So to take the communication temporarily out of words freed us to bring it back into our own without the anxiety of not knowing what it referred to.

At another moment, so far out of my comfort zone, I wondered whether what the French call “round rice” wasn’t necessarily “short-grained rice” but pudding rice, which many different Middle Eastern and Moroccan cookery books use for savoury dishes. Sophie had used it in a recipe and it had (naturally) come out puddingy and stodgy. But who knew if that was not what was required?

Five

The process was beginning to feel a bit like being the conductor of an orchestra (or indeed the chef in a large kitchen) where all the different influences, contributions opinions and traditions are playing their part; it’s imperative to keep a handle on the whole, the different parts distinct, or it will fall into formless mess. Also intensified was that feeling you get halfway through all translations, in my experience, perhaps somewhere in the first draft, where the text seems to be alive, snakelike and protean, with everything constantly changing – spellings, meanings, style etc. – and liable, therefore, to fall apart at any moment.
Translating Cookery Books

This text was in fact changing all the time (the author modified, simplified, suddenly took out or put in ingredients or processes as we went on, as her priorities seemed to change) in a way that a fiction or nonfiction book is not. I was left wondering if it was less important (e.g. than in novel) to say what the author has said than to say what she means. Of course the English book needed to be as straightforward and clear as possible; I often find that where the French are abstract we need to be more concrete and this was also true in a cookery book, where the French may take certain things for granted. For instance we often had to add steps in the English (wash a vegetable, cut lengthways, scoop out insides, stages of drying or rinsing) or just be more specific: when she said four times less water did she actually mean four times or “a lot less”? It wasn’t enough to simply specify vinegar or sugar: was it red wine / white wine / cider vinegar? And what kind of sugar? All the salad recipes asked for the germ of the garlic to be removed, for example, which was soon lost in translation as being too complicated and unnecessary, or possibly our garlic generally too uniform to need it.

Cookery book translation is particularly painstaking work, in which more than ever as a translator you must check, check and check again. And consistency is taken to a new level, especially with all the abbreviations, conversion of measurements, amounts and house style. I would advise that when revising your own or your collaborator’s work, towards the end of the process, make sure you check again the target language against the source: this is much more important in a cookery book than other books as it’s so easy to miss something when your head is dazed with endless lists which often repeat the same procedure, the same ingredients and amounts, or which are just infinitesimally different.

If you make a mistake translating a novel, the result is something inaccurate (a not so important fact, perhaps) or a turn of phrase that doesn’t quite ring true and briefly spoils reading pleasure or damages authenticity. But facts here are all important and should you mistake an amount or wrongly identify an ingredient, the recipe won’t work, so there are practical repercussions, which suddenly seem more serious. You imagine countless failures for anonymous people in unknown kitchens, with who knows what results – which are your fault, either your own mistake or your having missed the author’s mistake. Which feels like a heavy moral responsibility, one which will keep producing disastrous results for all time, or as long as the book is used.

Six

But the main difference I found in collaborating in a cookery book over, say, a novel, was the level of collaboration you have not with your co translator, but with
the author: this relationship is far more important than in most translations and even more crucial to the translation process. In a novel I might verify a fair few words, phrases or concepts in the course of a translation – a fact, the direction in which to take something ambiguous – or enquire about cultural differences, to make sure I have it right, but the emphasis is more on the act of imagination and the nuance of your own language. In a cookery book, of course, and especially when it comes to the actual recipes, it is all facts, all practical, all cultural difference (which gives you again the false notion of equivalence).

We can’t necessarily presume, for example, that a bunch of parsley, coriander or asparagus in Beirut is roughly the same amount as a bunch in London; we need to know that when the author specifies Bulgarian yoghurt we could call it Greek and how much a “pot of yoghurt” contains in France, for example. It was news to me, for instance, that “nuts” in French, except when specified, means walnuts.

We had to imagine complex processes of making traditional Lebanese bread in ovens we have never had, or to describe things like freekeh, roasted wheat, that we’d never seen. To give an idea of the levels we needed to go to, these are some of our questions to the authors: “Can you describe the process of neutralising grain in India? Is boiling involved?” “In the village bakeries, is the bread left on the benches for several hours to give it time to rise or for another reason?” “For ka’ak asriyé, can you describe this dough biscuit or bread pancake in more detail? Is it soft or hard, more like a crepe or like bread?” “Why does one leave all these nuts in water? If it’s to separate their skins, why not use shelled almonds for example?” “Is all the water for the Corinthian raisins going to be absorbed by the raisins or should one drain them?”

Conclusion

With fiction and most non-fiction books, you take the text away and make it your own, create your own version or reading. In this translation it was not so much about transforming as being a conduit for a further stage of transformation. The translation after all is not the finished product in the same way as other books are. Some of the aesthetic satisfaction of translation, usually obtained from language, was necessarily transferred to the food, so inevitably it is not fully realized until you make the recipes; so perhaps the satisfaction is more a delayed, sensual one.

We made a second Lebanese feast to celebrate finishing the translation and found that this was the time of bonding with the recipes and the general focus of the book, the kind of food and kinds of cooking it calls for. It was a catalytic experience, which crystallized our decisions – and finally made the word flesh.
British Sign Language (2): Interpreting
Paul Michaels

In the last issue of *In Other Words* I gave an introduction to British Sign Language (BSL), which is the first or preferred recognised language of the British Deaf community. It is safe to say that most people in the UK do not have enough comprehension of BSL to converse with Deaf people. So, like any other people trying to speak to someone in a language they don’t know, there becomes a need for interpretation and translation services.

Reading the Winter 2012 issue of *In Other Words*, it struck me that there are some similarities and differences in the interpreting world I find myself immersed in daily and the parallel world of the many translators who read this journal. Therefore, I thought I would share just some of those thoughts…

**Time**

One difference I notice between translation and interpreting is the luxury of time. In most cases, when translating between British Sign Language and English, like with spoken languages, there is the luxury of being able to analyse the source text, think about linguistic choices of the target text and revisit those decisions. Time to make such decisions, though, is significantly reduced in consecutive interpreting, when sections of source language are listened to, possible notes made and messages rendered; and even more so when interpreting simultaneously, rendering messages into the target language as quickly as these can be formulated after receiving the message in the source language.

Something that significantly affects the ability to interpret simultaneously is the ability to process two different language modes. Spoken languages are auditory-vocal and sign languages are visual. Therefore, at any one time the following process may be taking place:

**Common Interpreting Situation**

- **Deaf Person:** Signing
- **Hearing Person:** Speaking
- **Interpreter:**
  - Listening to English
  - Processing English into Sign Language
  - Producing English into Sign Language
  - Watching a person use Sign Language
  - Processing Sign Language into English
  - Producing Sign Language into English
This can be done but because of the complexities of the task, the interpreter cannot maintain this processing for any considerable time and will soon need to stop and take control of the processes happening. Cognitive load – the amount of information and interactions that are occurring – will affect working memory and ultimately, the interpretation taking place.

**Lone working**

The article on “Collaborative Translation” by Nick Caistor and Lorenza Garcia was interesting. Getting together to “compare and discuss” is a luxury rarely afforded to a Sign Language Interpreter. Most of the time I am working alone in a variety of domains: medical, interviews, meetings and training to name but a few. Therefore, in these and other situations, the decisions made when interpreting between BSL and English are instant and autonomous. There are times, however, when an interpreter may be working alone but may have had the opportunity to prepare for the assignments beforehand with a colleague. An example of this would be interpreting in the theatre. This is a domain that allows for, and indeed requires, full preparation prior to starting the assignment. Theatre interpreting commonly allows for two or three months’ preparation, as interpreters have to match exactly what is happening on stage through characterisation, musicality, pace, etc. That’s not to say that interpreters don’t match that when interpreting in other settings but there is more of a need to be interpreting a show at almost the exact time that it is happening on stage whereas with all other interpreting assignments there is inevitably a slight time delay.

**Working with the original orator**

Nick and Lorenza also mention the opportunity to discuss their translation with Andrés Neuman, which is such a luxury. Being able to take time to question the motives, desires and artistic aims of the writer ensures that the translation truly matches the original intent. I’m sure that, like for most translations, and generally in the case of sign language interpreting, this isn’t always possible. I find that within community interpreting, I am often able to clarify what people are saying and getting them to elaborate their intent; however, with situations such as formal lectures and presentations or AGMs, there is very little, if any, opportunity for this.

**Literal vs free translation**

I’m sure that when a translator is translating, they are thinking about the people who will read the final product and this is most definitely also the case for a sign language interpreter. They will think about the audience that is watching the
interpreting. In many situations I work in, I find that the audience is not just one deaf person and as a result, I need to consider the wide range of people watching my interpretation from English into BSL. Some deaf people are educated in a mainstream environment and will have a very good command of the English language that may be, for many years, their first and preferred language. These individuals will like to see an interpretation that is more at the English end of the BSL register and commonly referred to as Sign Supported English (English sentences are constructed and signs are used to support the English). This would be more like a literal translation. However, many individuals will be “grass roots” Deaf, i.e. they will most likely be from a Deaf family, will have been brought up using BSL as a first language and may not have a very good command of English. It is this group who would prefer a free translation.

Invisibility of the translator

Vineet Lal talks about the invisibility of the translator and the fact that they resemble a “ninja” in that they leave no trace of themselves except their text and that this is the mark of a successful translation. It is more than likely that a person reading a book that has been translated will never actually get to see the person that laboured over this translation. However, this is often not the case with a sign language interpreter. More often than not, the interpreter is physically in the room and therefore visible to all parties. Even if people present are not the ones relying on interpretation from English to Sign Language, they will most probably rely on interpretation from Sign Language to English when the Deaf person(s) wishes to contribute. Many people think that the Sign Language interpreter is only there for the Deaf person to have access to language but of course, this is not generally the case.

Female-dominated

José Saramago mentions in his article that most translators are women. That is very much the case in Sign Language interpreting as well. In 2009, whilst studying for a PGDip in Interpreting at Durham University, I undertook research that looked at Interpreting for the Deaf gay community. I found out, through an international survey of 304 interpreters that 72% were female and 28% were male. Interestingly, at that time, there was a high proportion of interpreters who identified themselves as gay or bisexual: 38%. This is an area I will be conducting further research on when I begin a PhD at Durham University in October.

In conclusion, I feel that there are a number of similarities that both the literary translator and Sign Language interpreter face; lone working and the debate over
literal compared to free translations, for example. On the other hand (pardon the pun!), I can also see the vast differences; the invisibility of the translator compared to the obvious visibility of the interpreter as well as the fact that the interpreter is having to work with the huge constraint of time, when there is an obvious need for immediate interpretation. However, the fact that we are providing access to information which would otherwise not be possible has to be the nicest and most rewarding similarity we share.

Translating at the Nuremberg Trials, 1947-49
Patricia Crampton

I left Oxford in 1946, with a decent second-class degree in Modern Languages – German main, French subsidiary, and one year’s Russian by special agreement with Miss Bickley, who was both my moral tutor and one of my German tutors. Miss Bickley gave tutorials in her comfortable sitting-room, with a blazing fire. Cosily settled, often after a night on the tiles (or in the Cher, where we used to swim with a group of New College medics), I would be asleep within minutes. When I woke up, I would find Miss Bickley reading peacefully, and beside my armchair a glass of milk sweetened with brown sugar, a prize for which, in those war years, she must have sacrificed precious food coupons.

The circumstances of my last interview with our Principal, the formidable Miss Gwyer, were also a little unusual. It was during Commem Week, and in the euphoria of having finished Final Schools, I was walking across the garden in evening dress at breakfast time when the Bursar caught me. (Not that I was trying to evade capture.) The Bursar didn’t like me at all. “Straight in to see Miss Gwyer!” she squeaked, quite viciously. Miss Gwyer seemed surprised, but not displeased, by my arrival and asked me why I had come. “The Bursar told me to report that I have just returned from a ball, Miss Gwyer. I was crossing the garden in evening dress.” Miss Gwyer continued to look surprised. “You’ve been taking your Final Schools, my dear?” she said. “Then you’re no longer in statu pupillari, I believe.” We settled down to a pleasant chat and she asked me if I would be returning to Oxford to teach. When I said that I was going to be a translator, Miss Gwyer was very interested indeed. “Is there such a profession?” she asked.

The University Appointments Board of the day pointed me in the direction
Translating at the Nuremberg Trials

of the World Council of Churches, but I chose Nuremberg, because I needed to get to Germany – as any Modern Languages student would have done already, had we not been at war. So I went – firstly – for linguistic reasons; secondly, because of the US-style, untaxed pay; and thirdly, from interest. I can’t put it any higher than that. We took language tests, in which I was much surprised by the frequent appearance of the word Wirtschaft, which the excellent eighteenth-century German I had acquired at Oxford led me to interpret as an inn, or hostelry. Fortunately dictionaries were allowed. My own, the one I used all the time, was printed in Schrift…

I got the job, was asked to be ready to board General Telford Taylor’s private plane at Northolt – I took this to be quite normal! – and was driven by my mother to the airport. Her last words to me as I left were, “You will come straight back, won’t you, darling, if there’s anything nasty…”

There was one other woman, a London graduate, in that intake, two young men with quietly impeccable army service and German mother-tongue (though both were English), and (already there) three older people, two women and one man, who appeared to me to have been there forever, and in whose background I never took any interest at all. To this little English bunch gravitated three of the most interesting interpreters, all naturalized British, all of distinguished German-Jewish background. So we were the one British section in the American-run Palace of Justice in Nuremberg in 1947. The seven other language sections were American, almost exclusively composed of refugees from the Nazi regime at the beginning of the war.

I had not lived very far from London and had heard and seen, without directly experiencing, the Blitz, watched dogfights overhead and the criss-crossing searchlights seeking their targets countless times – visited London, when first the Blitzkrieg, and then the war were over – but none of that could have prepared me for Nuremberg.

Nuremberg, in 1947, consisted largely of long lines of heaped-up rubble, formless, meaningless and in no way indicative of a place where people had lived. By 1947, however, having been chosen as the site of the Trials, the occupying powers had had the Palace of Justice (a fine, long, impressive building) patched up, and had also patched up the Grand Hotel to house single senior American officers and officials, including, for instance, senior operatives, interpreters and others, of the Office of the Chief of Council for War Crimes (OCCWC). The railway station was also in use, though lacking any amenities whatever. Admirably, we thought, the German inhabitants – or the people who emerged from the rubble-covered cellars every morning – had themselves set about the reconstruction of the Opera.
I attended its first performance. Was *Madame Butterfly*, with its story of foreign occupation, an ironic choice, or a serious artistic preference?

All the other OCCWC staff lived on the edges of Nuremberg – the leafy suburbs, so to speak. Unless and until we acquired vehicles of our own, we were well served by the official buses, but the house I lived in had the disadvantage of standing opposite one of the rather casually guarded American arms stores. Thefts from this store, and the consequent risks, inspired me to want a gun. I had never fired a rifle (or any other firearm) in my life, but the Provost Marshal was happy to hand me out an army rifle as soon as I asked for one. Sadly, as we know, this has its echoes in America to this day.

If you look up “Nuremberg Trials” in a basic reference book, you will find the dates “1945-6”, and it’s possible some of you reading this found the dates in my title – 1947-9 – surprising. Or else, they didn’t mean much to you, and you assumed that I had been at work there when Göring, Robbentrop, Schacht, Hess, Speer, Kaltenbrunner and their like were tried. In fact, and with good reason, the trials of German *Bonzen* (bigwigs) war criminals continued for two more years. The two trials with which I was concerned were typical: the medical case, which we called the “Doctors’ Trial”, and the IG Farben case.

Opening the case for the prosecution in the Doctors’ Trial, General Telford Taylor, the American Chief Prosecutor, stated: “A nation which deliberately infects itself with poison will inevitably sicken and die. These defendants and others turned Germany into an infernal combination of a lunatic asylum and a charnel house… I do not think the German people have as yet any conception of how deeply the criminal folly that was Nazism bit into every phase of German life… We will show that in some instances the true object of [their] experiments was not how to rescue or to cure, but how to destroy and kill.”

The “experiments” referred to fall into thirteen categories: High Altitude Experiments; Freezing Experiments; Mustard Gas Experiments; Bone, Muscle and Nerve Regeneration Experiments; Head Injury Experiments; Experiments on Twins; Sea Water Experiments; Epidemic Jaundice Experiments; Sterilization Experiments; Typhus Experiments; Poison Experiments; Incendiary Bomb Experiments; and finally the Leather Experiments, which didn’t even pretend to a medical objective, in which victims were murdered for their skin – tattooed skin was particularly valued – which was then put to the uses common to leather from animal sources.

The Prosecution’s summary concluded, in part: “… the medical experiments were not an assortment of unrelated crimes, but a well-integrated criminal programme in which the defendants planned and collaborated among themselves
and with others.”

Of the sixteen doctors sentenced, seven were condemned to death by hanging, five to life imprisonment, and four to terms of imprisonment ranging from ten to twenty years.

On the whole, the British section did not go into the Courthouse to hear the judges passing sentence; not, I think, from squeamishness – the type of material we handled daily would militate against that – but because there was something about attendance at such times that smacked of vengeance, bloodthirstiness – even now, as you can tell, I can’t quite define it. However, there was one exception: the sentencing of Oswald Pohl. Not much heard of over here I think, his was an atrocious name at Nuremberg. He was the head of the organization of the Einsatzgruppen, the Special Action Squads, and responsible for the administration of the concentration camps.

Pohl’s sentencing had been postponed because of some legal flaw in the course of his trial; I can’t remember what it was, but the judges took it very seriously (there was concern from the start of the Nuremberg Trials that all proceedings must be legal, and that even in the appalling circumstances of the subject, there should be no sudden invention of categories of crime that were not already recognised). So the heavy, grey-faced man reappeared in the Courtroom some time after his trial by the International Military Tribunal, and in the midst of the non-international – the American – trial series. He was then condemned. But before that he was asked by some less observant official to raise his hand. I don’t know what part of the legal process that was, but it was a gift to a thug like Pohl. Looking round the Courtroom with furious irony, he raised his two manacled hands. The order was hastily withdrawn and Pohl was asked if he wished to make a statement. Crashing the manacled wrists down on the table in front of him, he shouted, “This trial is a farce. I have already admitted to direct or indirect responsibility for the deaths of six million Jews. In the same circumstances, I would do it all again. That is all.”

Probably another reason for not going to the Courtroom (as many sections of the language division did) was our way of life. We worked extremely hard – partly from vanity, because we knew that we, our one section, produced as much work as the other seven put together, and partly because we greatly valued our free time and preferred to work very long hours during the week in order to avoid weekend work (not always possible) and to be in a position to enjoy our unique selection of public holidays. There was a high proportion of linguists of Jewish background (I hesitate to say “faith” because, for instance, I don’t remember any provision for Jewish services or any attempt to restore a synagogue at that time – most of these had, of course, been destroyed under Nazism before the war). So we celebrated (or
rather, we went off to Munich, Salzburg, or other centres of an artistic civilization that had once again burst into flower after the years of totalitarian suppression) on every Jewish holiday – for some reason I remember Rosh Hashanah with special affection.

Then again, we were living in Catholic Bavaria and the German clerical and cleaning staff had to be given all the Catholic holidays – and we had them, too. And then there were the predominantly Protestant holidays allotted to the whole of the American occupying force. So, with our special status in Germany, and to some extent in Europe as a whole, our American money, our enormous petrol allowance and so on, we had travel opportunities not then enjoyed by the majority. And, of course, we had the PX, the Post Exchange. One rather odd result of this, as far as I was concerned, is that my letters home, kept by my mother and containing many memories of the events of those years, are also crammed with details of the goods that were still largely unobtainable in post-war Britain – dress materials and beautiful china appear very frequently, with suggestions for “orders” I might bring home for my immediate family and all my aunts and cousins…

The indictments in the IG Farben Trial were of course somewhat, though not entirely different in kind from those of the Doctors’ Trial. They were:

- Planning, Preparation, Initiation and Waging of Wars of Aggression and Invasion, involving an alliance with Hitler and the Nazi party.
- Plunder and Spoliation: for instance, organizing the acquisition of the chemical industries of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, France, Russia and other countries.
- Slavery and Mass Murder, involving the enslavement and deportation of civilian populations from areas occupied by Germany; enslavement of concentration camp inmates; use of prisoners-of-war in war operations.
- Under count 4, defendants were accused of being members of the SS, that organization having already been declared criminal by the then International Military Tribunal.
- Conspiracy – all the defendants were accused of being implicated in a common plot to commit crimes against peace.

Examination of the defendants aimed to uncover their reasons for helping Hitler to power, much of the questioning being based on German economic documents indicating a thirst for power as well as profit; a plan to marshal the chemical industry of Europe – including Britain – to wage war against the world. Soviet resources were to be exploited most ruthlessly “even if many millions of
people are starved to death”.

The defendants were members of the board of directors of IG Farben, or the directors of the individual manufacturing plants, attached to the concentration camps.

In the event, only counts 1 and 2 of the indictment were pursued to the end, as it was too difficult to attach responsibility to the individual defendants for crimes against humanity actually executed by the SS. Guilt by association is always a complex issue, and as you all know, we are even now keenly arguing the status of what we now call “corporate guilt” – if I remember rightly it was referred to at Nuremberg as “institutional” or “organizational” criminality.

Five of the defendants were found guilty under count 3 (slave labour) and received sentences of six to eight years’ imprisonment. All denied the legality of the trial. Eight were found guilty under count 2 (plunder and spoliation) and received sentences of eighteen months to three years’ imprisonment.

I had an amazing two years at Nuremberg – privileged, shocking, life-changing – spent all my spare time with a very special group of friends, and returned in 1949 to my own beloved country, where everyone, including my own parents, preferred not to ask, not to think, not to know anything at all about the death camps and everything that preceded them. Only my cousin John, a coeval child of Empire (I do hope people haven’t forgotten their Kipling stories altogether – he still has a lot to say to us) asked me, very quietly, “What do you really think?” And he was probably the only person to whom I could reply “There, but for the Grace of God…”

Afterword

In 1999, I received an award for the translation of The Final Journey, by Gudrun Pausewang, a book about the 24 hours spent in one of the infamous cattle-trucks by a twelve-year-old German Jewish girl on her way to Auschwitz. In my acceptance speech I asked whether it was still important for English-speaking children to be able to read this book, 50 years after the gates of the death camps were opened? I used four brief, personal memories to explain why I thought it was:

1) My first job was as a translator, from 1947 to 1949, at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials, probably the most publicized trials in history.

2) In 1966, a 23-year-old German graduate, the daughter of educated and agreeable parents, came to us as an au pair. It was not long before she asked us if we could tell her about the persecution of the Jews in Germany, as nobody there, either schools or parents, would talk about it.

3) Time, and public perception, moved on. One night in 1994 I was taken out
to dinner in Berlin, by a group of German writers in their thirties and forties. How on earth, they wanted to know, could I bear to read their language, study it, even translate it? I found that question as astonishing, I must admit as our au pair’s question nearly 30 years earlier.

4) And finally, in the late 1990s, in Wiltshire, where I live, a young mother asked if I could speak to her children’s school about what is now known as the Holocaust, as they seemed to have been taught nothing about it.

The Final Journey knits together those four memories, scattered over 50 years, and answers the question with which I introduced them. Yes, of course it is important for English-speaking children to be able to read books like it.
The second cleanest profession in the USSR

My mother wanted me to become a doctor. If not a doctor – then a literary translator. She would start speaking about my future and say with conviction that in our country there were only two “clean” professions – firstly, medicine, secondly, literary translation. She wouldn’t be more specific, so I took it as an axiom.

When she saw that I was hopeless at chemistry and physics and that I showed little interest in biology, she started pushing me towards the second option. She was a schoolteacher, she knew how to manipulate people.

Just one example of her scheming. At home there was a bookshelf up very high where, mother told me, were the books for adults. I was not to touch them until I was old enough to understand them. Of course when I was alone I read them all, to the last page. I was probably the youngest living creature in the world to read the two volumes of Anna Karenina and the four volumes of War and Peace. I didn’t understand much, but I developed a lifelong habit of reading difficult books.

To interest me in reading books in English (the language I was studying at school without enthusiasm), my mother took me to the Moscow Library of Foreign Literature, recently reopened after renovation. The building was brand new, all glass and steel. In socialist Moscow of 1969 it looked like a miracle of modernity, a temple of light. Even the compulsory Lenin statue was not like the one at school, three metres high and gilded, but small, sort of cubist, very chic. And there were no kids, as no one under sixteen could get a subscription.

I immediately felt that I wanted to belong to that world. Even the queue behaved differently from all other Soviet queues: everybody was so polite, so patient, so soft-spoken. They are all translators, I thought. I also thought I understood why translation was a profession second only to medicine in its sterile attire. I demanded that mother take out a subscription for me in her name, then I was allowed to take a book. Not knowing what to order I chose the thickest volume from the display and promised myself I would read it to the end no matter what. Hadn’t I read War and Peace, after all?

Unfortunately the book turned out to be The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck.
In the beginning I had to write out at least 50 unknown words from each page. I did force my way through it, I had to keep my word, but I’ve never touched a Steinbeck book since then. An adolescent trauma.

The second English book, *Scaramouch* by Raphael Sabatini, was a relief, a treat. I started translating it immediately for a friend who was unlucky enough to have to study German at school. After a couple of pages I found it easier to tell the story in my own words, embellishing it along the way – a premonition of what was to become of me eventually. But at thirteen I didn’t want to be a writer, I wanted to translate.

The real meaning of what my mother had in mind when she called literary translation “a clean profession” and why it was less “clean” than medicine became clear to me later as I was growing up and learning the art of adjusting to the real world.

Here I must digress in order to explain the rather specific position of writers and philologists in the Soviet Union.

Adolf Hitler was a failed painter. Joseph Stalin was a failed poet.

Stalin must have envisaged his dictatorship as some sort of epic poem, the beauty of which should be admired. And it was admired, genuinely or falsely, voluntarily or otherwise. In any case, no criticism of that great work of poetry was tolerated.

It was bad luck for Russian literature that Stalin thought highly of literature. For him it meant that literature was politically important. The dictator grew up in an era when Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov were iconic figures in Russia, influencing not only Russian literature but the whole of society.

Stalin evidently despised all three of them for their uselessness and even harmfulness. He needed his own socialist Tolstoys. And with his arithmetical practical-mindedness, his endless contempt for human nature, he was sure that he knew how to achieve this goal.

The chaotic and uncontrollable world of literary creation had to be put in order. Stalin *directed and organized the process*, as it was called then.

He put the nightingale in a gilded cage by founding in 1934 the Writers’ Union, which put Soviet authors in a privileged position both financially and status-wise – in return for complete loyalty.

Those writers who didn’t agree to be locked in a cage or who misbehaved were purged or barred from publishing. The majority, though, didn’t mind playing by the rules. By the end of the Soviet era there were some ten thousand registered members in the Writers’ Union. Candidates would conspire for years trying to get there.

When I was a student in the 1970s writing was a coveted profession – but at the same time there was something shameful in it. In Moscow and in Leningrad there
were quite a number of informal literary clubs and groups whose members actually took pride in the fact that they didn’t want to be published. Those people would ask about a new name: “Is she a poet or a published poet? Is he a writer or a Writers’ Union member?”

That’s why my mother didn’t want me to become a writer. For her and her milieu it definitely wasn’t a clean profession.

But literary translation was.

Stalin’s directorship of the writing world was awful for Russian literature, which quickly lost all of its previous greatness, but it proved to be a blessing for literary translation.

When authors of talent, even of genius, were not allowed to publish their works or were afraid to write the way they wanted – they turned to translation. Boris Pasternak was secretly writing his Doctor Zhivago while surviving on translations of Shakespeare, Keats or Schiller; Anna Akhmatova, banned from publishing her own poems, earned her living by translating Chinese and Korean classics; Mikhail Zoschenko had to translate Finnish prose and he did it brilliantly. That’s what almost all the big guns did – they translated other authors’ works. As a result the school of Soviet translation rose to an incredible height. It had its own stars, even cult figures. A literary translator, even if he was a member of the despised Writers’ Union, was welcome in any underground literary club, even the most snobbish of them.

And still it was less clean than medicine. Here my mother was right again. The rose of literary translation was not without its thorns.

You couldn’t translate just any author you wanted and then offer it to a publisher, no way. There was an undisclosed but widely known list of forbidden and half-forbidden writers, the latter category including the afore-mentioned Steinbeck for instance. Of all his novels, I think, only The Grapes of Wrath, with its description of the hardships of the Depression, was approved for publishing.

And it was always safer to translate a writer who was already dead. With living authors one never knew what to expect. A “progressive writer and a big friend of the Soviet Union” (that was a sort of honorary title) could say something stupid about Czechoslovakia, the dissidents or, God forbid, Solzhenitsyn – and never be published in Russian again.

Anything at all could happen.

There was a Japanese author, Abe Kobo, considered to be undoubtedly “progressive” because he was, I think, a member of the Communist Party of Japan. His prose was very popular in the Soviet Union of the 1960s and 1970s. Translations of Abe made the translator, my professor at university, a celebrity in his own right. Then Abe fell out of grace with the Japanese communists, they reported on him to
Moscow, and Abe immediately became a persona non grata for Soviet publishers – a professional tragedy for his translator.

Another thorn was censorship. And I don’t mean political censorship – all dubious authors and titles would have been excluded at the pre-translation stage. No, it was a peculiar sort of censorship called “moral-ethical editing”. There could be no sexually explicit descriptions in a published text. An editor would cross out all the “immoral” scenes, and if it could not be done without ruining the logic of the plot, the editor would urge the translator to “soften the sharp angles”, as it was called.

In the 1980s when I started to work for the magazine Foreign Literature all these restrictions were still in force, so, being an editor, I had plenty of opportunity to see how it worked. It was very Victorian, actually. Some things were not mentioned, some words did not exist.

I remember our proof-reader correcting the word “orgasm” to “organism” without the slightest hesitation. The lady thought it was a misprint.

(Oh yes, that reminds me of the most celebrated misprint in the history of the magazine. A typesetter, probably hung-over or not quite sober, composed “Marxism de Sade” – instead of “Marquis de Sade”).

So, when I was young, literary translation could not be called an impeccably clean profession. Second cleanest was more like it.

I wanted to translate and to live by translation, but not like that, picking my authors from among the “progressive friends of the USSR” and “softening the sharp angles” afterwards.

So I found a compromise.

The bliss of translation

On graduating from university I did become a translator, and I began to earn my living by practising this trade, but I kept work and pleasure apart.

For money I translated technical documents: scientific articles, patents, licences. It paid well and it was as clean as medicine. And for my own pleasure I translated fiction, books that impressed me and were a challenge for my translation skills. I did not even try to find a publisher, it would have been hopeless and maybe even risky.

For an audience I had my friends. They were unpublished writers and poets, I was an unpublished translator, it was absolutely normal for the time. Besides I had my wife. Her marital duty was to read and retype my translations and of course to say what a wonderful translator I was. So my audience was small, but reliable.

I must say that it was the most cloudless period of my whole career as a translator. Pure art unsoiled by greed.

There are a lot of bonuses for someone who translates just for himself. No
deadlines, you go as fast as you want and you work only when you feel like working. In later years I learned to translate quickly, sometimes very quickly. It felt like gulping down a bottle of fine wine, splashing some of the precious liquid in the process, because a publisher would be tapping me impatiently on the shoulder.

In the blessed times of Samizdat you didn’t care whether your translation would sell or not, the print-run was determined by how many copies your typewriter could produce. Mine produced four. And when I was sitting down to translate it was leisure, not work.

I loved every minute and every stage of it.

You know that there are different metaphors concerning literary translation. The one most frequently used likens translation to transplanting a foreign tree or flower into local soil while harming it as little as possible. Alexander Pushkin (rather condescendingly, I think) said that translators were the post-horses of enlightenment.

Working on a translation I felt neither like a horse, nor like a gardener.

For me it was more like restoring a work of art, covered by an ugly and irritating layer of foreign language that didn’t let Russians admire it. This work of art was a mosaic. My task was to clean every tiny tessera. They were fragile, very easy to break, so I had to be careful with my brush. Careful but not timid. If you were too cautious you could restore every single piece of the mosaic, but harm its magic. I knew that a translation which was mathematically correct but devoid of the translator’s personality would kill the magic.

With a language so distant from my own as Japanese, translating prose was like translating poetry. Freedom and inspiration were the key words.

Grammar was a trap, an enemy. I know many translations from Japanese where all the weight goes to the last part of a phrase, because in that language the end of a sentence determines everything. The Russian sentence is flexible and loose, putting the stress on the ending makes a phrase sound pompous and heavy. Irony and humour are expressed by other means. Exquisiteness and coarseness function differently. Allusions and metaphors belong to another cultural universe. A translator from Japanese must be very resourceful, sometimes even cheeky.

I found my favourite author almost immediately. He had two irresistible features. First, he was an absolute taboo in the USSR. Second, he was impossibly hard to translate.

I am talking about Yukio Mishima, famous for his style and notorious for his ideology which eventually led him to hara-kiri.

In the Soviet Union Mishima was considered to be an epitome of decadence, moral corruption and political subversion, a devil reincarnate. We, future japanologists, were not given his books to read, but I remembered from my university literature
course the titles of Mishima’s poisonous books. They all seemed to be “hymns” to something awful. The novel *Confessions of a Mask* was a hymn to perversity; the novel *Kinkakuji* was a hymn to destruction, the novella “Patriotism” was a hymn to suicide, and the play *My Friend Hitler* was, naturally, a hymn to fascism. It all sounded so intriguing that I became Mishima’s fan even before I’d actually read his books.

With time I translated all of the afore-mentioned titles and many more. Mishima taught me many things on the professional level. I shall mention just one of them, the most important one of all.

When I was translating *Kinkakuji* (“The Temple of the Golden Pavilion” as it is known in the West), I had at hand the English translation – very meticulous, authorized by Mishima himself. Everything was impeccably correct – and yet still something was amiss.

You see, Mishima is not a clever author, most of his ideas about life and society would leave you uninterested. Neither is he an especially gifted builder of plots. The story isn’t his forte. With Mishima, the nuances are more important than the ideas he advances; Shade means so much more than Light. But his narration is so elegant, his style so powerful, that it makes up for the banalities and showing-off. There is plenty of shallowness in Mishima’s works, but strangely it only increases the impression of genuineness and beauty. It turns into a melody that I can always hear when I am reading Mishima.

In the English translation this melody was silent.

The saddest disappointments were the descriptions of nature. Mishima is famous for his “landscapes”. Everybody knows that describing skies, meadows and mountains is the hardest thing in modern fiction. It usually looks so unnecessary, so pretentious, so boring. I always miss out those bits when reading. When writing I keep to the golden rule: the shorter the better. “It was raining”, “the sky was cloudy” – and that’s it.

Not so with Mishima. You can actually see what he describes, and landscape is always an important part of his narration. His descriptions of nature can be quite long, but you are never bored.

How does he achieve this, I wondered. And how can I reproduce this effect in translation?

I remember how I tried to translate a fragment describing a sea view from *Kinkakuji*. I did it several times, each time differently, and still I was not satisfied. (There was no deadline, you remember.) Then I understood that the secret lay in the sounds. The passage had to be read aloud. It was like a mantra, the combination of sounds and words – the trick was to capture this combination, not the meaning.
And when I translated the passage again, making it sound like a mantra in Russian too, I liked the result.

Then I discovered that every single phrase in Mishima’s books was a mantra. A sentence becomes a mantra when every word is in its exact place and cannot be changed for another word. Every syllable is a part of a mosaic and cannot be moved. It’s like a poem, only in prose there is more oxygen, more air.

In order to make a good translation of Mishima I had to become a Russian Mishima inside. Which is of course easier said than done.

Do you know how Mishima described the process of writing? It feels, he said, as if you have saddled the planet and are flying through the Universe with stars whizzing by and scratching your cheeks.

Well, that’s the picture I tried to imagine before sitting down to translate *Kinkakuji*. Sometimes it worked.

After a while I discovered a very useful trick. Since every good book has a hidden melody you should try to find the closest possible equivalent to it.

I would try to find a melody – it could be anything from classical music to a pop song – that would put me on the same sound wave as this particular text. Before translating a chapter I would listen to this music for a couple of minutes, and then the process of translation usually went almost as Mishima described.

I use this method now, when I write fiction, but in a more sophisticated manner. I have collected an audio-library of melodies that put me in a certain mood. Every episode in a book has its rhythm, its colour, its nuance of feeling. So I tune myself in. I have melodies for all shades of emotion: “vague anxiety”, “fearlessness”, “unrequited love”, “not-a-care-in-the-world”, “smiling through tears” – anything. Whenever I hear a melody that moves me in a certain manner, I mark it and record it for later use. It does spoil the pleasure of listening to music, but, you know, a writer, no matter what he does, is always on the alert for tidbits that could be used in a text. It’s like in Chekhov’s *The Seagull* when the writer Trigorin says: “I’ll see a cloud that looks like a camel and I’ll think – I have to put that in a story…”

I often feel nostalgia for the era when I was a translator and could look at clouds in an un-predatory way. You cannot be a part-time writer. You are a writer even when you sleep. When I was a translator I felt much freer.

This feeling of freedom reached its peak during the Perestroika years when all the ideological taboos were abolished. I was able to publish all the translations that I had done just for my own pleasure.

I was thirty when my first book of translations was published. I knew it would be a big day for my mother, so I hadn’t told her anything – I wanted to show her the book already printed.
We went to visit her, me and my wife. Mother looked at the book, then she looked – not at me, but at my wife – and said something awfully tactless: “You married very well indeed, didn’t you, my girl?” I don’t know what came over her, she had always been a very polite mother-in-law. None of my later achievements impressed her to that extent.

I was a translator for twenty years. In Russia it was like belonging to the clergy or a sacred order. Philologists formed a kind of community with unwritten rules. Some things were just not tolerated. A critic, a translator, a researcher of literature could experiment with writing poetry or fiction, but it had to be serious – that is, sophisticated, dark and respectably boring. Most of the literary awards in Russia go to this sort of writing.

I am often asked why I took a pseudonym when I started writing fiction. The answer is simple. Cowardice.

I was working for a highly esteemed literary magazine, I was a translator with a name. Had it been known that I publish, for God’s sake, crime novels, I would have lost face. So, for as long as possible, I was hiding the fact that Boris Akunin, the new phenomenon of mass literature, was me. Sometimes I had to endure discussions about that filthy profiteer led in my presence by colleagues.

Ever since the truth leaked out I have been treated by part of that community as though I were a defrocked priest.

And this is not a specifically Russian phenomenon. I have a number of friends and acquaintances in the Japanese “Bundan” – as the literary world is called there. Japanese are much politer than Russians – when they are sober. I didn’t even guess that my Japanese friends were also shocked by my transformation, until one of them, a professor and a celebrated translator of Dostoyevsky, called me, over an empty bottle of sake, “a traitor to Junbungaku”.

Junbungaku means “clean literature” in Japanese – as opposed to “taishubungaku”, mass literature.

So, it was about cleanness again.

Shadow’s mutiny

I shall try to explain why I became a traitor to Junbungaku, why I changed my clean profession for an unclean one.

There were some mitigating circumstances.

As I was approaching 40, not an easy milestone for anybody, I suddenly realized that I had lost the urge to translate. It had become a routine, and that had always been my idea of a senseless existence – when life becomes routine.

I was not moving anywhere. I had reached the peak of my capacity as a translator.
I could translate for another 40 years and still be at the same level of skill. This perspective frightened me.

Then I began to notice a new tendency within myself. I would start feeling irritated with the author I was translating. “Come on, these preliminaries are taking far too long, come to the point!” – I would think. Or: “That episode should have been devised differently”.

It was neither normal, nor reasonable. It was worrying. My favourite Russian playwright Evgeny Shvartz has a play in which the shadow of the protagonist rebels against its master because it’s sick and tired of following him everywhere and faithfully reflecting all his idiotic movements. The shadow in the play separates from the man and starts a life of its own.

Something like that happened to me.

When I sat down to write my first novel (I didn’t bother with the smaller stuff, like a short story or a novella) I felt very sure of myself. My mood was: “I’ll show you all” – and I didn’t mean readers, I meant other authors.

When I finished it I was immensely pleased with the result – and endlessly surprised when at first nobody wanted to publish the novel and then very few people wanted to buy it.

I was stubborn, I wrote and wrote till the audience gave up. And I was lucky. My fountain started to gush at the moment when a new class, the middle class, was emerging in Russia and they wanted middle of the road reading – not too light, not too heavy. My genre fit in perfectly.

Now, having published about 50 titles, I’ve lost much of my initial confidence. To be honest, I have lost all of it. I suspect (and am being told by unfriendly critics) that I was better as a translator than as a writer.

On the other hand, this dissatisfaction probably motivates me to keep on moving. I tell myself that I can do better, so there is no question of routine. You just have to jump higher. Then one day maybe you’ll fly and feel stars scratching your cheeks.

I should add that my mother never approved of my metamorphosis. She read my novels with a pencil and asked me questions about the plots, she watched screen adaptations and attended theatre premieres, she even collected nice articles about Boris Akunin – but she was never a fan. For her it all was a whim of mine, a temporary diversion. She just had to be patient.

Right until the end of her life, when I visited her on Sundays, she would ask every now and then: “What are you writing now? Is it one of your Fandorin novels again? You should give yourself a break and write something serious…” – And then she’d finish, with a tinge of hope: “… or maybe even translate something?”
I am a literary agent at Rogers Coleridge and White Ltd and specialise in translation rights. When an author signs with the agency, the primary agent submits the author’s book to British and American publishers. As soon as the work is placed with a publishing house, I start looking for publishers around the world who will want to translate it into their own language and publish it in their country. I have to have a comprehensive overview of publishing houses in all the territories I am handling. I also often share the manuscript with literary scouts who will report on it to their international clients and advise them as to the quality of the work as well as its international potential. Their endorsement of a particular book can be of great help.

In reality, the process starts much earlier, usually during the first reading of a manuscript, when I will almost subconsciously think of which particular editor will have affinities with the book and which publishing houses have the right profile. Occasionally, an off-track conversation with a publisher will echo fruitfully years later. Ultimately, my work consists in matching an author with the best publisher for that particular writer: not necessarily the biggest or most prominent publisher, but the one who will give that writer the greatest exposure, who will nurture her / his career in their country and be there to publish her / his subsequent books. My aim is to find the right home for an author in each country. Placing translation rights widely can make a crucial difference to an authors’ financial situation and play a part in helping some of them carve out more time for their writing, and in some cases make it possible for them to write full time. In addition, foreign sales can lead to critical success and literary prizes in a number of territories, all of which contribute to the prestige and international standing of an author.

I have to keep an eye on all changes: structural changes in the publishing world of each country I work with, in order to spot a new editor who might like a particular book I haven’t placed yet, or a change of editorial direction which may suit some authors but be detrimental to others. I also have to keep up with cultural changes. For instance, when I started selling translation rights, placing crime fiction in Spain was almost impossible as the emphasis was strongly on historical fiction. This is no longer the case and the trends have now been reversed. Whilst the great majority of publishers are interested in the most recently delivered manuscripts by completely new talents, many also have an eye on authors of the past who may have fallen into oblivion into their country and are ready to be revived, or who
may have been missed altogether. Authors such as Nancy Mitford, Angela Carter, P.G. Wodehouse and J.G. Farrell come to mind. In recent years, very inventive small independent publishing houses have appeared in many countries, often set up by highly experienced editors. They buy less than bigger publishing houses but have strong editorial lines and lower overheads, are often loved by critics and booksellers and successfully launch authors who have not appealed to bigger publishing houses. They add great versatility to the mix and we include them in our submissions on a very regular basis.

Not giving up is an essential part of being an agent. Some books catch fire and sell very widely in translation, auctions ensue when several publishers in the same territory start bidding to acquire rights and much excitement is created. In many cases, though, it can take months or even years for a particular author to be translated. An essential part of being an agent consists in ensuring that authors stay in print, that backlist titles do not fade away completely, so that an author’s full body of work remains available in all the languages in which the author is published.

Translation is an intrinsic part of the work I do once a book is placed with international publishing houses. I have to ensure that a final, translatable manuscript is made available to all translators on time; occasionally convey to the author the alternative titles suggested by publishers who feel that a literal translation will not work in their country, as well as synchronize publications in several territories and the trips that often accompany them. Working closely with the publicists in each country and knowing the key publications, television and radio shows in these territories is essential, in order to be able to give the author a sense of context. I translate quotes from the best reviews in the languages I read, and ask for the help of the foreign publishers for the languages I don’t read in order to cross-reference all the foreign editions and give everyone involved as full a picture as possible. Occasionally, a book will be particularly successful in a foreign territory and that success can help boost more modest sales in the original language.

In addition to handling translation rights for the agency’s English language authors, I also represent several non-Anglophones. On the surface, the process is the same, but in reality, it differs greatly. On a purely linguistic level, I have to ensure that I have an excellent sample translation into English prior to submitting the work. Publishers rely on trusted readers but often want to be able to read something themselves in order to get a feel of the writing. This is of particular importance when submitting to an English language publisher but less when submitting a Spanish language novel in territories where there are many translations from that language for instance, since much depends on the relationship publishers have
with their readers. If that reader is called upon very regularly, the trust and mutual understanding will be much greater than for publishers who may only call on a reader a handful of times a year. Happily, this is changing and a great number of British and American publishers are now much more interested in translation than they were a few years ago, have a greater pool of readers and are keener to acquire translations. Beyond the linguistic element, there are many other considerations: is the work written in a style and tradition that will appeal to readers? How much existing interest is there in the literature from that particular country? Again, I am happy to say that the most limiting considerations have faded away and that publishers are overly interested in the quality and originality of a work and much less in whether it has “local colour” or not. This is very much the spirit in which I represent these authors whose mother tongue happens not to be English: as talented authors of very good literature who fit on the list of our agency alongside all the other authors.

The Editor’s Tale
Michal Shavit

As editorial director at Harvill Secker, an imprint of Random House, I am looking to commission and acquire the best international writing from around the world. This involves reading submissions from international agents and publishers, but also keeping my ear to the ground for writers and books that might not come from traditional avenues.

Half of what we publish at Harvill Secker is in translation which means I am very reliant on a group of very trusted readers (usually translators themselves) in a whole variety of different languages who can write reports on those books that I can’t read, and on the basis of their written reports, as well as other indicators such as the reception the book received in its own country, the reviews it received, any prizes it might have won, I decide whether to pursue that book further or not. If I decide that I do want to publish the book, it is then my job to convince colleagues of the reasons why and how I envisage we do that. Acquiring books for a publishing house involves a lot of different people, not just the editor who is the first to feel passionately about the book – it involves people from the rest of the editorial team, publicity, sales and marketing. It is important that as many people as possible in-house feel positively about the books we acquire to get the
maximum impact on publication.

Once a book is acquired, I then have to think of who I’d like to translate it. Every author is different as is every translator. Matching translators with books is an intuitive business a lot of the time on the part of the editor, but it’s also dependent on whether or not the translator likes the book and feels that they can work well with the text. Some translators need a lot of editorial input whereas some produce very clean translations that need very little work. Working with translators is a large and important part of what I do and it is based on a dialogue that is often very collaborative, creative and fascinating.

Editing translations is quite different to editing English-language novels and non-fiction as the book in question may already exist in a number of different language publications around the world – so there is often less structural editing involved – but the process remains the same. First I will edit; then the manuscript is sent to a copy-editor, who will edit for consistency and house style; the book is then set by a typesetter; and finally the proofs are read against the copy-edit by a proofreader, who will check for errors in the setting, and the translator will also read those proofs and make any final corrections to their translation. Ultimately the goal is the same for all books: to make them as good as they can possibly be and for them to read well. Translators need not only love the book and the language they are translating from, but they ultimately need to love their own language. The best translators I have worked with have a passion and feel for the English language that is truly exceptional.

My work as a commissioning editor on an international list such as Harvill Secker involves a network of people in the international community including writers, translators, book scouts, literary agents, foreign publishers, literary critics and readers all of whom feed into the work that I do and the books that I then select for publication. It is through this network of people that I hear about books that open up new worlds.

Recent years have seen a significant change in the way translated fiction is perceived by the book trade and by readers alike. The success of bestselling books like The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo by Stieg Larsson, Phantom by Jo Nesbø, HHhH by Laurent Binet and The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed out of the Window and Disappeared by Jonas Jonasson is testament to that. Good storytelling can come from anywhere and the point is not that it is a “translated” book but that it is a great book that deserves to be read by as many people as possible.
A translation normally comes to me with a bit of history as the publisher provides background on the author and the translator. Preliminary discussions may sometimes include a conversation about a few points in the text that have already been picked up on.

My approach to copy-editing is probably not very orthodox and I’m not sure I can say it’s the right approach or the only way to do things. I come to it not just from an editorial angle, but as a writer too. It is hard to shut out that viewpoint. My preference is to work on translations from languages I speak, namely French and Italian. I start by reading the original text, trying to get a feel for the language, the imagery, the tone, sussing out the traits of each character, gauging the mannerisms of the dialogue, the level of slang, the sentence construction, anything that gives the writing a specific identity. I then go to the translation and read that through once, almost in one go, trying not to pay too much attention to any particular grammatical or wording issues unless they immediately jump out at me. My aim is to try and retain the language of the original text mentally while seeing if I’m getting a similar feeling from the translation. In short, are the emotions, the characters and musicality of the language mirrored in a similar way? Am I left, at the end of the translation, with the same impressions as I had reading the original? I will then start circling or highlighting words in the English that seem to stick out or grate in some way. I will return to these sticking points over the course of the copy-editing and try and find a way to address them. I then start the nitty-gritty of the work, sentence by sentence, often referring back to the original, checking specific meanings, possibly attempting to work out a better way of saying something that seems a bit convoluted or which gives a different sense. It’s vital to me, though, not to forget that the veracity and authenticity of the text in English is just as important. The English has to be as smooth and fluid as possible. It has to feel a hundred per cent real and readable. I’m looking to make sure that nothing overtly betrays the text as a translation.

During the copy-editing process there is always quite a bit of to-ing and fro-ing with the translator on unresolved issues. Sometimes this requires going back to the author with a series of precise questions (the translator and author may have already struck up a working relationship). A couple of e-mails normally clarifies problems. The translator then gets a chance to reread through any changes we have agreed on at the next proofreading stage.
I am the Sales and Marketing Manager at Saqi Books in London. Saqi Books is thirty years old this year and was set up to bring writing and culture from the Middle East to the UK. Over those thirty years we have strongly been associated with publishing books about Middle East and Arabic culture, many of the titles having been translated from Arabic and in some instances from French. In recent years, with the creation of Telegram Books, we have branched out into publishing fiction in translation from around the world. Novels from China and Iceland have won literary awards and a title originally published in Russia was made a Waterstones “Book of the Month” over August last year. We have also published books from Korea, Spain, Hungary, Croatia and in one case a novel translated from Faroese.

My job within the company is to manage the sales and marketing parts of our business. We have distributors based in the UK, North America, Australia and Beirut. Our distributors hold our stock, process orders and control invoicing and payments. In some instances they also provide marketing and publicity.

The everyday work of visiting accounts, large and small is handled by several independent sales teams who work for commission on net sales. In North America and Australia the same companies handle stock, whilst in the UK, Europe, Africa and the Middle East the teams visit accounts on a regular basis and maintain relationships with them. For example our Icelandic author, Sjón, has just been shortlisted for the 2013 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Prize. I dealt with an order from an Irish Library supplier, but the chasing up of orders from the Irish wholesale and retail trade was done by our sales team, Durnell Marketing.

Each team works differently, but my role is to make sure that they understand our books, and where we would expect them to sell copies. A good team will tend to know immediately what they can do with each individual title. I manage this part of the business with a remit to make sure that these teams are working in our best interests.

I see our business and its success as being down to the efforts of the entire team, and in this I would include the authors, translators and agents, as well as the Saqi team of publisher, editors, production, publicity and sales. The aim is to get a piece of writing published in a form that matches the author’s expectation, but which will also find a market. Sales, and of course publicity, work with the final product. I have to ensure that our sales teams understand what the book is and how they
can sell it to the trade. Equally we have to give the trade reasons to stock our titles ahead of other competing books. There are a lot of books published and whilst online retailers, for example, can list everything, high street retailers have to make often hard decisions about what they stock and what they promote. However much I would like to see all our books prominently displayed we can’t assume that we will get support from the trade every time. It is important, therefore, that a sales manager has a say in what we publish, and how we publish, at the editorial stage.

In the UK much of what is published is written in English, books translated from other languages tend to form a small part of the book market. I was in Turkey last year, where I believe 50% of the market is made up of translated books.

Whilst translated fiction is much celebrated in the literary press and amongst a small elite, it struggles, in general with a few notable exceptions, to find a market in the UK. As a result the literary titles often rely upon grants and awards to find a publishing home. It is good to get this kind of support, particularly to fund the work of translator’s, however that still leaves a sales job to do. One recent development in the awarding of grants that has met my approval is the idea of providing a marketing spend. I believe this to be an important element of funding. Of course we want to see a book well translated, but if nobody knows the author or the book then all that effort at the editorial stage has been wasted. The larger publishing houses can manage this part of the business because of the budgets they have. Smaller independent publishing houses struggle, and this is where a marketing grant, well spent can make all the difference.

The big question a buyer at Waterstones will ask you concerns the author’s profile, namely will the author be in the UK promoting the book. In other words will a reader have heard of the book or author. It is not a question of the odd precious review that sells a book, but features in newspapers and magazines, appearances in the media, at festivals and on panels.

Of course some books sell without this kind of support. One of our best selling translated titles is Ferenc Karinthy’s dystopian novel *Metropole*, translated by George Szirtes. The author is dead, but having an acclaimed translator working on the book and the added value of an endorsement from Chad Post in the US gave the book the impetus it needed. Two marketing points in my opinion that boosted this book’s sales.

We published a book called *Jamilia*, written by Chingiz Aitmatov in 2007, where it received strong support from James Daunt and his then three-shop mini-chain. Six years later James stepped in again to promote the title as a Waterstones book of the month. In both cases we had classic books just waiting to be picked up.

At the other end of the scale we enjoyed success with the Chinese author Bi
Feiyu and his novel *Three Sisters*, which won the Man Asian Literary Prize. In this instance a marketing grant from English PEN was instrumental in bringing the author over to the UK in support of publication. My sales team had something extra with which to sell the book in, an author coming to the UK to talk and promote his book.

I am not sure that selling translated fiction is any different as such, as long as we can bring a book to market in the same way we would a book written in English by a UK-based author. It doesn’t have to be seen as exotic or automatically difficult. We do, following in the footsteps of other publishing houses that make a point of searching out translated fiction, now package translated fiction as we would books written in English. Both publicity and I make the same demands on the editors as we would for any other book, namely that the packaging is good, and that the author can generate publicity.

If I had to sum up my job, then it is about building, maintaining and developing relationships whilst at the same time promoting both Saqi Books and the titles and authors we publish. Not every book will sell a million copies, but the combined efforts of everyone involved should at the very least ensure that the book in question finds its audience.
I’ve been a literary publicist for over twelve years, first at Canongate Books, then Harvill Secker and for the last seven years at Granta and Portobello Books. I’m responsible for the promotion of every book that we publish at Granta and manage a small team of publicists to help me. Promoting books consists mostly of securing book reviews in national press, arranging interviews on the radio, TV (rare!) and in print media and organising talks at literary festivals and in bookshops.

At each publishing house I’ve worked at, publishing international and translated works has been a key part of our identity. I’ve therefore promoted a great many: from established writers such as Alberto Manguel, Herta Müller and Elias Khoury – to the far less well known (far too many to list, sadly).

The challenges to promoting books in translation are many and varied. In order to convince a literary editor that the book deserves to be reviewed, it has to be outstanding. Though we have a lively press, and every paper still has space for book reviews – most of the British media is still a little hesitant to cover foreign literature. I have to persuade editors that this translated book is genuinely more worthwhile to review than the hundreds of other books vying for the review slots every week. Because commissioning editors know this is a challenge, the quality of foreign literature published in the UK is often of outstanding quality. It also helps enormously if the author speaks good English. There are no radio programmes in the UK that will interview an author in any language other than English, and for it to work authors have to speak English well and without a strong accent. It also helps when arranging interviews for the newspapers. It's not too hard to find a journalist who speaks French or Spanish, but few editors want to spend any of their meagre budget on a translator for a more obscure language – so unless the author has won a Nobel Prize or done something truly remarkable, an author’s lack of English puts the book at a disadvantage.

Speaking and writing in English is especially helpful when promoting non-fiction. If the book deals with current affairs, then it is especially advantageous to pitch the author to radio and TV news programmes and for comment and opinion pieces in the paper. Translators are never used for broadcasting, and only used for quick turnaround articles when the author’s perspective is truly unique.

Some literary festivals are eager to invite international writers to their festivals – the Edinburgh International Book Festival in August is the most impressive on that
front. They actively look for interesting writers from around the world and have a list of interpreters at their fingertips if the authors’ English isn’t good enough. The Hay Festival is also hugely supportive especially for Spanish-language and Arab writers – but they are always interested to hear who we recommend and this year, for example, they’ve invited the wonderful Czech writer, Jachym Topol. Jewish Book Week is, by its nature, wonderfully international, and the Frontline Club is always interested to hear about international journalists with interesting stories to share.

It is always worth being in touch with the embassies and cultural institutes that play a major role in helping with the promotion and costs of translated publications. Most countries of the world are represented in some way in London, and many of them have fascinating programmes of talks, and of course, for them, the language is no barrier.

It helps, as with every book, if there’s a “hook” to pitch to the media – a reason that this book especially should be noticed above others. A major international literary prize or inclusion on an important literary list helps enormously (national prizes from the author’s country don’t have a huge impact – sometimes it seems that every translated book has won a major prize from their originating country!). But if the book tells a story that a British writer couldn’t have access to – then the media interest can always be stirred.

It is often more difficult to promote books in translation than books in English, but it’s worth the effort – it’s essential for the cultural diversity of the country that we have books from all over the world and the festivals, newspapers, prizes and events that support translated works are to be commended and praised.
The Translation Chain

The Literary Editor’s Tale
Boyd Tonkin

The Independent was founded in 1986, the year of the Big Bang that opened up the City of London to the world. Mere coincidence? Not quite, since the paper’s creation likewise rested on the fundraising potential of free-flowing finance. It began at a high tide of optimistic globalisation. Arguably, the Independent’s proud history of close and consistent attention to international literature carries traces of that origin.

Inaugurated in 1990, with Orhan Pamuk as the first winner, and revived in 2000 in partnership with Arts Council England, the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize remains the strongest public signal of that global reach (and still unique in its 50:50 split of the rewards between author and translator). You will also find that worldwide curiosity in a record of covering translated fiction that, at times, may approach something nearer 30 per cent of all fiction reviews rather than the fabled 3 per cent; in frequent profiles of writers of note from across the entire literary planet, and not only the English-speaking chunks of it (most recently, of Israel’s Sayed Kashua and Norway’s Karl Ove Knausgård); and in an alertness to events and movements all around the “world republic of letters”. I have just returned from Abu Dhabi, and an interview with the winner of this year’s International Prize for Arabic Fiction: the young Kuwaiti writer Saud Alsanousi. In his case, the route that runs between spotting non-Anglophone talent and presenting it to a domestic readership will be swifter and less tortuous than usual, since English translation and UK publication rank among the perks of the prize.

With fiction at least, it takes no underhand exercise in positive discrimination to give translations a prominent role in the reviewing process. Several distinguished “literary” imprints continue to find reasonably ample space in their catalogues for major – or even merely fashionable – authors in translation. After Mankell, Larsson and their heirs, British publishers all know that foreign crime may sell as well or even better than its home-grown counterpart, and mix their lists accordingly. Meanwhile, some of the courageous publishing start-ups of the past few years have chosen to specialize in literature from outside the Anglosphere. In spite of the relatively scanty total, an editor need not go far out of his or her way to discover and discuss high-quality works of translated fiction in decent quantities. For excellent professional and cultural reasons, translators wish to see many more books from other languages available in Britain. Agreed. But this is not a numbers game alone. We also need to ensure that those translations we already have are more widely read, and robustly debated.
For a general newspaper, the nature of that debate will pose particular challenges. In a review of 500 or even 1000 words, how much of this precious and hard-won space should an assessment of the translation itself command? One typographic point: in most instances, the translator’s name will appear at the head of an Independent review in the same typeface as the author’s. Where this is not possible for design reasons, the translator will still be cited in the text. However fleeting the glimpse, translators should always be visible—even when, as may now occur with genre fiction and popular memoirs, the publisher has omitted all mention of them from title-pages.

As for the critique of their work, that will depend on genre and language. For mass-market fiction, or indeed much history and politics, the popular assumption that an invisible translation is an effective one probably needs little correction. More stylistically ambitious authors in translation manifestly call for closer scrutiny. But should a reviewer, say, have read the original work as well? Sometimes, I have commissioned pieces in which that prior knowledge has led to some striking insights. Equally, the comparison can lead a reviewer into fussy detours that leave most readers none the wiser. So should a significant work in translation go out for review to a shrewd generalist critic, or to a specialist in that language, that culture, that author? No iron rule applies. Sometimes, to make their entrée into the English-language literary marketplace, authors from other tongues will need a discreetly well-versed guide. On other occasions, depth of context can appear as a distraction or irrelevance. One reviews the book, not (or at least not primarily) the background and the reputation.

For the large majority of its potential readers, the book under review will stand or fall simply as a work in English. They need, in most cases, an assurance of the translator’s competence; in some, evidence of a special verbal felicity or (more rarely, but sadly not unknown) the lack of it. But any publication for a broad lay audience will sometimes, like the paddling duck, have to keep its effortful expertise just below the surface.

In any case, how much of a commitment do readers of reviews—or interviews and other articles—have to the process of translation as such? For a few, immersed in a language or a country, the concern will be personal, learned and intense. For most, beyond an initial anxiety about the authority of the intermediary and the aesthetic appeal of the result, it will fade into the background. To them, the book will catch the interest or fire the imagination as part of a prolonged fascination with the life and art of other cultures. By and large, the Independent still caters for those optimistic globalizers. Translators or not, we all have an interest in making sure their hopes are not misplaced.
The book trade is part of a sector of industry that seeks to commercialize art-forms. That simple premise is a dichotomy that we all struggle with at times: it’s no easy task to make a viable business out of such a diverse inventory, so full of products with more specialist appeal.

The fall of the Net Book Agreement over fifteen years ago now began a fundamental shift in what guides readers’ purchasing decisions, with the consequence that price is now the most important factor for over half: 56% according to The Bookseller’s “Reading the Future” survey in 2010.

So this has become the principle driver of sales for some retailers: supermarkets, online retailers and even some high-street chains may even be willing to sell at a loss in order to secure a larger market share. High-volume sales require a focus on authors already established as bestsellers, books with extremely large marketing budgets, authors with a presence far beyond the book world and hitching a ride on the latest bandwagon freewheeling by.

This leaves a gap for traditional booksellers to be discovery destinations and it’s this gap in the market that allows good independent bookshops to flourish, although it really does require a considerable focus on engagement with customers. It does often seem to be the case that indies will champion authors at the beginning of their careers, with the big players only offering their backing once they’ve made names for themselves

The survey mentioned above reported that only 3% of the reading public claim to find out about books and authors from those working bookshops. But the survey also asked what “would make you more likely to spend money in bookshops”? Amongst the results were: wider range of quality books (21%); more recommendations in-store (17%); better personal service in store (12%); more in-store events (12%). All of these are factors that depend on booksellers. We research that wider range, we make those recommendations, we offer that tailored service, we organize those events.

Titles in translation fit very nicely into the niche that independent booksellers are carving. With intermittent exception, few authors not writing in English trouble the charts, so this is an area we can lay claim to without fear of being usurped by the heavy discounters.

The reading public’s supposed fear of translated fiction is greatly exaggerated; in fact it’s rarely a factor in a buying decision. Herman Koch’s The Dinner, for
example, drew readers in because of its controversial perspective on the values of Western society, for what it said about our political class, for how it depicted their privileged offspring, for the unsettling ambiguities of its unreliable narrator. The fact that it was set in the Netherlands and translated from the Dutch was little more than a curious aside.

Our culture may be dominated by the Anglosphere, but we’re all aware that we cannot ignore the influence of the rest of the world. Stereotypes of inscrutable foreigners are out of date and where our cultures do clash, there is always a fascinating frontier.

This is not to say that the exoticism of some translated fiction is not a selling point. Some of my favourites on the Peirene Press list give me a glimpse into lives that are very different from anything I am ever likely to experience. But presenting translated fiction as some sort of homogeneous genre does a disservice to the books themselves and patronizes its potential readers. There needs to be a binding concept behind any selection of books we yoke together in promotions and displays, something more than the half-hearted lure of the peregrine.

There’s nothing wrong with the occasional table marked “Translated Fiction”. My experience shows they’re always popular and not just at Foyle’s vast flagship store; our smaller branches also find such displays very effective. The trick is to include four or five recognisable titles amongst the 30 or 40 unfamiliar books: most readers will try something if they feel they’re not choosing completely blindly.

But perhaps the best approach is to treat translated fiction no differently from the English-language titles: hand-sell them, write staff recommendations, feature them in major front-of-house promotions and window displays, include them in events programmes.

This isn’t an issue for bookshops alone. Bookshops and publishers are gradually realising that co-operation is necessary to assist new writers in finding readers and so it must be for translated writing.

The majority of my book trade career has been spent in bookshops, but I’ve also worked for agents and publishers, as well as dabbling in journalism and judging a few literary prizes. In all cases, I’ve considered myself still to be, at heart, a bookseller. It all comes down to sharing a passion not just for reading generally, but for specific titles. There are so many of us involved in the whole process of bringing translated fiction to readers that the sheer weight of our enthusiasm, combined with the simple power of word-of-mouth that remains at the heart of the book trade, is already producing an inexorable tide.
I meet Adam Freudenheim and Stephanie Seegmuller on a rainy day in London at 10am. We brave the drizzle to go to a café to talk about Pushkin Press, their publishing house. Adam is publisher and managing director, Stephanie is associate publisher and chief operating officer. Right from the moment we sit down it is clear to me that they are both extremely passionate about international literature. They both used to work at Penguin but were so frustrated by the lack of great literature translated into English that they began organising lunch meetings to work out if anything could be done. Then, in 2012, they were approached by Pushkin Press to take over the company; here was the opportunity they had been looking for. Pushkin Press was the ideal place to bring their ideas to life because, since 1997, it had been building a reputation as a company known for rediscovering many twentieth-century European classics in translation. Under Adam and Stephanie’s scrupulous eye Pushkin still publishes modern classics in the same format as before but they have refreshed the look. They also now aim to go beyond Europe and publish more contemporary fiction; in fact two thirds of what they do is contemporary and nine tenths is fiction, along with essays, memoirs and classics.

Adam tells me that he sees himself as a re-publisher; the books Pushkin takes on are already huge successes in their countries of origin and have often been translated into many other languages. What Pushkin does is to rescue these great books that have somehow fallen through the cracks of the British publishing industry. And the reason they do this so well is because this is their one and only goal. They are specialists in the promotion of international fiction in translation: they know what they are doing, and they know how to do it well. They use books that have sold well, that have won prizes and that they know will translate well because translations into tens of other languages already exist. As a small, independent company with a team of four their vision can remain unadulterated and they can afford to be rigorous about what fits with their company, their ethos. As they both testify, publishing a translation is a long process and a huge amount of work goes into every text. They use award-winning designers and good translators, ones whose talent they can justify and whose strengths they can take advantage of. This does not just mean using big names in the translation world; they are also very open to working with new translators. A refreshing perspective when many publishers only work with translators they already know and trust. As they both point out, all translators have to start somewhere and they are happy to bring in
something new and fresh.

Furthermore, three out of the four members of the team speak more than one language. Adam speaks fluent German, Stephanie is originally from France and another speaks Italian. Stephanie explains to me that this reduces the cultural barrier; of course they do not only use German, French and Italian books, far from it, but they are not afraid of foreign literature. Unlike some publishers who are wary of commissioning translations because they know nothing about foreign literary norms and systems, the members of Pushkin Press are comfortable with the foreign and open to enriching Britain’s literary system through another.

We then get on to discussing the new string Pushkin has recently added to their increasingly unique bow: children’s literature. Aside from picture books, very little children’s literature is translated in this country. Stephanie explains to me how she found a French collection of fairy-tales that have sold 1.5 million copies in France and been translated into eighteen languages. Only six out of the thirteen stories have ever been published in America and none in Britain; until now. This is what Pushkin does. Another of their books being translated into English had previously been translated into 26 other languages. It’s only when it comes to translation that you can find English at number 27 on a list of world languages. This lack of foreign children’s literature in Britain is partly due to the fact that Britain has a very rich, long-standing tradition of original-language children’s books and this means that many publishers do not take on anything more than the translation of picture books. However, according to Pushkin, foreign children’s books involving text are just as important as British ones and they are going out of their way to widen this regrettably overlooked field of literature.

Adam and Stephanie are both keen to ensure that Pushkin Press’s books are simply presented as good books. They are not looking for obscure, difficult books but not blockbusters either; just prize-winning successful literature that deserves a voice in the Anglophone world.

On the train home I have a chance to look at the Pushkin Press books Adam and Stephanie gave me when we arrived at the café: *The World of Yesterday* by Stefan Zweig, one of their most prolific writers (translated from German by Anthea Bell) and a book from their children’s literature series, *A Tale Without a Name* by Penelope S. Delta (translated from Greek by Mika Provata-Carlone). The blurb of the former claims that “Pushkin Press publishes the best writing from around the world – great stories, beautifully produced, to be read and read again.” How true that is. These books are beautifully designed and printed and it is clear that right from the start much care has gone into their production. These are books that just look too good to leave on the shelf.
The Edinburgh International Book Festival was launched in 1983 and in 2009 Nick Barley became its director. As anyone who has been along to Charlotte Square in the last few years will know, it is indeed an international affair. When Mr Barley took time out from last minute programming duties to speak to IOW, he began by pointing to Edinburgh’s Enlightenment past as part of the reason for this engagement with non-English writing, as well as a desire to reflect the expand / shrink effect of globalization. “While keeping an eye on the local, and the fact that Scotland is English speaking, the ambition is to broaden the scope as much as possible. On average, each year we have writing from 50-70 countries represented.”

In 2012, Mr Barley was a judge on the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, an experience that strengthened his belief that there is growing interest in writing from beyond these shores. Along with conversations with the British Centre for Literary Translation, this last year led to the establishment of a strand within the Festival called “The Art of Translation”. This included a pair of translation “duels”, a whole-day workshop and conversations between authors and their translators (see Vineet Lal’s write-up in IOW issue 40).

“We hadn’t anticipated that these would be big selling events,” he says, “but were extremely pleasantly surprised. We had thought of them as a way of proving, both to our authors and to audiences, that translation and ‘internationality’ truly are cornerstones of what we do. That the Festival believes in translation. We didn’t anticipate that conversations about literature making its way into English would have anything more than a niche appeal. The events were sell-outs.”

IOW readers may be pleased to hear that he thought audiences’ eagerness to look at the nuts and bolts of what we translators do on a daily basis was “proof of audiences’ sophistication”.

Something I’ve never considered before, Mr Barley also stressed the importance to authors of a translation focus in literary festivals. “A writer who is a household name in his or her own country but doesn’t have an equal command of English might be wary or nervous. They are used to expressing themselves at a very high level, and they’re going to come over here and have to hobble along. When they see that translation is a core issue for us, and that there are going to be translators around the place, they feel more confident. Gaining authors’ trust is a big part of what we do, because with that, the conversation they take part in will be more lively, and as a result, we hope, literature in the world becomes more lively.”
It also makes Mr Barley better placed than most to comment on the market and the much-bandied idea that only 3% of what is read in English is translated: “I honestly don’t believe the 3% thing, but it is true to say there can be a certain slackness on the part of the English-language publishing community. Sometimes publishers in New York and London won’t look beyond their own language – but sometimes it’s not their fault. This is one of the places where festivals can come in. Charing an event in Jaipur with a Tamil pulp fiction writer, and events at a literary festival in Brazzaville, Congo, with an audience from across the Francophone Sub-Sahara, I’ve been in the position to find out about writers who aren’t Oxbridge educated, don’t have diplomat parents with friends in the right places. Festivals can provide a platform.”

Last year, in partnership with the British Council, Mr Barley also set up the Edinburgh World Writers’ Festival, with sister events taking place in Berlin, Cape Town, Toronto, Krasnoyarsk, Cairo, Jaipur, Izmir, Beijing, Brussels, Port of Spain (Trinidad), St Malo, Lisbon, Kuala Lumpur and Melbourne. “We, along with these seventeen other festivals around the world, wanted to ask ‘Why does the novel matter in the twentieth century? Why does it prove so tenacious in the face not only of new forms of digital writing, but people spending far more time online and our supposedly increasingly visual culture?’”

Which brought us on to this year’s Granta “Best of British” list, which in many people’s eyes redefined what being a “British” writer means. Many of the writers – names such as Tahmima Anam, Xiaolu Guo, Benjamin Markovits, Nadifa Mohamed, Helen Oyeyemi, Sunjeev Sahota, Kamila Shamsie, David Szalay and Evie Wyld – have split national identities. The main thing, according to Mr Barley, to take from the list was the vociferousness of the conversation that surrounded it, proof of the rude state of the novel itself but also the mechanisms that enable those conversations. “It won’t be possible to judge the list for another five or ten years, and of course it’s tempting to lament certain authors who were overlooked, but the abiding sense was one of event. It definitely didn’t slip under the radar, and it’s wonderful for young writers to have that exposure.” The Granta List is “certainly” going to be a focus of the Festival this year.

“My job each year,” says Mr Barley, “is to answer why and how the Edinburgh International Book Festival should – or should not be – different from last year. In 2011 we went with ‘Revolutions’ as a theme, and it just so happened that that summer the Arab Spring exploded. That’s what we aim for – a reflection of the way the world is feeling. In general terms, we all know that globalization brings the far edges closer, so it’s obviously important for us to focus on literature from abroad – and therefore translation.”
It’s not often, particularly in Anglophone cultures, that matters of literary translation make the main evening TV news. However, on April 11th this year the opening of the new Centre for Literary Translation (CLT) at Trinity College in Dublin was covered throughout the national print and broadcast media. While the event featured Ireland’s Nobel Laureate for Literature Seamus Heaney, the spotlight was on his translators, six of whom who had come to Dublin to showcase their versions of his work as part of a more general celebration of literary translation.

The setting up of the CLT, with its acting director Sarah Smyth, can be seen as the culmination of a series of co-operative efforts from four separate stakeholders: the Ireland Literature Exchange (ILE), Dalkey Archive Press, Trinity College’s School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies, and the Oscar Wilde Centre for Irish Writing, also at Trinity. Indeed the CLT will now be the new home of the ILE, Ireland’s national organisation for the international promotion of Irish literature.

The work of the ILE goes beyond the usual remit of similar bodies in other countries in ways that respect the many unique conditions which Ireland presents in terms of literary translation. Obviously the fact that the vast majority of our literature is written in the world’s most translated language, combined with a literary heritage that Irish tourist bodies have been all too keen to market, places our authors in what is in many ways an enviable international position. Yet there are also challenges such as that encountered by a friend of mine who, in one of his novels, describes an Irish farmer tramping home through the fields one evening to his cottage and traditional dinner of crubeens – an Irish word for pig’s trotters. One can imagine said novelist’s surprise on hearing that, in French translation, this simple farmer had become rather more sophisticated, returning home to a plate of haricots verts, the translator having got his ’beens mixed with his beans. The fact that most translators from English cut their teeth on the British and American variants of the language at university often leads to surprise at the distinctiveness of Hiberno-English diction. Of course, many have risen to this heroically. I have wonderful memories of the late lamented Jin Di, the Chinese translator of Ulysses, dazzling me with tales of his adventures during the several decades he spent translating Joyce’s masterpiece in a land that was not merely culturally distant from the world of Leopold Bloom, but which was often politically hostile.
to Bloom’s creator as well.\(^1\) Were Jin to attempt this feat today, life could have been made considerably easier through an ILE residential bursary enabling him to come to Dublin to research his translation, a lifeline for many translators and their authors alike. ILE also run a translation grant programme for publishers, funding the translation of literature from Ireland into foreign languages, and the translation of foreign literature into English or Irish, on top of which they also publicise Irish literature internationally.

The fact that the new Centre for Literary Translation has found its base at Trinity is testament to the success of both the university’s Oscar Wilde Centre (whose creative writing programme continues to thrive after nearly two decades) and the MPhil programme in Literary Translation. In less than ten years the MPhil, under the direction of Peter Arnds, has given rise to a literary translation discussion group, several conferences (the next focusing on translating Holocaust literature, scheduled for June), a new *Journal of Literary Translation*, a visiting fellowship in literary translation, and a second fellowship offering the lucky recipient the chance to work on a translation which, on completion, will be published by Dalkey Archive Press. Indeed the recent setting up by one of the leading publishers of avant garde literature of a Dublin office (arguably its natural home, given its eponymous nod to Flann O’Brien) has proved fortuitous for the Trinity MPhil more generally – Dalkey Archive provides feedback on sample translations by students on the course as part of a general commitment it has made to training and education in literary translation.

One might imagine that all this would augur well for work prospects for literary translators in Ireland, though students considering enrolling for the MPhil are warned that employment opportunities in the field in Ireland are limited. On the international scene, Ireland has exported some major success stories in literary translation, such as Sligo-born translator Frank Wynne, whose translation of Michel Houellebecq’s *Atomised* was awarded the prestigious IMPAC award in 1998. Not only did this make a star of the author in Anglophone literary circles, but it also announced the arrival of a major new literary translator who has subsequently gone on to translate Frédéric Beigbeder, Ahmadou Kourouma, Tomás Eloy Martínez, Marcelo Figueras, Pablo Picasso and Almudena Grandes and this year alone has been nominated for both the Oxford-Weidenfeld awards for his translation of Alonso Cueto’s *The Blue Hour* and for the French-American Foundation Non-Fiction Translation Prize for Claude Lanzmann’s *The Patagonian Hare*. Derry-born Donal McLaughlin has similarly achieved a major reputation working

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\(^1\) For the full account of Jin Di’s adventures with *Ulysses*, read his *Shamrocks and Chopsticks: James Joyce in China* (City University of Hong Kong Press).
from German, particularly for his work on Stella Rotenburg and Urs Widmer (the latter gaining him a shortlist nomination in this year’s Best Translated Book Award for Widmer’s My Father’s Book).

McLaughlin and Wynne have both lived in Britain since well before the advent of the internet. However, while the new communications technology has been liberating for translators everywhere, it has been particularly important for Irish-language translation, with the Irish-speaking Gaeltacht regions being mostly located on the west coast, far from the Dublin metropolis. With all speakers of Irish also being fluent in English, one might think that the readership for translations into Irish would be small, though Máire Nic Mhaoláin’s Harry Potter agus an Órchloch enjoyed huge success on publication a couple of years ago (who would have thought that Irish would have its own word – Órchloch – for “philosopher’s stone”!) and Nicholas Williams’s An Hobad, a translation of Tolkien’s The Hobbit, attracted similar attention on publication recently. As far as translation out of Irish is concerned, one notes the efforts of the pioneering Connemara-based publisher Cló Iar Chonnacht, who have led the way in publishing English translations of cutting-edge Irish-language literature and who last year announced a major new project: the translation by Liam Mac Con Iomaire and Tim Robinson of Cré na Cille, the landmark modernist novel by one of the giants of twentieth-century Irish prose, Máirtín Ó Cadhain. Nevertheless, translations of Irish literature into English enjoy a limited audience, while also arousing strong feelings among certain writers such as Biddy Jenkinson, who has stated that she prefers “not to be translated into English in Ireland. It is a small rude gesture to those who think that everything can be harvested and stored without loss in an English-speaking Ireland.”

Only a tiny number of the 500 or so members of the Irish Translators’ and Interpreters’ Association work exclusively with literary translation. Nevertheless, the perennial success of the literary translation events the Association has organised from its base at the Irish Writers’ Centre in Dublin demonstrates an enthusiasm for literature in different languages: a masterclass it recently organised with Edith Grossman, translator of Cervantes, Mario Vargas Llosa and Gabriel García Márquez (supported very kindly by BCLT!) sold out almost immediately. One senses, however, that there may well be more opportunities for literary translators in Ireland in the near future given not only the support offered by the ILE and the new Centre at Trinity, but also the new literatures being produced in the country (though often published abroad) by many of the communities which have made Ireland their home in the 21st century, and particularly since the accession of ten new states to the EU in 2004. According to a recent census, the second most commonly used language in Ireland is now Polish, and I know
of at least four Polish novels and memoirs which have been written about the immigrant experience here – all could provide surprising insights for Irish people into our culture, though none have yet been translated.

Many of the new communities in Ireland speak languages of limited diffusion, and it is difficult to raise the profile of such languages in education when the bias remains towards old favourites like French, German, Spanish and Italian – in spite of its vast number of speakers, Polish is so far only taught at one university in the country (again Trinity) as part of broader degree programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level, while other widely spoken languages such as Chinese, Latvian, Lithuanian and Romanian have very little if any representation in tertiary education. Thus, while prospects for training literary translators in these new languages remain minimal, there are potentially exciting prizes awaiting those who take up the challenge. It seems apposite in this respect to quote the leading Irish translation scholar Michael Cronin, who has noted how, rather than taking Joyce’s *Ulysses* as a symbol for the nation (as is the wont of the now-burgeoning literary tourist industry), a more appropriate literary reference point might be *Finnegans Wake*, with its cacophony of languages and discourses, making translators of us all.

*For further information...*
Centre for Literary Translation: www.tcd.ie/literary-translation/
Ireland Literature Exchange: www.irelandliterature.com/
Trinity Journal of Literary Translation: www.trinityjolt.com
Irish Translators’ and Interpreters’ Association: www.translatorsassociation.ie
Being a translator from Scandinavian languages, principally Swedish, I attended the second Nordic Translation at UEA in Norwich in early April. The first such conference was held in London in 2008. Around a hundred people there this time. These came, predictably, mostly academics and freelance translators, from throughout Scandinavia, i.e. Denmark, the Faroes, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and also Finland, where both Finnish and Swedish are spoken. The total population of the countries represented is around 30 million; so quite a few people have “Scandinavian” as their mother tongue. Rather surprisingly, several academics from the Netherlands were also present, as Scandinavian languages are still taught there, although Scandinavian languages are undergoing a crisis at the University of Groningen, where several such languages were taught until recently. About half of the lectures, talks and workshops were literary, the other half discussing more linguistic matters.

The conference was mainly organized by the American lecturer at UEA, Dr B.J. Epstein, a Bryn Mawr graduate from the US, and the Fleming, Gudrun Rawoens, from the University of Ghent in Flanders, i.e. the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. All the sessions were held in the English language. The conference was promoted and sponsored by various bodies including embassies of the various countries, The Nordic Culture Fund, the Swedish Institute, John Benjamins publishers, Norwich Castle, the British Centre for Literary Translation and last but not least, the University of East Anglia itself.

The first day started with a number of workshops cover topics ranging from electronic language corpora to translating songs. The rest of the time was divided between plenary sessions with keynote speakers, and parallel sessions of smaller scope, plus several readings where original and translations were read out, prose for the most. One intriguing session, by the Dane Morten Sondergaard, translator Barbara Haveland, involved poetry arranged to resemble the folded inserts inside medicine packets. The packets too were part of this poetry installation.

Other themes of the various talks and lectures included: translating literature between closely related languages; translations of English-language literature into...
Scandinavian languages (e.g. Virginia Woolf); Ibsen; Selma Lagerlöf; Halldór Laxness; Knut Hamsun in Dutch translation; crime fiction; slang and vernacular; Faroese and Icelandic literatures. And at a more language & linguistic level, EU legal documents; translating quality assessment; machine translation; theory versus practice; language corpora and translation universals; translation quality assessment. My own talk was about the Swedish postmodernist novelist Ulf Eriksson and the challenges presented for the translator. Eriksson is very well up on Spanish and Latin American literature, and intertextual references to this in his own novels are inevitable.

For a literary translator like me, some of the most interesting things were the dual-language readings. These were always done with source-language author plus translator present. The authors were Gaute Heivoll (Norway), translator Don Bartlett; Ninni Holmqvist (Sweden), with B.J. Epstein standing in for translator Marianne Delargy, who was unable to attend; Morten Søndergaard (Denmark), translator Barbara Haveland; Kristina Carlson (Finland, Finnish language), translator Emily Jeremiah; Yrsa Sigurdardóttir (Iceland), translator Victoria Cribb. The crime novel parallel session was a lively one. As Nordic Noir has become something of a cliche, there was a certain amount of discussion about product branding, and Agnes Broome and Anna Tebelius (both at UCL) gave lively talks, where quite a lot of emphasis was placed on the way book covers fall into certain traps of, for instance, always having snow on the cover (Miss Smilla’s fault), even when the book is set in summer or contains no snow scenes at all. It appears that such branding is necessary to sell the books as Nordic Noir, as it is well known that there is never any summer in Scandinavia. With “literary” novels the covers are more carefully chosen, but it appears to be assumed that the readers of crime novels need the groups of thematic covers to lead them on to the next murder. The British side of the argument was represented by Palgrave Macmillan crime novel expert Barry Forshaw. Forshaw claimed, for instance, that changing the translated title of the Stieg Larsson crime novel from Män som hatar kvinnor (“Men Who Hate Women”) to The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo was good for sales and branding.

There was a book table, containing a surprisingly large number of Scandinavian (and even a few Baltic) books. It was organized by the manager of the small branch of Waterstones at the University of East Anglia. One of the presses featured was the Norvik Press, which specializes in Scandinavian literature in English translation, and is publishing newly commissioned translations of works by one of the main classic authors of Sweden, Selma Lagerlöf. The poetry publishers Arc Publications were also well represented, and even a few translated books of poetry
from the Baltic countries were to be found on the book table, as well as a selection of Scandinavian crime novels in English.

One small irony with the venue for this conference is that over the past twenty years or so Danish, Norwegian and Swedish have ceased at UEA, and the Norvik Press has moved to UCL, London. So outside of conference time, there are no longer many seminars in Britain about the history and literature of the three named countries. Scandinavian Studies in the UK is a ghost of its former self, as it used also to be a subject to degree level, with language tuition at Newcastle, Hull, and Aberystwyth universities. It is only during events such as the Nordic Translation Conference that the subject reappears briefly in the British provinces. Browsing the internet, you cannot easily find any list of where in the UK, beyond UCL and Edinburgh, you can actually study these three languages to PhD level, as you used to be able to do at UEA in previous decades.

But this conference, at any rate, reminded people that there are still language contacts between Scandinavia and Britain.

What I Learned at the London Book Fair
Susan Bernofsky

The London Book Fair kicked off for me this year with a Translation Summit kindly hosted by the Gulbenkian Foundation and organized by the British Centre for Literary Translation (BCLT) and the UK Translators Association. I learned a lot of things there. For one, I learned to envy my UK colleagues their excellent network of literary translators’ organizations. Three of them in particular work together to offer translators in the UK many kinds of support: the Translators Association (TA, a subsidiary of the Society of Authors); the Writers in Translation programme at English PEN; and BCLT, which is based in Norwich. In the United States, we have only two major organizations: the American Literary Translators Association (ALTA) and the Translation Committee of the PEN American Center, and even taken together they have a narrower range of focus and activity than their UK counterparts.

Not that there aren’t also things that make my UK colleagues envy me. On

1. The twelve participants were Esther Allen, Susan Bernofsky, Michael Emmerich, Maureen Freely, Kate Griffin, Daniel Hahn, Susan Harris, Antonia Lloyd-Jones, Chad Post, Samantha Schnee, Ros Schwartz and Ira Silverberg. [Ed.]
some counts, US translators are ahead. Those with established reputations can generally get their names printed on the front covers of their books and have been able to do so for at least the better part of a decade; I put this in all my US contracts and rarely even have to have a conversation with my publishers about it, whereas my UK publishers regularly balk at this, and my UK colleagues report that front-cover credits for translators are rare. And grants are available in the US that are designed specifically to provide direct support to translators. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) offers substantial fellowships in the amount of $12,500 or (in exceptional cases involving long, difficult books) $25,000, though the latter are rarely awarded; one can receive these fellowships once a decade.

There are also smaller grants that often go to emerging translators: the PEN / Heim Translation Fund Grants, available to translators working on book-length projects, whether or not they have publishers lined up, and whether or not they live in the US. These grants were made possible by the generosity of translator and translation advocate Michael Henry Heim, who established the Translation Fund at the PEN American Center with a large endowment nearly a decade before his death in 2012.

In addition to administering these grants, the PEN American Center offers a model contract on its website. It also awards prizes for outstanding literary translations in poetry and prose, along with a lifetime achievement award, the Ralph Manheim Medal, which is awarded once every three years.

The second major US organization, ALTA, is an academic-style association that puts on a large translation conference each year unlike anything that currently exists in the UK and offers travel stipends to encourage beginning translators to attend the conference. It also publishes a translation studies journal, Translation Review.

Like the PEN American Center, the TA in London publishes a model contract on its website. The TA also provides a legal consultation service – translators can submit their contracts for vetting before signing them – and suggests an “observed rate” (currently £88.50 / 1000 words) that translators can request in payment for their work. US-based organizations cannot do the same for fear of prosecution under anti-trust laws, though the “observed rate” that tends to get talked about in New York as a recommendation is $150 / 1000 words. But in the US many translators, particularly those without established records of publication, work for far below this rate (sometimes 50% below), while in the UK the TA’s “observed rate” is widely adhered to, even by publishers hiring younger translators who know what to ask for. The model contracts on both sides of the pond advise translators to ask for royalties in their contracts; in the UK royalties for translators are pretty
much universal, while in the US they must be negotiated for, and some publishers categorically refuse to provide them.

English PEN – unlike the PEN American Center – is able to make grants to publishers to support the translation costs and publicity / marketing expenses for translated books. US publishers have only the cultural institutes of foreign countries to turn to, which means that it is considerably more expensive to publish translations of books from countries whose governments do not offer subsidies.

One more thing I envy is the UK’s Emerging Translators Network, which provides encouragement, career strategizing and other sorts of peer support to younger translators who haven’t yet made names for themselves. Younger translators in the UK can also apply to participate in an excellent mentorship programme through BCLT that pairs experienced translators with translation apprentices – some of whom have already completed a masters degree in translation – for six months of editing and career guidance. The mentors are paid for their work. What a splendid idea this is. Certainly mentorship takes place in classrooms on both sides of the ocean, but extensive individualized guidance on a long-term project is rare. In the States, I was asked to serve this year as a mentor in a programme organized by the Yiddish Book Center, but that was the first I’d heard of such mentorships in the US. I’d love to see a support framework of this sort established over here. BCLT also hosts summer courses at the University of East Anglia.

After the Translation Summit, the American contingent was left thinking it’s time for us to establish a Translators Association of our own to provide workshop training, mentorship, publishing / promotional subsidies and direct financial assistance to a larger number of literary translators. We’ll be working on that one. Both the UK and the US colleagues agreed that it would be good to create an international Anglophone translators association to help us pool our resources across the pond (and the Pacific too, and in India). People kept bandying about the name World Translators Federation – in large part, I’m afraid, for the sake of the acronym.

In any case, it’s clear that establishing an international umbrella organization to link together a global network of local organizations of English-language translators (including a potential new one to be set up in the US) would go a long way toward ensuring that Anglophone translators around the globe will be able to profit from the resources and advances developed in each of our respective countries and network internationally. In an era of Global English, it might well be time to call instead for an era of Global Translation.
L
ike many Britons of my generation, I am virtually a monoglot. I was
taught French at school but taught so badly that I had no confidence either
in speaking or reading the language; essentially, it was taught to me as an extinct
language, like Latin, and no acknowledgement was made of the fact that, within
visible distance of our shoreline, millions of happy Frenchmen and women were
chatting away.

Again like many of my compatriots, I feel guilty for being so bad at languages,
and guilty that I cannot help my translators more. Though usually, they have not
asked. Queries have been restricted to a few difficult phrases, idiomatic or obscure.
And I have often wondered what is the effect of my work in translation, since often
there is no feedback after publication. I know I am a quirky writer, and make use
of non-standard English and of different registers and tone; also, my writing is
interrupted, or inflected – however you like to put it – by nods and winks to other
writers, by quotations not marked by quotation marks, by allusions that probably
only a few readers will grasp. I am not a difficult or obscure writer (I hope) but I
am ferociously intertextual. Mostly, the sense of the passage remains intact for the
reader, whether or not the teasing echoes are picked up. But I suppose some of my
translators must think I am a very strange woman.

Wolf Hall, my 2009 novel, has been published in some 30 countries. Until then
my translation record was patchy. A particular book would be picked up in one
country, but not in another, and I never quite knew why that was: was it the state
of the market, or was it that a particular novel seemed too difficult to translate?
My publishers changed frequently, and I had no chance to build up a relationship
with a translator. Contact would come only when the work was done, and the
translator was tidying up after herself. The tone had been settled, the project was
almost finished, and what remained for me to do was purely mechanical: it was
the equivalent of putting the papers in a neat pile and fixing them together with
a paperclip. Only recently, working with Ine Willems on the translations of Wolf
Hall and Bring up the Bodies, I have realized that there is another, better way. It is
possible for two minds to meet, and treat the translation as a new work. The novel
then reverts to its unformed, unfinished state, as work in progress.

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A.M. Heath Literary Agents. This article first appeared on the Boekvertalers blog –
www.boekvertalers.nl – both in English and in a Dutch translation by Ina Willems.
This seems to me a much better way, though it makes greater demands on both the translator and the original writer. I cannot consider a book finished when it leaves my hand. It must be read, translated, interpreted, and no two readers, even two readers who share a language, have the same experience. A great deal of the power of a book lies anterior to words, and beyond words. The power lies in the images that the word creates, each image unique to one reader and each image shifting, fluid, endlessly renewable. But still, I depend on the translator for the words that will spring that image. In the ideal world, the translator must be more than linguistically skilled, well-informed, well-read. She or he must also be intuitive, and able to align her intuition with that of the writer.

Such paragons are rare (and I think I have found one, though Ine will not like me to boast about her.) Clearly the translator’s task is far greater than that of finding word-by-word, line-by-line equivalents. It is about finding a tone that allows the writer’s personality to shine through the lines. But it is even more than that. We are not just translating a book, we are translating one culture to another. Given that there is generally a high level of technical competence among translators, this is where the challenges lie. The translator must stand back and consider the whole picture. A writer’s native audience has certain underlying assumptions about the world, and these assumptions shape a text, almost invisibly; but they are not necessarily shared by foreign readers. The author may not be aware of her own shaping assumptions, until a translator draws her attention to them.

For instance, my novel *A Place of Greater Safety*, though written in English, is about the French Revolution. It is now being translated into Dutch. So the question arises, what do the three nations know about each other? Ine has already told me that the Dutch will understand more about the administrative structure of pre-revolutionary France than the English do. Therefore, when describing the job held by the father of one of my revolutionaries, she can be more accurate and precise in Dutch than I could in the English original. That is welcome. But there is a further point, a more subtle one. The English, invariably, think local administrators are funny. They don’t have to say or do anything to amuse; they are just ridiculous by virtue of their position. So, for example, in an American city, a mayor is a person of consequence and is taken very seriously. But to the English, a mayor is likely to be a pompous individual strutting around in a medieval costume. (Modern mayors don’t do this, but they did until very recently, and it is unlikely we will ever let them forget it.) Now the questions arise, what do the Dutch think? Will they understand why my text, when I discuss town government, takes on a tone of mockery? Are local bureaucrats seen in the same way, all over the world? I don’t know. But I trust Ine to be aware of the issue, and think it through.
I feel enlightened by the discussions we have held, even though we have only been looking at the first dozen pages of the book. It is as if my unconscious assumptions are coming to light: as if the book’s resources are being mined. It feels deeper than any editing process I have ever undertaken, and much more revealing.

Let me return to my young self, struggling to learn French. At fifteen I decided that I would read *Madame Bovary* in French, just by myself. I did not get much further than one chapter; after that, I read with an English version at hand. If this was cheating, it was still productive; but I don’t remember much about that, I only remember my work on the early pages. It was a frustrating process but also brought me the deep reward that comes from struggling with something just beyond one’s competence: not so far beyond that one feels hopeless, but not a safe process, not a restful one. I remember that I was completely absorbed, and, as one says, “translated” to another time and place. My struggles with the first chapter, my intense and deep striving, stays with me to this day, so that when I reread that part of the book, in English, it seems to me that it is hyper-real; as if the rest of the book is monochrome, but this chapter is in vivid colour. I will never be a linguist, but I am glad I made that effort, because it gave me, in a humble way, an insight into the process of translation. I understood that what I was trying to solve was a multi-dimensional puzzle, and I understood that the key did not lie within the French-English dictionary; it lay within the heart of Emma Bovary. I think most authors, if asked, would say, “Be faithful to the spirit of my book, not its letter.” Conjuring that spirit is an exercise in magic, a magic more potent because most of its operations are hidden.
It can sometimes seem as though the sort of work academics do on translation has little relevance for its actual practice. In one sense this is true: theories are meant to describe and explain what happens, not to provide instructions on how to do things. I might understand the theory of how the moon affects the tides but I still can’t do it myself, and nor would I want to.

But of course things are not really quite that separate. We can and do respond to whatever discussions and theories are around at a particular time. Most translators today have come across ideas such as Venuti’s foreignisation and domestication. These are not methods, but observed tendencies, and so they cannot be turned directly into practice. But this doesn’t mean that they lack the power to make us think, or that they have no relevance for practice. On the contrary, as both a practising translator and an academic I would argue that knowing about other people’s theories has helped me develop my own, and this had quite a profound influence on the way I translate.

Here is an example: I have recently been translating Paul Celan’s poetry, and looking at other people’s translations, particularly those of Michael Hamburger and John Felstiner. They have both expressed their views (which is what I take theories to be) at different times: Hamburger often said that Celan’s poetry was about “breath pauses” – that is, that it mattered to Celan where you stopped in a line to draw breath and that the translation should take this into account. Felstiner has said in interviews that in translating Celan’s poetry the important thing is the rhythm, so that’s presumably part of his theory.

Both these insights are important but I have my own theories, too. One is a more general theory of translating poetry and one is a theory about translating Celan. The first goes something like this: When we translate a poem we reconstruct the mind of the poet from the style of the text we are translating and try to write our target poem in a way that does justice to this reconstructed sense of the choices the original poet made.

As far as translating Celan is concerned, I have a more specific theory about what reconstructing his mind might involve. As with any poetry, I try to see what elements of style stand out (helped by the theory of foregrounding for which I thank the Prague Structuralists). Celan uses the image of snow a great deal. Snow might seem to render everything clean and white but in fact it only covers up, so it’s a powerful image for a poet who was so deeply influenced by the Holocaust,
in which his parents were murdered. But the particular insistence of Celan’s use of the word for snow suggests to me that the word itself matters, and not just what it represents (a suggestion helped along by the work of a number of theorists including Walter Benjamin).

And then, the German word *Schnee* (snow) comes from Latin *nix*, which gives French *neige*, and appears to be related to German *nichts* (nothing), but in fact isn’t. And that’s important: for Celan it didn’t matter whether *nix* and *nichts* were historically related or not, because a relation of sound was as real as a relation of etymology. (And in fact we know that this is how folk etymologies work.) He even uses the German *Neige* (“end” or “remains”, and nothing to do with snow) and follows it with the word *Schnee* (snow), just so we see the cross-linguistic link. This, too, is a link that exists in the mind, not on the page or in the dictionary. Similarly, an Indogermanic word *neigu* (to wash) is probably also unrelated to French *neige*, and German *Schnee* and English *snow*, but suggests a connection to the idea of washing white as snow, and may have been partly behind Celan’s use of images of washing. These are just observations about Celan’s poetry, but where theory comes in is in trying to explain these observations and the feeling that much of what happens in his poems is in the head, not on the page. In fact, this is exactly what the theory of cognitive poetics attempts to explain. And then, as a translator of poetry, my experience has always been that the text itself will tell me what to look for. Theories of stylistics explain this by saying that style represents choice. Having decided what to look for I can then go beyond the text to reconstruct a particular view of the world; the theory of mind-style helps explain this. These various theories help my thinking and help me develop my own theory.

But they are explanations, not instructions. So would I translate differently without any theory? I think the answer is “yes”, because I would be afraid to tackle Celan. Even if you disagree with other people’s theories, it’s always good to have the confidence that you know what they think. But, you might say, these are theories of language, or poetics, or style, not of translation. So what of translation theories? One of my favourite philosophers, Mary Midgley, says theories are different pairs of spectacles that help us see the world differently. I find that helpful. I want to know how other people see the world, because my own view is limited. So reading different translation theories – whether sensible, illuminating, fascinating or bizarre – gives me a chance to see things I might not otherwise have seen and to think things I might not have realized I thought.

On the whole, though, and perhaps this is just a personal preference, I find theories that don’t try to explain translation, but help explain, say, how style works, to be more useful than actual translation theories. Perhaps that’s because
there is no temptation to try and read them as instructions.

So overall, as long as we don’t expect theories to offer instructions, but only possible (complementary rather than competing) ways of seeing translation or the texts we want to translate, then I would say (but then of course I would) that they can be very useful to the translator: they help you clarify your thinking, give you confidence, and above all they make it easier to be free of all those preconceived ideas about translation that people who don’t translate seem to have.

*For more views on the theory-practice link, and to follow up references to particular theorists mentioned above, try...*


One

My first experience translating Shakespeare professionally was in 2001 with *Henry VIII*, for the Pan-Hispanic project *Shakespeare por escritores* directed by Marcelo Cohen, in which Shakespeare’s complete works were translated by writers from all over the Spanish speaking world. I immediately knew I would be working on Shakespeare meant primarily to be read – if *Henry VIII* is not much performed in its native land or language, the possibilities of it being staged in any Spanish speaking country are close to nil. So when I set down to my task I was mainly concerned about how the translation would read on the written page.

Preliminaries were the usual: reading and rereading thoroughly, consulting glossaries, comparing different editions, and perusing all the notes. Next came the difficult choice of the level of Spanish: I couldn’t go too local, since this was a project for Spanish readers worldwide, and even if it had been only for Argentina, Argentine Spanish had not been invented in Shakespeare’s day, so the effect would be anachronistic. My solution was to work the common ground – which is not the same as going neutral – those words shared by the sixteenth century and our own, and by Spanish speakers from Argentina, Mexico, Peru… Translators from Spain are blessed in that they never worry about these things – the Spanish they speak is to them the language, not a specific dialect of it – as usual, imperialistic delusions and provincialism go hand in hand.

But the hardest task by far was to find a Spanish verse form that could accommodate the basic pattern of the iambic pentameter. Even if no actor would ever say these lines, I wanted to give the reader the feel of an oral text – a text that would be heard rather than seen. Having coached actors in Spanish-language performances of Shakespeare, I was conscious of how often translations of Shakespeare – specially those done by academics who seemed to have never seen a play on stage – failed in that they only made sense to the mind’s eye, while the mind’s ear was as good as deaf. My readings in Spanish poetics had taught me that many scholars, among them Antonio de Nebrija and Andrés Bello, privileged the “English” measurement in feet over the “Spanish” syllabic count. So through trial and error I decided to translate the iambic pentameters into a flexible pattern of Spanish hexameters, working in longhand and writing down the stresses as I...
went. But before doing the actual translating work I would listen to an audio of the English text – listen to the scene I was going to translate again and again, until the words lost all sense and became a musical pattern; a mantra, you might say. Then, when I sat down to write a Spanish version, the words not only flowed, but flowed in time. You could say I breathed in the English text, and breathed out the Spanish one – my body became the translating agency.

This changed me as a writer as well. At the end of this transforming experience – I devoted six months to the task – I found, to my amazement, that when writing in Spanish prose, my body / mind had become more sensitive to the rhythmical patterns of my own language, that it was automatically measuring lines, paying attention to weak and strong endings, to alliteration and internal rhyme, in a way it had never done before. All my novels written after my translating of Shakespeare were affected in this way.

Two

In the year 2009 director Alejandro Tantanian approached me with a project for translating Hamlet and adapting it for the stage. In the time-honoured tradition of Sarah Bernhard and Asta Nielsen, the prince was to be played by Elena Tasisto, one of the great divas of the Argentine stage. My approach in this case had to be different – this would be Shakespeare to be heard, rather than read, and it would be spoken by Argentine actors on an Argentine stage. Argentina has no tradition of verse drama worthy to be spoken of, and even if an actress like Elena was thoroughly trained in the speaking of Spanish verse drama, this would not be the case with everybody in the cast. Still I decided to translate in verse, but did not worry so much about measuring the verses, and went much closer to free verse than to the “flexible” blank verse I had used in Henry VIII.

Linguistically I could dare to be more local, since this was a play to be performed in Buenos Aires, by local actors: but this “localism” was restricted to rhythm and syntax and did not include the choice of words. A too-local vocabulary can be a put-off – one doesn’t want an eleventh-century Danish prince to speak in the slang of present-day Buenos Aires. (Unless, of course, the “adaptation” involves re-setting the play in time and space – as in Oscar Barney Finn’s gauchescal version of Much Ado About Nothing in Buenos Aires’s Teatro San Martín (2010). I myself am at present trying to talk Tantanian into staging a “Peronist” version of The Duchess of Malfi, drawing upon the language of the Golden Age of Argentine cinema, which more or less coincides with the first Peronist decade (1945-1955).)

1. Literature about the world of the gauchos of the Argentine pampas, evolved in the mid-1800s, which developed a specific style and language.
But if vocabulary must be handled with care, you can handle local syntax, word order and the local music of the language, collocations, etc. with greater impunity – as the perception of these is unconscious or not fully conscious, it affects the body and the emotions rather than the intellectual faculties, and even when consciously perceived it does not grate the ear or the eye as an inadequate word will do.

Another concern was to “suit the word to the action”, something that translators for the page, rather than for the stage, often forget about. For example, the killing of Polonius goes down well with the phrase “Dead for a ducat, dead!” and it is quite possible to kill a man while saying these words. But if Hamlet has to get through, as in Rolando Costa Picazo’s translation, with “¿Qué es esto? ¿Una rata que espió? ¡Apuesto un ducado a que es hombre muerto!” even the venerable counselor will have enough time to get away. Ángel-Luis Pujante’s “¿Cómo? ¿Una rata? ¡Por un ducado la mato!” gives Hamlet a much better chance of making a carbonado of him.

**Three**

Some ten years ago, while rereading *Don Quixote*, I came across a footnote that revealed to me there was a lost Shakespeare play based on the story of Cardenio in Part I of Cervantes’ novel. The minute I read this I knew that one day I’d write a fiction piece on the subject, as it touched upon the English-Spanish mix that is part of my family history (my grandfather was a Spaniard who was a British subject in Gibraltar, I myself grew up in the medium of both languages and eventually both literatures) and of Argentine cultural tradition, as writers like W.H. Hudson, Jorge Luis Borges and Rodolfo Walsh testify – the myth of origins in Borges’s case being that he first read *Don Quixote*, that monument to the Spanish language, in English before he read it in Spanish (as a child I unknowingly replicated the myth by reading Borges in English first).

I began, then, by rereading Part I of *Don Quixote* in English, in the 1612 translation by Thomas Shelton that Shakespeare would have read. Rather amazingly, the quest for this rarity took me not to any English library but deep into the pampas, to the Bartolomé J. Ronco Library in the town of Azul.

When I learned that Shakespeare had written the play in collaboration with John Fletcher, and that this had taken place immediately after the breakup of the famous Beaumont-Fletcher collaboration period, I discovered what my story would be about: John Fletcher trying to get over the loss of his beloved partner and being forced to write with Will as second best. From the start I had decided I would have no narrator, as I didn’t want any “modern” voice intruding into theirs – the whole novel is made up of conversations, letters, poems and fragments of
plays, and as I couldn’t write much of the verse myself, I combed the more or less forgotten plays of the time for suitable lines – there was no lack of them, the Beaumont and Fletcher canon alone offering some fifty – of course this meant that for the first time I’d be writing in English – the first version at least; and in an English that, if not strictly speaking Jacobean, could accommodate these other Jacobean texts without too much pain.

The project also involves rewriting, that is recreating, the novel in Spanish (it will thus have two “originals”, and one reason why I chose the rather unimaginative title Cardenio is because it will serve both), elaborating a kind of neo-Cervantean just as I developed a highly idiosyncratic neo-Jacobean for the English text. And when it came to translating the verse of Shakespeare, Fletcher, Beaumont and the rest, I decided I would be more rigorous and restrictive than ever before (formal restrictions being after all the soul of writing and translating): the pentameters of blank verse would be translated into blank hendecasyllables – and sonnets would be translated into the Spanish form as practiced by Góngora and Quevedo: hendecasyllables in full rhyme, only using the rhyming pattern of the English sonnet. In this I took myself to the other end of the translating spectrum: from the extreme flexibility of translating Hamlet for the Argentine stage to the ruthless (but playful) rigidity of recreating in the twenty-first century both the Shakespearean sonnets and those of the Spanish Golden Age. I hope that Borges’s Pierre Menard will approve, if not of the results, of my efforts at least.

When it comes to vocabulary I have tried to stick to the language of both sixteenth centuries, trying to avoid the use of “quaint” words that have become clichés, but this is not always possible to avoid: I am at times incorporating some texts almost verbatim – as in passages from Cervantes in the Spanish version, and Shelton’s translation in the English, and they used many of these words naturally, as they had no way of knowing that one day they would become period clichés. But whenever possible I prefer to use the idiosyncratic sixteenth-century word when and if it is still in use today, and in the course of my research (which involves reading extensively and intensely in the texts of the period, rather than trusting to dictionaries) I came across some delightful discoveries: for example, that some of the sexual slang used in Argentina today is actually sixteenth-century Spanish slang that present-day Spaniards have forgotten all about. What a pleasure it was to put these quintessentially Argentine words, the ones I grew up with, into the mouths of Shakespeare, Fletcher or Beaumont when discussing Cervantes’s work! In that moment of epiphany I felt that all distances had been breached.
In Autumn 2001, a new production of King Lear was launched at the National Theatre in Cairo. The star of the show was Yehya al-Fakharani; a larger than life actor who’d won a place in the nation’s heart through playing grizzled leads in long-running soaps and quirky romantic movies. The men he played were lovable, exasperating, always flawed, but always more sinned against than sinning. In 1999 he decided he wanted to play Shakespeare. By the end of the year he was reading different Arabic translations of Lear. In 2000 he and his colleagues went into rehearsal. The translation he’d chosen was by Fatma Moussa Mahmoud, my mother.

In interviews, Fakharani said that this was the one version he felt would work on the stage. And it did. Almost twelve years later, it still does. The success of the play took everyone by surprise. Fakharani’s fans were not, the reasoning went, a Shakespeare audience, people on the whole were not going for serious drama (the commercial comedy theatre was flourishing); the play would run for a couple of months, get a polite reception and the star would feel he’d stretched his thespian muscles and that would be that. But the theatre filled every night and the play ran and ran. When summer came it transferred to Alexandria and it worked on the holiday crowd as well. In the annual arts festival at the Citadel it played to an unticketed audience of six thousand. Fakharani tells how he’d peeped out at the house before the start and told the company they should try to get through Scene One and then he’d announce that they couldn’t perform in the noise and chaos and shut down. Then, he says, when Lear declared his intention of carving up his kingdom you could hear a pin drop – and the audience was rapt all the way through.

Previous translations had held the play in reverence; they’d made sure that it felt like “high” culture, indeed, that it felt like high European Renaissance culture. My mother, on the other hand, loved it and what she did was make it as accessible to the Arabic-speaking 21st-century public as it had been to the Globe groundlings and aristos four hundred years earlier.

Fatma Moussa Mahmoud was professor of English Literature at Cairo University. She had taught Lear for a decade and writes in the introduction to her translation how she had grown more attached to the play the better she got to know it. But she had first learned to love Shakespeare, English literature and literature in general when she was eleven, and a Miss Sage, from Manchester, had come to teach at her

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school. And then there was a year when she was ill with some form of rheumatic fever. She stayed on the sofa at home, excused from housework, instructed to use what energy she had on schoolwork. Nobody at home spoke or read English, and so the novels, drama and poetry with which Miss Sage kept her supplied passed for work. Shakespeare, Byron, Pope, Brontë, Eliot, Dickens became her friends and companions. Later, they were joined by Mahfouz, Yehya Haqqi, Tawfik al-Hakim. She spent her life working amongst them, introducing the public of one to the other, drawing parallels, contrasts, working out common grounds. Taking liberties.

My mother died six years ago, aged 80. She left thousands of students and protégés, hundreds of articles and more than twenty books. Only four of them were translations.

Her *Lear* is – as she states in the introduction to the first edition in 1969 – a faithful translation of the Arden text published by Methuen two years earlier. But she made radical choices about the Arabic that was to be its new avatar. Shakespeare shifted register by switching between verse and prose. Instead of trying to replicate that shift, as all previous translations had done, she instead signalled the changes by having characters deliver their lines in either formal classical (*fushā*) Arabic or colloquial. This liberated her from the need to strong-arm her text into metrics and allowed full scope for the richness, density and drama of the language.

She also made decisions about how many “foreign” elements she would keep in the text; names, place names, titles, names of gods… how much to retain and how much to transmute? In her introduction to the second edition (1995) she writes that “the truth is that some of the curses and insults and some of Edgar’s spells and nonsense are not literal translations but equivalent ones; where the cultural reference does not exist in Arabic we have looked for an equivalent – most particularly in areas of magic, folk belief and curses”.

And yet it is also in almost literal translation that the Arabic text achieves its extraordinary power. Gloucester, introducing his illegitimate son, Edmund, confesses “I have so often blushed to acknowledge him that now I am brazed to it”. Arabic has no verb “to blush” which is expressed as the face reddening in shame or shyness. But Egyptian colloquial Arabic does have an expression for becoming impervious to shame: his body has become like brass. Mahmoud translates Gloucester’s sentence as: “so often has my face reddened to acknowledge him that it is now brassed against shame”.

My mother used to say she couldn’t think except with a pen in her hand. And in the later years, when I learned to see her as Fatma Moussa Mahmoud and not just as my mother, I used to love watching her at work, her pen poised above a notepad, her elbow leaning on a stack of paper. Sometimes she had to rush an ending as
the courier from the newspaper or the magazine waited in the hall. There’s nothing rushed about her Lear, though. But she does acknowledge, in the introduction to the second edition, that the translation of drama is never complete until it’s been produced: “Only then can we judge whether a translation works: the stage’s the thing!” The introduction is signed off “Cairo, 1995”. Six years later – and more than thirty years after she’d translated it – my mother was on the National Theatre stage in Cairo to receive a standing ovation for bringing Shakespeare’s great text home to its Egyptian audience.

A huge poster advertising the play hangs today on the railings of the Cairo Opera House, on my route between home and downtown. It’s a bit worn and ragged but here, in Egypt, it’s fit for purpose. It features, of course, Yehya el-Fakharani, but every time I see it, I see my mother; her desk placed improbably in the centre of the room, her pen in her hand, her face taking on a questing, faraway look, as she waited for that perfect phrase to appear in her mind.

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**Ten Questions for Frank Günther**

1) _Which was the first Shakespeare play you translated, and how did it come about?_

That was pure chance, actually. As a director, I was invited to direct _Much Ado_ in a middle-sized theatre, and they suggested that I might do the translation as well. Though I had already translated a few Elizabethan plays, just for fun’s sake, I had never thought about translating Shakespeare – so many German poets had proved already that they couldn’t do it that I really didn’t feel called up to the job. Anyway, I thought I might give it a try, fear-struck – so I got ample provisions for the refrigerator, closed all curtains, bolted the door, unplugged the telephone and the TV, and plunged into it. I emerged into fresh air two weeks later, still shaking from a heavy language tempest that had tossed me around, with a complete first rough draft. In those two weeks I had – on a trial-and-error-basis – decided on all the poetical principles I was going to use for my German Shakespeare: a verse is a verse is a verse and has to be translated as a German verse; beautiful poetry has to find its equivalents in the tradition of German poetry, with a wide range of poets and their artistic techniques from Goethe to Rilke; colloquial English has to be colloquial German; the vocabulary has to take in all stylistic registers of the German language
up to the industrial revolution, even down to German vernacular; a joke is a joke is a joke and HAS to be spontaneously funny; a wordplay in the English has to be a wordplay in the German, even if it is not identical with the original; and so on. It took quite a while, afterwards, to reach the final version – but in those two weeks of absolute solitude with Shakespeare’s text all the the basic decisions were made. And I have stuck to them to this very day.

2) How well did you know your Shakespeare before you started?

Not that well. I had done English and German Literature at university, but nobody had managed to kindle the love of Shakespeare in me in academic seminars. It was only when I started theatre, and especially in those old days of Peter Brook’s unsurpassable magic *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, that Shakespeare clicked with me.

3) Since that first translation, have you always translated with a view to a particular production or commission, or have some plays been done just for yourself?

I was commissioned, mostly, by theatres who wanted to produce a special play – so the sequence of translations was rather arbitrary and didn’t follow Shakespeare’s development. It’s only those plays which are very rarely performed in Germany that I translated without a commission – to fill up the canon.

4) When you’re translating plays, you’re writing for actors to be able to speak the lines aloud. Does this affect how you work? Do you speak your translations aloud as you go?

This is the basis of my work – Shakespearean language is always rhetorical language, spoken language, and has to follow the inner laws of spoken language, no matter whether it’s high-flown courtly language or coarse gutter-dialogue. So I actually act out all the characters sitting at my writing desks – in English as well as in German, in order to find the special flow of Shakespeare in the special lines at hand, even if it’s dark, intricate, convoluted, dense and compact language as for instance in *Cymbeline*. It doesn’t mean that I write easy-to-speak-language, apt for a television soap, not at all, my texts are actually pretty demanding for actors, but they try to catch the inner tune and harmony of Shakespeare’s lines. In those 34 plays I have translated up to the moment, there is not one line that I have not performed aloud, with my computer as my audience. I’m very good as Ophelia, by the way, due to my beard.

5) Are you translating into sixteenth-/seventeenth-century German, or twentieth-/21st-century German? Or into a German which isn’t quite either of these?
Sixteenth- / seventeenth-century German would be as hard or harder to understand today than Elisabethan language is today to the English – but the idea of any translation is to open up an access to the the foreign text. “Access” is the word, and access seems harder to get even for English younger generations – that’s probably why there are so weird publications in the UK and the US as the “NoFear Shakespeare” series that offers Shakespearean plays translated into modern English and so stripped down to basic bad English that just anybody may understand it.

Twentieth / 21st-century German, on the other hand, would be just as wrong – you can’t have modern slang in a Shakespearean play, a Shakespearean character cannot “let off steam”, for instance, because the steam engine that triggered this expression originally was noticeably not yet invented in Shakespearean times. So I draw a line where the vocabulary of the Industrial Revolution starts; and I try to smuggle in as many colloquial words that do NOT sound like the twentieth century as possible – it’s all about imperceptible anachronisms in language, actually, to overcome the historical language-barrier.

6) Presumably certain translations have been used for multiple productions by now – have your texts changed between productions?

No. My texts are my texts, they are finished when I finish them. In my next life I will probably change everything, but not any more in this one. Except blatant mistakes, of course, those I revise when I discover any.

7) Do you like to be a part of the rehearsal process, or do you feel that’s outside the remit of your job?

I prefer to stay outside. When a director asks me to discuss the play with him or to read passages of the text to the cast, or give a talk to the cast, or answer questions, I’m glad to come and help; but I’m very much aware that theatre is a world of its own where text and language are only part of the final product, so I prefer not to interfere with other people’s imagination and not to pester them with my personal views.

8) I presume you have your own favourite among the plays, as we all do. Were your favourites as a civilian (reader, audience-member) also your favourites to translate, or are those delights to be found in quite different places?

My favorites change in time, of course, as everybody’s favorites will, I presume. My impression is that Shakespeare always embarked on a new experimental journey when he started a play. There are not two plays that have the same inner basic beat, the same fluttering of the soul, have an identical tune, a comparable frame of mind. He’s always exploring something new which he has never done before in exactly the same
way. As a translator you are always the hound following that new fragrant scent – and you are happy when you get the dear at bay, when you hit on something, and find a tune in your own language to get it across. There are plays that drove me mad – I just finished *Coriolanus*, and for some reason it was an ordeal. It was probably the “Roman” grammar and syntax, or North’s convoluted style that gave me a headache. And I just hated *Cymbeline*: How to go about a language that even in English is sometimes impossible to paraphrase and remains obscure for most native speakers? Write obscure German? Or simplify it by writing easy-to-understand-German? What happened to Shakespeare when he wrote that play – why is its language so hermetically sealed? As a translator you have to get your teeth in questions like that – and the joy is in finding a solution.

9) I’d like to ask you for two examples. First, something tricky you found in the text (a word, a line, a joke?) that you weren’t able to resolve satisfactorily in the translation. And then an example of something tricky for which you managed to find a clever solution that you were particularly pleased with.

a) Oh that this too too solid flesh would melt… which is not so difficult, if you take it in this obvious sense; but what do you do when you realise that it means additionally *Oh that this too too sullied flesh would melt* at the very same time? It doesn’t mean one or the other, it means one *and* the other – Hamlet means both things. It’s his special pastime to mean two things with one word, or as Richard III says, “*I moralize two meanings in one word*”. This generally is the maddening problem with Shakespeare and his skeptical attitude towards language – the pun that manages to say two different things with just one word… For Hamlet’s famous line there is no solution. In German he says only *one* thing… either *solid* or *sullied*. Nothing you can do about that.

b) I wonder how many English native speakers will grasp this joke on first reading or hearing, without footnotes:

Sir Toby: Pourquoi, my dear knight?
Sir Andrew: What is pourquoi ? Do, or not do? I would had bestowed that time in the tongues that I have in fencing, dancing, and bear-baiting. O, had I but followed the arts!
Sir Toby: Then hadst thou had an excellent head of hair.
Sir Andrew: Why, would that have mended my hair?
Sir Toby: Past question, for thou seest it will not curl by nature.
Twelfth Night, I.3
The trick, of course, is the homophonic Elizabethan pronunciation of *tongues* and *tongs*. Sir Andrew means “*tongues*” – *Oh that I had spent my time in studying languages*. Sir Toby mischievously pretends that Sir Andrew meant *tongs* – curling-tongs: *If you had spent your time with curling-tongs you would have had an excellent head of hair.*

The traditional German translation by Schlegel doesn’t get the sense across – Schlegel didn’t notice the double meaning; the passage is completely senseless.

I hit on something – which now is hard to retranslate into English, you can’t explain jokes; it feels clumsy in explanation but actually does work very well.

Anyway: *Curls* in German are the noun “Locken”. And there is also a verb, “locken”, which means to *bait, to entice, to lure*, etc. So I changed the text roughly as follows:

Sir Andrew: *Oh, I should have let myself be lured by the fine arts and language studies, I really should have let myself be lured* (which has the German possible double sense of “*should have let myself be curled*”)

This second sense is activated for the reader / hearer when Sir Toby now answers:

That would have given you a beautiful head of hair.
Sir Andrew: Why, would that have been good for my hair?
Sir Toby: Definitely, you see, it isn’t lured / = curled by itself

10) *Is translating Shakespeare more fun than translating anything else? Harder than translating anything else? Or both? (These things may be connected – my sense is that translators tend to like difficulty, on the whole.)*

“Fun” is a strange word to describe the task of translating Shakespeare. It’s more on the line of subtle torture techniques for masochists. A German saying goes “Viel Feind, viel Ehr”, which could be translated as something like “Many foes, much honour”. Shakespeare’s works are an overwhelming army of innumerable fierce and frightful foes to any translator. The achievement any Shakespeare-translator has to be honoured for is that he doesn’t run away from his desk for dear life, screaming.
As a director, the joy of every autumn starting to prepare the coming summer’s Shakespeare play in Swedish is one of the perks that I, up to 2008 (the theatre went bankrupt in 2009), enjoyed. Spegelteatern staged Shakespeare-in-the-park for 25 years at the Royal Gripsholm Castle, the Steninge and the Häringe Palaces (all outside Stockholm).

When I was five I was forced by the nuns of a convent school to learn Shakespeare sonnets by heart, which left me with a hatred so strong that I walked through university studies in theatre keeping clear of the Elizabethan stage. It was not until I was well into my twenties that I suddenly discovered the greatness of the bard. I was given the opportunity to study and work with the academic, translator and director Göran O. Eriksson, who awakened my love of Shakespeare. He taught me about the respect for the verse, the richness of the language and the need to find rhythm and pace.

My first production was *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in 1985 and every summer I learned more and more. From being a rather directorial director I became a listener of Shakespeare. Nowadays I need actors that are willing to have the patience to “listen to”, and “feel” the verse instead of chasing ahead with their own ideas, who are not waiting for me to direct them, who are not afraid of speaking directly to the audience and who can follow the natural impulses as they come to life.

Of course working on Shakespeare in translation is different from doing it in English.

I have found it impossible to work with older Swedish translations, such as the classical work of Hagberg (1810-1864), whose language often is beautiful and flowery, but has little to do with the Shakespeare I have come to love. And yet Hagberg’s translations are still sometimes used. Even worse, his translation of Hamlet is the one everyone can quote and *Romeo and Juliet* is still called *Romeo och Julia*. (Why change Juliet’s name? None of the other names are Swedish…) Recently I was asked to read a new translation to Swedish (I won’t mention which play), only to find verse lines of more than fifteen syllables and a language so far from the rhythm, contrast and tightness of the bard that I was angrily throwing the pages to the floor. Being asked to direct Shakespeare in Chile I found the same problem in translations into Spanish.

My first reflection is that translating theatre scripts really should be done close
to the theatre by people who understand the difference between the spoken (acted) and written word. When it comes to Shakespeare (just as with the Nobel laureate Harold Pinter) it is essential that the translator has an understanding of the actors’ process.

The actors (and I as a director) need to feel the verse in our bodies to be able to pick up the impulses and stage directions that Shakespeare is giving us. Moreover the content of every line of verse has to match in the translation. A broken line is a broken line and has to remain broken even if the target language is different. In Eriksson’s translation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* you will find the following lines (the sequence here slightly abridged):

EGEUS
Aningen gifter hon sig med Demetrius eller så dör hon.

THESEUS
Vad säger du, flicka? Demetrius är ju en hygglig pojke.

HERMIA
Det är Lysander med.

THESEUS
I och för sig. Men när din far nu föredrar den andre betyder det att han är bättre för dig.

HERMIA
Förlåt, ers nåd, nu går jag väl för långt …

Here Egeus is threatening Hermia with death if she refuses to marry Demetrius. Theseus is quick to silence Egeus’s talk of punishing his daughter; he is eager for his own marriage and doesn’t want it spoiled. So he interrupts Egeus and turns directly to Egeus’s daughter, probably encouraged by Hippolyta. Bravely (again – probably supported by Hippolyta) Hermia in one short half-line (six syllables) says that Lysander is just as good. Not wanting an argument Theseus agrees immediately, but then has to try to keep order and tells Hermia she should obey her father.
Hermia’s first complete line in the exchange comes next; she starts her plea, with a line of respect that says something to the actor of how she should handle her voice and body language.

It’s all there for the actors! Adding or taking away a syllable in translation will completely ruin the scene. In these short lines—correctly translated—we learn how brave Hermia is, Hippolyta is present without saying a word, and the eagerness of Theseus comes through.

If I had the space I could give examples from Juliet’s soliloquy as she waits for Romeo; beautifully flowered speech in Hagberg’s translation but down to earth and real in Eriksson’s as Juliet talks about her impatience to meet Romeo physically. Or Rosalind teaching Orlando about love (and getting a chance to be close to him) watched by Celia. Translations can make or break the scenes.

Shakespeare’s writing is so precise, his verse a tool for the actors that both they, and the director, have to understand, and be ruled by—something that is unfortunately not taught at the state acting schools in Sweden. Even at the most prestigious theatres in Sweden all too often the text is handled as prose (not only in Sweden) rather than as verse. It infuriates me and makes me sad, but basically this is a problem of translations. On the other hand, a good translation can do wonders.

With the translations that Erikson did, where he used a Swedish understandable to audiences of today—without falling into the trap of modernizing or trying to be “hip”—I sometimes feel that a Swedish audience gets a better understanding of the plays than a British one. In England you are “stuck” with the language of the sixteenth century (but I am definitely not suggesting, God forbid, modernizing the texts). You study him in school, which is positive, but it also can lead to stagnation in the way Shakespeare is “spoken on stage”. We humans are conservative and you Brits want to hear Shakespeare the way you always have heard him. This—if I may say so—might be a bit misleading. Language changes, words get new meanings or are completely forgotten, even intonations and rhythm changes. I don’t know if it is true, but I was once told that Australian English is closer to Shakespeare’s language than the British of today.

Starting the process of preparations I always work with English and Swedish text side by side, comparing word by word and line by line. I am helped by the comments to the text and usually read a couple of works on the play. From the first reading, and up to dress rehearsals, the English text is always present and compared with the translation. But most important of all, as a director what I really need is a brilliant translation!
The 2012 “Globe to Globe” season at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in London was the chance of a lifetime for a theatre and language nerd like me. Over six weeks, every one of Shakespeare’s plays was performed, each production from a different country, each in a different language or dialect. Taking advantage of the Globe’s famously cheap standing-room tickets, I went to every show that I could. For a month and a half last summer I found myself at the Globe at least three times a week.

The festival was as close as you could come to a comprehensive portrait of world theatre today. I saw straight adaptations and avant-garde ones; old, established theatre companies and ambitious new ones. Some productions were incredible, some mediocre and some downright bad. From a translator’s perspective, though, there were some surprises and more than a few insights.

I noticed immediately that the actual translated text was usually irrelevant to me. I know a few languages, and I know a few Shakespeare plays, but for the rest, I was totally dependent on two electronic screens situated on either side of the stage. These screens provided short summaries of scenes, dialogue and individual speeches in English – but not a word of Shakespeare’s original text. This is, of course, a kind of translation, but when so much of the magic of Shakespeare is in his words, something was clearly being left behind. The dilemma for these production was how to make up for that loss – how to make their own magic.

Some productions went for a highly visual style. Meno Fortas’s Hamlet in Lithuanian featured a steampunk aesthetic and giant blocks of ice. The Belarus Free Theatre had King Lear dumping handfuls of soil into his daughters’ laps as he parcelled out their inheritance. Habima National Theatre, performing The Merchant of Venice in Hebrew, opted for a motif of ropes, hooks and ties – bringing to mind Shylock’s infamous bond.

Others adapted the text in new and creative ways. For some, like Ngakau Toa’s Troilus and Cressida in Maori, this was as simple as giving the characters Maori names and dressing them in traditional costume. For others, the script was practically torn up and remade, as with Yohangza’s hilarious Korean folktale version of A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Company Theatre’s Hindi Twelfth Night featured an onstage band, Bollywood-style singing and dancing, and Sebastian complaining that Shakespeare didn’t write him a larger part.
The Georgian Marjanishvili Theatre’s *As You Like It* was in a class of its own. The Georgians, liberated by the knowledge that practically no one in the audience would understand a word, filled every second of the show with farcical stage business. In one scene, Le Beau covers an extended bit of exposition by assembling a sandwich: taking from each of his many pockets first bread, then lettuce, then mustard, then salt and pepper, and finally a slice of ham from inside his hat. Duke Fredrick struggles with an over-enthusiastic lady prompter with a crush on him. In the wrestling match, Charles is replaced halfway through by a life-size dummy, which Orlando proceeds to pulverize. Touchstone courts Phebe while she violently milks a life-size foam sheep. And Jacques’s famous speech culminates in a hilariously over-the-top geyser of autumn leaves erupting behind him to the swelling of violins.

But looking back on Globe to Globe, the plays that stick most in my memory are those where the cast’s chemistry with one another and with the audience were the strongest. Ashtar Theatre’s *Richard II* in Palestinian Arabic was so good it sent me home to read the play for the first time. National Theatre of Bitola’s production of *Henry VI, part 3* in Macedonian featured not only haunting Balkan music, stylish military costumes and serious gender-bending, but a pitch-perfect ensemble cast, including an impish and hilarious Richard Plantagenet. (It may be no coincidence that the latter play – generally considered among Shakespeare’s weakest – benefitted from being freed from the original scripts.) Finally, the French Compagnie Hypermobile’s production of *Much Ado About Nothing* – a fundamentally straight production, no frills, no gimmicks – stands out as one of the best. The actors’ exemplary timing, wit and chemistry with one another carried the show on its own.

In some respects it’s humbling to reflect that the plays of the greatest wordsmith of the English language can stand alone with barely any text (save those two little screens) to support them. The translator in me was disappointed, but the theatre director in me was unsurprised. Theatre is always so much more than the text – it is a living, breathing, temporary art, feeding off of personal connections and never existing in the same way twice.

Is there a lesson here for a literary translator? Is it that textualism only gets you so far – that the things that make a piece of writing live and sing are beyond the words on the page? Perhaps these things are as intrinsic to fiction and poetry as actors, a stage and an audience are to the theatre. Perhaps these things are magic because they make something completely new, and we have no idea how it happens.

I am too new at this game to know the answers to those questions. But I do know magic when I see it – and Shakespeare is magic, no matter the stage, no matter the language.
Corinne’s Italian translation of Romeo and Juliet in Mme de Staël’s 1807 novel is not strictly speaking a translation at all; it is a fictitious translation which as such can only assume a vague form in the reader’s imagination, a very vague form indeed if the reader knows no Italian or is not acquainted with Shakespeare’s play. However this does not prevent it from telling us something about Mme de Staël’s opinions on Shakespeare and translation: the staging of Corinne’s Italian version of the play allows Mme de Staël to advocate translation as a means of literary revivification, in particular in Italy, while a closer reading of its omissions and modifications reveals her unease with various aspects of Shakespeare’s plays. The performance of the Italian Romeo and Juliet comes at the end of Book VII of Corinne ou l’Italie, “La littérature italienne”, in which the protagonists have discussed the tiredness of Italian literature, above all the Italians’ inability to portray love without falling back on clichés, and the lack of “national” tragedies in Italy. A translation of Romeo and Juliet seems to fit the bill perfectly, and the audience is enthusiastic, proclaiming the play “véritablement la tragédie qui convient aux Italiens” (“truly a tragedy that is well-suited to the Italians”).

Seven years before Michele Leoni produces the first Italian translation of the play and almost a decade before Mme de Staël urges the Italians to remedy their literary sterility by translating the English and German poets in her 1816 article “De l’esprit des traductions”, Corinne’s successful translation of Romeo and Juliet makes a bold statement about the role translation can play in the literature of a nation. At the same time however, her Italian version of this “tragédie qui convient aux Italiens” is very much in keeping with French neoclassical conventions. From what we can glean from the lines of Shakespeare’s verse and their French prose translations quoted in the text, as well as from the odds and ends of plot summary provided by Mme de Staël, we would seem to be dealing here with a somewhat expurgated version of Shakespeare’s play.

The combination of Mme de Staël’s boldness in allowing Italian literary history to culminate in a Shakespeare translation in Corinne, and her discomfort when it comes to certain aspects of the text is typical of her attitude to Shakespeare in general. However much she admires the originality and beauty of his works,
Shakespeare in Translation

she is troubled time and again by his “bizareries”. His plays pander too much to low and vulgar tastes; they are repetitious, full of longueurs and too often stage suffering and violence which French neoclassical theatre prefers to keep invisible. After urging Italians to translate English and German poetry in “De l’esprit des traductions”, Mme de Staël seems to renege on her own suggestion, encouraging them instead to transform Racine’s Athalie into a kind of Italian musical. It is not just Shakespeare’s vulgarity that troubles her; it is also the enormity of the translator’s task. Languages pair themselves off in Mme de Staël: they are either analogous, like French and Italian or English and German, or else they are not, in which case the task of translation becomes infinitely difficult. Shakespeare’s German translator, A.W. Schlegel, extolled in “De l’esprit des traductions” for rendering Schiller and Shakespeare contemporaries, had both linguistic closeness and similarities in taste in his favour; an Italian or French translator of Shakespeare has neither. In De la littérature², Mme de Staël bemoans the fact that simple words are not regarded as noble enough for French verse, so that Macbeth’s words “The table is full”, when he sees the ghost of Banquo in his place, can have little effect on a French audience. If a French actor were to say “exactly the same words in French: la table est remplie”, the audience would hear only commonplace, everyday words and remain unmoved. Of course, no translation can hope to use “précisément les mêmes mots” as the original; Mme de Staël herself defines translation as “animer du meme souffle de vie un instrument différent” (“breathing the same breath of life into a different instrument”). But her point is that even a translation which says the same thing as the original does not have the same effect; in some languages some effects cannot be achieved.

For Mme de Staël then, an Italian translator of Shakespeare is confronted with a dual problem – that of taste and that of linguistic register. In “De l’esprit de la traduction”³ Mme de Staël will evade the issue by abandoning Shakespeare in favour of Racine; in Corinne she can get round both problems by producing a fictional account of a translation rather than an actual translation. In many ways her method is similar to the one she will make use of in De l’Allemagne in order to familiarise French readers with works of German literature: a more or less faithful plot summary is interspersed with French prose translations (also more or less faithful) of excerpts from the text, and occasional comments on style. In The Birth of European Romanticism, John Isbell has shown how Mme de Staël manipulates her portrayal of Goethe, “pushing Faust back towards neoclassicism”, and something similar happens in Corinne: not only is Shakespeare’s play reduced

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to a two-person plot to allow it to function as a perfect *mise-en-abîme* of Mme de Staël’s novel; it is also purged of all comic interludes, wordplay, innuendo, and any other language or action that might offend neoclassical taste. One of the most notable omissions is that of all references to lips or kisses. Mme de Staël describes for example how Romeo approaches Juliet at the ball “pour lui addresser à demi-voix des vers si brillants dans l’anglais, si magnifiques dans la traduction italienne, sur sa grace et sa beauté” (“to whisper lines of verse to her on her grace and beauty, verse so brilliant in English, so magnificent in the Italian translation”). English brilliance becomes Italian magnificence in Corinne’s translation, but somewhere in the process, Romeo and Juliet’s playful exchange on hands and lips and kisses which culminates in Romeo kissing Juliet twice, is transformed into whispered words on Juliet-Corinne’s grace and beauty. (Lines on the beauty of Juliet are in fact spoken, not whispered, to a servant, earlier in I.5; grace seems to be an invention of Mme de Staël.) Kisses are omitted again when Oswald quotes from Romeo’s final speech, stopping just short of “And lips, O you / The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss / A dateless bargain to engrossing death!” (V.3). Even the word “embrasser” is considered too risqué a translation of “embrace” here; Mme de Staël rejects it in favour of the more clunking “serrez-la […] contre mon coeur” (“press her to my heart”).

As far as taste is concerned, then, *Romeo and Juliet* is tidied up to meet French neoclassical requirements. Linguistic problems do not even arise, because the translation, like Corinne’s improvisations elsewhere in the novel, is left to the reader’s imagination. The fact of translation is nevertheless important; the reader is reminded four times that the play is performed in translation. There is however little description of language or style, other than that the translation is in verse and that it is “tour à tour éloquent et lyrique, inspiré et naturel” (“eloquent and lyrical, inspired and natural by turns”). But we can imagine it to be something like Corinne, who not only translates Shakespeare’s English into Italian, but also as it were, translates herself into Juliet:

Corinne était revêtue d’un habit de fête charmant, et cependant conforme au costume du temps. […] elle frappait d’abord comme une personne nouvelle, puis on reconnaissait sa voix et sa figure, mais sa figure divinisée qui ne conservait plus qu’une expression poétique.

(“Corinne was festively attired in a gown which was charming and yet in keeping with the costume of the time. […] at first the audience were surprised
to see a new person, then they recognised her voice and face, but a deified face which no longer retained anything but a poetical expression.”) Charming and yet in keeping with the period, simultaneously new and recognisable, but decidedly poetical in expression – Corinne figures here as a translation which manages to be both faithful and original, a translation which is itself a work of art. Interestingly though, neither the translation from Corinne into Juliet, nor that from Shakespeare’s English into Italian (Mme de Staël uses the verb “transporter” for both) has to cover much distance. Corinne and Oswald fall in love before they discover that their love is forbidden, just like Juliet and Romeo, so that fact and fiction are so close that the somewhat literal-minded Oswald is incapable of distinguishing between them, and is jealous when Corinne utters Romeo’s name instead of his own. The closeness of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* to Corinne’s is similarly striking: although written in English, Shakespeare’s play is very much an Italian play, so much so that the translation seems more original than the original: “La pièce de Roméo et Juliette, traduite en italien, semblait rentrer dans sa langue maternelle” (“Translated into Italian, *Romeo and Juliet* seemed to return into its mother tongue”). Far from introducing the literature of the north to the Italians, Corinne has in fact repatriated a play that was Italian to begin with, and was just as it were written in the wrong language.

In this context it is interesting to note that the only time Oswald quotes from *Romeo and Juliet*, the only time, that is, that Shakespeare is quoted in the original English, it is for once not the English which comes first in the text, but Mme de Staël’s French prose translation. Thus the prosaic and – for a French readership, at least – unexotic French would seem to represent Oswald’s English Shakespeare, while the more exotic and poetic original gets to stand in for Corinne’s Italian. In this way, the Italian translation corresponds in the most literal sense with what Goethe regarded as the highest form of translation, “wo man die Übersetzung dem Original identisch machen möchte, so daß eins nicht anstatt des andern, sondern an der Stelle des andern gelten solle” (“in which we seek to render the translation identical to the original in such a way that it does not stand instead of the original, but in its place”). In *Corinne ou l’Italie*, Mme de Staël can create the perfect Italian translation of *Romeo and Juliet* by allowing the original to stand in for and give a sense of the translation. At the same time, through highly selective quotation and a modified plot summary, she is careful to ensure that Corinne’s translation does not give us too much of a sense of the original.
In Brief

Translating idiolect

Given its colloquial and highly non-standard narration, Translating Celda 211 by Francisco Pérez Gandul was an exercise in sociolect, dialect and idiolect translation.

As far as translating features or expressions unique to a character’s idiolect is concerned, the problem lies in their inventive nature, which makes non-equivalence more likely. This innovative usage might have subtle links to existing expressions, and presumably it is where language change is spawned: a new form is used by a speaker and it either catches on or it doesn’t.

Taking the example above of cagar grillos, given the context there is a tenable link to the Spanish idiom olla de grillos (meaning a place of chaos and confusion), roughly equivalent to the English word “madhouse”. However, since a “madhouse” is not something that a person could conceivably defecate, it is no longer a possibility for translation. A modified version of the common expression the shit hits the fan was used in my translation so that a ver qué hacéis para no cagar ladrillos was rendered as “let’s see what you do now so yer shit don’t hit the fan tomorrow”, thereby preserving the character’s linguistic inventiveness. “Shit crickets” was deemed inadequate since it would not allude to a well-known expression in the same way and its connotations would therefore be obscure.

Simon Bruni

There are good reasons for translating names when they carry symbolic resonances. In Mercè Rodoreda’s 1960 contemporary Catalan classic, La plaça del diamant, the narrator, Natalia, reviews her life from before the advent of Spanish Second Republic to the grey days of Francoist dictatorship in the late 1950s. She meets a young carpenter at a fiesta in Diamond Square in the district of Gràcia. He sweeps her off her feet and declares that he will marry her and she will be known as “Colometa”. He soon persuades her to leave her job in a pastry shop and start fulfilling his dream of breeding pigeons while rearing their two children. What’s in a name or a nickname then? In Diamond Square is one of the few great novels about women struggling to survive on the home front during wartime. “Colometa” is a nickname, “Pidgey”, diminutive of “colom”, the Catalan for “pigeon”. I decided to use “Pidgey” with all the negative and positive reactions pigeons evoke in the English-speaking world. “Colometa” may sound exotic to an English reader, even if it is footnoted, as in the 1967 translation by Eda O’Shiel, as “pigeon-girl”, or explained in the text in the second as “little dove” in David Rosenthal’s 1980 peace-
loving interpretation. The shift from Natalia to Pidgey denotes a shift from romantic adolescence to maternal struggle to survive. Natalia has Tolstoyan resonances – a favourite author among Catalan anarchists and translated by Andreu Nin, translator, Trotskyist militant and Rodoreda’s one-time lover. Pidgey’s husband dies at the front. She marries a grocer and becomes Mrs Natalia…

Peter Bush

Translating simile is as hard as a nut. Or is it as hard as nailing jelly to a tree? The former reflects more literally the Turkish idiom for conveying difficulty, and just about works in English, where we are familiar with “hard nuts to crack”. But does the latter, much more native option represent a better gloss?

The latest novel by Turkish author Murat Menteş, Ruhi Mücerret, gives the translator ample opportunity to wrestle with these quandaries. Ordinarily, the calculation might run as follows. Do you translate the simile word for word, and risk amping up the strangeness in the interests of preserving the author’s very words? Or do you naturalize the comparison, and preserve what you feel to be its effect on its original audience? The density of metaphor tumbling out of the mouth of the narrator in Ruhi Mücerret leaves you with room for more than just one or the other: there is space to develop almost a typology of Menteş’s metaphors, reserving a different approach depending on what you think that the author’s language was trying to achieve at that particular point in the text. On the whole, I decided to retain the author’s words when those words already sounded original and strange in Turkish, but then to culturally relocate those that, by contrast, can only have been intended to come across as cliché.

Even within the simplified terms of this method, “…küle bulanmış kardan adam sessizliğiyle oturuyordum.” presents a less than straightforward choice. Rendered quite literally it might be, “I was sitting with the silence of an ash-covered snowman”. (Where in English you are as quiet as a mouse, in Turkish, quiet can be expressed with snowmen.) The ash covering adds a twist – a subversion of the expected metaphor. I suspected that it might have been designed to convey something of the age of the protagonist. The novel’s adventurous and highly unreliable narrator is a hundred-year-old war veteran who in this passage is describing both the greyness he feels and the greyness he sees when glimpsing his reflection in hospital mirror; perhaps the “ash covering” is a function of cataracts. I decided to imply age, but I also decided that the point more than anything was to subtly trill on the cliché you were expecting to hear. So the mouse became geriatric. Rather than an “ash-covered snowman”, in English our protagonist is sitting, “as quiet as a geriatric mouse”.

Izzy Finkel
The translation issue that has occupied most of my brain space this week came about whilst working on a re-translation of a poem by the contemporary Slovene poet Dane Zajc. The poem’s title, “Krokar”, is problematic in itself, with both “crow” and “raven” cited in the dictionary and previous translations utilising both options. But the most difficult issue concerned one particular verb, “kljukati”, meaning “to peck”. The sound of this verb in Slovene, echoing the “k” of krokar, and along with several other words, creates a beautiful alliterative structure. It also echoes the word “kljukast”, meaning hooked, which in turn has dark associations with the swastika (“kljukasti križ”, or “hooked cross” being the Slovene translation). Already this verb was loaded with meaning, not one bit of which was conveyed with “peck”. Nor did “peck” echo the sound of “crow” or “raven”, and the more I thought about it, the more I decided that I had to recreate the sounds of the poem, and prioritize the repetition of the “k”, “k”.

This leads to that ever-fuzzy area of recreating an equivalent effect for the target language reader, but on listening to an audio recording by the late poet, I was convinced that the phonetics of this poem were the key to its haunting, eerie atmosphere. And so I made a decision that is somewhat uncharacteristic of my usual philosophy, and as it stands my bird doesn’t “peck, peck”, it “caws, caws”. It certainly wasn’t a solution I arrived at easily, but in this context I believe it works. Maybe next I’ll go one step further and entitle the poem “Rook”, just to fit one more “k” sound in there…

Olivia Hellewell

Why I didn’t notice on an early reading that Teffi’s story “The Pipe” turns on an instance of sleight of pen, I don’t know, but when I started translating it, I began suffering from an extended anxiety attack. Its protagonist, Zobov, has a fantastic imagination – and as a journalist he just can’t stop himself dramatizing otherwise mundane news. Looking at pipes one day in a shop window rekindles a childhood memory: a picture of a sea captain out of a book. The caption to the picture read: “Капитан бодрствовал всю ночь” or “The captain kept vigil all night long”. The young Zobov, however, misreads “бодрствовать” as “бодросовал”, which isn’t a real word but can have connotations of gallantry. Inspired, Zobov goes into the shop and buys a pipe, and suddenly he is transformed into Zobov, latter-day knight. His misreading seems rather unlikely, but Teffi shores it up with the explanation that not many nine-year-old children would have known the word бодрствовать. And this explanation is what saves my translation. First, I changed the picture caption to read: “A night at sea”, which Zobov misreads as: “A knight at sea”. I then keep Teffi’s
explanation to a point – it is still an unlikely misreading – but I attribute it to the power of Zobov’s imagination.

Anne Marie Jackson

The Lustucru problem – why only Smarties have the answer

Did I grow complacent because it was my first time working on children’s stories? I managed to finish a draft of “The story of Lustucru” before recognising it as my toughest translation challenge yet.

A fairy blesses Lustucru with intelligence and immortality on condition that he keep this terrible name. He cuts a dash through the centuries, consorting with kings, emperors and Joan of Arc, but gets no credit for his valour because no one can bear to blight history with his name. The disappointed Lustucru retires to the country, falls in love with Madame Michel and kidnaps her cat so that she will take his suit seriously. They live happily ever after.

Then a friend pointed out that Lustucru is above all a venerable French pasta brand – a large factor in its absurdity. Birdseye, Dolmio, Marmite, Oxo started spinning through my head. Reputation was the point. Worse, the name was also a neat pun. Lustucru = L’eusses-tu cru = Would you believe it. I can’t believe it’s not butter? But the complication was even more far-reaching.

Lustucru’s name is at last immortalized in a song the country kids make up about him. But further research revealed this to be the jingle famously used in French ads for the pasta. Was I to reshape the story’s whole conclusion in favour of Mars’s red and blue cars, Noodle Doodle or joining someone’s Club? Or should I compose my own apocryphal jingle to a well-known brand? Was the story translatable at all? Terrified by the prospect of a complete rewrite in the name of true faithfulness, I wrote to my publisher with all the reasons why this translation was fairly impossible. They agreed – but decided to publish anyway. The name remains Lustucru, and so brand recognition and the pun and the point of the jingle are all lost to English readers. It is still a charming, ironic little story, but something of a sweet with a hole in it.

Sophie Lewis

As always, “In Brief” contributions for future issues gratefully received; send to d.hahn@uea.ac.uk

1. Sophie was translating Pierre Gripari, Les Contes de la rue Broca, to be published by Pushkin in August 2013 as The Good Little Devil, and other tales.
How to help new translators into the profession, while also ensuring the highest literary standards? I remember the first time we asked ourselves this question at a TA meeting a few years back. The first attempt at an answer, a pilot mentoring programme initiated in partnership with BCLT, with support from the Gulbenkian Foundation, was more successful than any of us could have imagined, with both pilot-mentees gaining contracts. Last year the programme expanded six-fold, and at our post-AGM talk in November, we heard moving accounts from two of our twelve mentors. Robert Chandler and Antonia Lloyd-Jones both spoke with great pride of their mentees’ achievements. Though the mentorships were officially over, the pairings had turned into lasting professional friendships. Antonia Lloyd-Jones went so far as to predict that her mentees would be bringing her gin when she was an old lady! One problem remains: we all hate the word “mentee”. Is there a better word in another language that we might be able to borrow?

This year there have been mentorships in Welsh, Polish, Turkish, Italian, Greek, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Portuguese, Japanese, Chinese, Tamil, Arabic, Dutch, and Russian – sixteen pairings in fifteen languages. The inclusion of Turkish meant that I was able to take part in the programme as a mentor for the first time; this was one of two Turkish mentorships supported by the British Council to run alongside its literature programme at the London Book Fair, at which Turkey was the market focus this year. The TA was centrally involved in the planning and delivery of this hugely ambitious exercise, which showcased more than twenty Turkish writers at XX events in XX cities as well as at the Book Fair itself. In the run up to the Fair, there were concerns expressed about the proper representation of minority voices and dissenting opinions, but I am happy to report we all heard a very wide range of perspectives at every event I chaired or attended. I had thought myself reasonably well informed on the literary scene in Turkey, but I left the fair with many new names on my to-read list, and hugely impressed with the range and dynamism of Turkey’s literary culture.

We don’t yet have audience figures for the LBF Literary Translation Centre, which we ran with our usual partners, but – as any of you who attended will have noticed – all of our sixteen events were full to bursting. Having invited several very distinguished literary translators from the US, we thought it might be an idea
to meet up with them outside the Fair to discuss ways in which we extend a few of our projects across the ocean. The result was an all-afternoon Sunday Summit. All in attendance deserve medals, I think, for agreeing to staying inside on the first properly sunny day all year. Oh, but it was worth it... I am sure we shall look back on this day and recall the open questions that led on to excellent transatlantic projects. (Susan Bernofsky’s report is on page XX.)

Meanwhile, back at the Free Word Centre, we welcomed two new translators in residence, Ollie Brock and Canan Marasligil (see page XX). We sent so many translators to speak at literature festivals that we are beginning to lose count. We also joined forces with CWIG for an event to announce the shortlist of the Marsh Award. This summer we shall again see two translation summer schools, one run by the BCLT at UEA, and the second, Use Your English, in London, at the end of July. And we’ve just finished checking the proofs of the Spanish edition of *Translation in Practice*, with others to follow.

But some of the best news has come from the Emerging Translators Network, which now has almost 200 members covering at least 23 languages, including Japanese, Hebrew, Turkish, Russian, Arabic, Flemish, Korean, Dutch, Norwegian, Finnish and Polish. It maintained a high and inspiring profile at our Literary Translation Centre, with two ETN founders (Anna Holmwood and Jamie Lee Searle) offering events on becoming a literary translator, and the other, Rosalind Harvey, running a Wordkeys translation game as well as speaking with Ollie Brock on the work translators do off the page. Anna Holmwood and fellow member Deborah Smith also spoke on translation flows in Asia. For those of you who are not familiar with this acronym, ETN is an electronic network for people as yet unsure or unable to join the TA, which can share advice and concerns in a welcoming, non-judgmental space, full of people with a wide range of backgrounds and experience and lots of new ideas. One project-in-progress is a “Translator's Toolkit”: this aims to provide a series of pdfs for members on editing, rates, time management, royalties, summer schools, and the pros and cons of joining a professional organisation. The @translatedworld hashtag on Twitter, initiated by Helen Wang, is another a great success, with over a hundred and fifty followers and ETN members tweeting titles translated from the languages they work from.

All this makes me almost embarrassed to remember the lofty open questions that helped start all this. It’s become increasingly clear that our new and emerging translators might have more to teach us than we could ever hope to teach them...
Calls for Submissions

In Other Words issues 42-43

Translation and Politics
We welcome article submissions on any aspect of “Translation and Politics”, which can include but is not limited to:

• The politics of word-choice
• Translation and free speech
• Political and economic pressures on publishing, and the literary marketplace
• Translation and censorship
• Inter-language power dynamics

Articles should be a maximum of 3,500 words; style guidelines are provided in the back of each issue of In Other Words. Further queries should be addressed to d.hahn@uea.ac.uk. Deadline for submissions is 1 September 2013.

Translating the Classics
We welcome article submissions on any aspect of “Translating the Classics”, which can include but is not limited to:

• When do we need to re-translate?
• What kind of English should classics be translated into – the language of then or now?
• Translated classics in the classroom and in the academy
• What gets into the international canon – and who decides?

Articles should be a maximum of 3,500 words; style guidelines are provided in the back of each issue of In Other Words. Further queries should be addressed to d.hahn@uea.ac.uk. Deadline for submissions is 1 March 2014.
Notes on Contributors

Boris Akunin is a pen-name of Grigory Chkhartishvili (q.v.).

Susan Bernofsky teaches literary translation in the MFA programme at Columbia University. She currently serves as chair of the PEN Translation Committee and blogs about translation at www.translationista.org.

Before taking up his current post as sales manager at Saqi Books in February 2007, Ashley Biles spent five years as a sales representative and latterly Sales Director with Signature Books, an independent sales representation team. He has worked in book selling since 1987, having been a buyer for the London book wholesaler, Pipeline Books, which was part of the Namara Group. His experience has taken in both wholesale and retail, sales and now publishing.

Tony Bianchi is a writer and translator. Born on Tyneside, he now lives in Cardiff and writes in English and Welsh. Until 2002 he headed the Literature Department of the Arts Council of Wales. His novel Pryfeta (2007) won the Daniel Owen Memorial Prize; his own adaptation, Daniel’s Beetles, appeared from Seren in 2011. Other publications include Esgyrn Bach (2006), Chwilio am Sebastian Pierce (2009), Bumping (2010), a volume of short stories, Cyffesion Geordie Oddi Cartref (2010), and Ras Olaf Harri Selwyn (2012), which has been shortlisted for Wales Book of the Year 2013.

Jean Boase-Beier is Professor of Literature and Translation at the University of East Anglia, where she runs the MA in Literary Translation. She has written several academic books on literary translation and is also a translator of poetry between German and English, and is editor of the bilingual poetry series “Visible Poets” for Arc Publications.

Peter Böök is a Swedish theatre director who was head of an independent theatre in Stockholm for 35 years. He has directed more than 80 productions, mostly in Sweden, but also in Denmark, Chile, Spain and the US. He writes, translates, and teaches in theatre (acting and directing) but is also a consultant in Communicative Leadership and ECR for companies such as Ericson, SEB, Vattenfall and KPMG. He lives with his two cats in the centre of Stockholm.

Having translated almost five million words from Spanish as a commercial translator, Simon Bruni is now snowballing towards a career in literary translation. Following his MA in Literary Translation at the University of Exeter he won a John Dryden prize for his translation of Celda 211 by Francisco Pérez Gandul, his first published translation came in the form of Uruguayan author Julio Figueredo’s collection of short stories in the magic realism tradition, and he has two further novels upcoming.

Thomas Bunstead is a writer and a translator from Spanish based in East Sussex. He blogs at www.throwyourlaptopdownthestairs.blogspot.com.

Peter Bush’s translations published this year include In Diamond Square by Mercè Rodoreda, Sketches of Spain by Federico García Lorca and The Sound of One Hand Killing by Teresa Solana. His translation of Solana’s story “Still Life No.41” – from her e-book Crazy Tales of Blood and Guts – was nominated this year for a Mystery Writers of America Edgar Allen Poe Award, the only translation nominated in any category.

Sean Gasper Bye is an actor, director and translator. He is joint artistic director of the Invisible Theatre Company, for which he regularly acts and directs. He translates Polish fiction, reportage and drama and is the 2013 British Centre for Literary Translation Mentee for Polish. Sean grew up in Holicong, Pennsylvania and is currently based in London.
Grigory Chkhartishvili used to be a literary translator from Japanese to Russian, then gave it up to be a massively bestselling detective-writer called Boris Akunin. Under that name he is perhaps best known as the author of the Erast Fandorin series, a dozen multi-million-selling titles set mostly in Moscow in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Fandorin books have been translated into more than thirty languages, and several have been adapted for the big screen.

David Colmer translates Dutch poetry, fiction and children’s literature. He has won several translation awards.

Patricia Crampton is a translator, best known for her English translations of some 200 children’s books. These include Gudrun Pausewang’s *The Final Journey*, for which she won the 1999 Marsh Award; the *Miffy* books by Dick Bruna; and work by Astrid Lindgren and countless others. She has twice won the Mildred L. Batchelder Award.

Siân Melangell Dafydd is the author of *Y Trydydd Peth* ("The Third Thing", Gomer, 2009, winner of the National Eisteddfod Prose Medal) and co-editor of *Taliesin* literature review. She is an author, poet and translator, working in both Welsh and English. She has translated a wide variety of works ranging from the Malayalam poet K. Satchidanandan to Eoin Colfer. She also speaks French and Italian.

Eric Dickens is a literary translator, chiefly from Swedish and Estonian. He has published over a dozen books from these languages. He lives in Sweden.

Kari Dickson generally manages to juggle translation with teaching in the Scandinavian Studies department at the University of Edinburgh.

Ben Faccini is a British author who grew up in France and Italy. He regularly reads, reports and edits for MacLehose Press. He recently edited and translated part of their Italian short-story collection: *Outsiders*.

Izzy Finkel is a writer and translator based between London and Istanbul. She currently co-edits *BÜLENT*, a quarterly journal that aims to foster new ways of thinking about contemporary Turkey.

Maureen Freely is a writer (six novels and three works of non-fiction), a journalist and a translator from Turkish. She teaches creative writing at the University of Warwick, and is currently chair of the Translators Association.

Carlos Gamerro lives and works in Buenos Aires. He has published five novels including *Las Islas* (1998; published in English as *The Islands* in 2012) and *El secreto y las voces* (2002; *An Open Secret*, 2011). He has translated Graham Greene’s *A World of One’s Own*; Harold Bloom’s *Poetry and Repression* and W. Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII* amongst others.

Kate Griffin is international programme director at BCLT. She also works as a freelance consultant on international literature and translation. www.kategriffin.org

Frank Günther is a translator of Shakespeare into German. He worked as assistant director in various German theatres, and assistant to Charles Marowitz at the Open Space in London; he directed plays and a few operas in Germany and Switzerland, started translating modern and classic English plays (such as Tom Stoppard). At a certain point he gave up theatre to concentrate exclusively on translating Shakespeare. He has so far translated 34 Shakespeare plays, and his translations are widely performed in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, with more than 400 productions to date. The plays are published in a bibliophilic hardcover, and a paperback edition that should be completed with every Shakespeare play by 2016. He has received various awards, including the Translation Prize of the German Academy for Language und Literature.
Daniel Hahn is a writer, editor and translator, with thirty-something books to his name. He is currently translating a Brazilian novel and compiling the new *Oxford Companion to Children’s Literature*. He is also national programme director of the British Centre for Literary Translation, and editor of *In Other Words*.

Olivia Hellewell is a budding Slovene literary translator, currently studying for an MA in Translation Studies with Slovene at the University of Nottingham. She has worked as a translator of economic news from both Spanish and Slovene, but returned to university to focus on Slovene language and literature.

Anne Marie Jackson was the first translator from Russian to be mentored on the TA / BCLT mentorship programme. Currently she is translating a collection of stories by Teffi. Anne Marie’s translation of *Istemi*, a novel by Alexei Nikitin, was published by Peter Owen this spring.

John Kearns has worked as a translator from Polish to English and has written extensively on translator training. He edits *Translation Ireland*, the journal of the Irish Translators’ and Interpreters’ Association.

Laurence Laluyaux is a literary agent at Rogers Coleridge and White Ltd. She taught French in the US and worked briefly as a translator in the UK prior to becoming an agent.

Sophie Lewis is a London-born writer, editor and translator from French. Her translations include works by Marcel Aymé, Violette Leduc, Stendhal and Jules Verne. She is Editor-at-Large at the independent publisher And Other Stories and has been living in Rio de Janeiro since 2011.

Hilary Mantel is a British novelist. Her books include *Fludd*, *A Place of Greater Safety* and *An Experiment in Love*; and most recently the first two in a planned trilogy about Thomas Cromwell and the Court of Henry VIII, *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. She has been twice shortlisted for the Orange Prize, twice won the Man Booker Prize, and won the Costa Book of the Year and the David Cohen Prize.

Canan Marasligil is a writer, literary translator, editor and screenwriter. She is translator in residence at the Free Word Centre in London. [http://cananmarasligil.com](http://cananmarasligil.com)

Paul Michaels started to learn sign language in 2001 after his niece was diagnosed as profoundly deaf. He qualified as a BSL / English interpreter in 2011 and is currently undertaking an MRes at Durham University, analysing the identity, culture and language of the deaf gay community.

Lulu Norman is a translator, writer and editor. Her latest translation is Mahi Binebine’s *Horses of God* for Granta (UK) and Tin House (US), which won a 2013 PEN award.

Emily Rose is currently studying the MA in Literary Translation at the University of East Anglia and is also doing an internship at BCLT. She did her BA in French and Spanish at the University of Royal Holloway and translates from French and Spanish into English.

Pru Rowlandson is the publicity director at Granta Publications. She has been a literary publicist for over 12 years, having worked previously for Canongate books and Harvill Secker.

Jonathan Ruppin has worked at Foyle’s Bookshop for ten years, where is now web editor. He is also a member of the editorial committee for *New Books in German* and a freelance journalist. He tweets as @tintiddle.

Michal Shavit is editorial director at Harvill Secker, an imprint of Random House. Harvill Secker is one of the most prestigious and highly regarded imprints in British and world publishing. In its original incarnation it was founded in 1910, and has been a major force in publishing ever since. It is the publisher of writers as varied as George Orwell, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, J.M. Coetzee, Umberto Eco, Günter Grass, Haruki Murakami, David Lodge, Yasmina Reza, Laurent Binet, Elif
Notes on Contributors

Batuman, Sheila Heti, Per Petterson, Henning Mankell and Jo Nesbø. Harvill Secker specializes in publishing the best literary fiction and crime fiction from around the world.

David Shook served as Translator in Residence for the 2012 Poetry Parnassus. He translated poems from French, Kinyarwanda, and Spanish for the associated anthology. While in residence, he premiered his film Kilómetro Cero, about poet Marcelo Ensenma Nsang, covertly filmed in Equatorial Guinea. His latest book in translation is Mario Bellatin’s Shiki Nagaoka: A Nose for Fiction, and a collection of his own poetry, Our Obsidian Tongues, is available from Eyewear Publishing. He lives in Los Angeles, where he serves as Editorial Director of Phoneme Media, a not-for-profit publishing and film production house for world literature in translation.

Kjersti Annesdatter Skomsvold is a Norwegian novelist, the author of Jo fortere jeg går, jo mindre er jeg, whose English translation by Kerri A. Pierce (The Faster I Walk, The Smaller I Am) has been shortlisted for the IMPAC Dublin Award; and Monstermenneske (“Monsterhuman”).

Ahdaf Soueif is an Egyptian novelist and political and cultural commentator. Her books include the novel The Map of Love, which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize; and Cairo: My City, Our Revolution, her personal account of the events of early 2011 in Cairo. She is the founder of PalFest, the Palestine Festival of Literature.

Imogen Taylor is a freelance translator and a PhD student at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Her thesis is on the bilingual couple in the French novel from Zaïde to Corinne.

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The Journal for Literary Translators

Published by the British Centre for Literary Translation and supported by the Translators Association (Society of Authors)

Subscriptions start from £17 for two issues. *In Other Words* is distributed free of charge to members of the Translators Association

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Guidelines for Contributors

Scope
Published by the British Centre for Literary Translation, with the support of the Translators Association, *In Other Words* is a British journal dedicated primarily to the practice of literary translation. With two issues per year (May and November), it publishes articles, interviews and notes.

Readership
The journal’s readership includes practitioners of literary translation, writers of fiction, poetry and drama, literary professionals and advocates, critics, and scholars. One of its main aims is to foster communication and exchange of ideas, while raising the visibility and profile of literary translation in the British and international contexts.

Content
Areas of interest may include factual notes on the profession of literary translator, news and reports on literary translation events and other developments in the field, as well as analysis and criticism of any aspect of literary translation, from a linguistic, stylistic or cultural perspective, as well as the relationship between literary translation and creative writing. To ensure content coherence, a part of each issue is dedicated to a specific theme which is announced two issues in advance, together with information about the deadline for submissions. Although the editorial board is sympathetic to a wide range of approaches, opinions expressed in published contributions do not necessarily reflect its views.

General instructions to intending contributors
Contributions of up to 3,500 words are invited in the above areas. Contributions should be sent by e-mail attachment to the editor at d.hahn@uea.ac.uk. E-mail enquiries to (and notes on styling conventions available from) the editor. Contributors whose articles are accepted for publication should also provide us with a brief biographical note of a few lines for the section “Notes on Contributors”. Contributors of articles will receive one copy of the issue in which their work appears.

Style guidance
Paragraphs should be indented. Quotations longer than three lines of prose or two lines of verse should be indented on both sides and separated from the main body of the text. Notes to the printed text should take the form of footnotes, not endnotes. Make sparing use of footnotes. Titles of books should be in italics, as well as words singled out for emphasis, single foreign words not naturalised in English and foreign phrases. No other form of emphasis (capitals, bold, large print, etc.) should be used, and careful use of inverted commas is recommended. Changes, or additions within quotations, as well as elisions, are marked by square brackets. Spelling should follow British conventions. Quotations in languages other than English should be followed by an English translation, whose author should be acknowledged in a footnote. House Style is MHRA, but submissions may initially conform to any recognised style.