

# AFTERWORD

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'It is a sign of the parochialism of the British literary scene that foreign literature is so neglected . . . To an outsider the British publishing industry can seem like a conspiracy intent on depriving English-speaking readers of the majority of good books written in other languages than their own.'

'Lost in Translation', extract of speech by John Carey, Bookseller.com 30/06/05

In the light of Professor John Carey's observations in his speech on 27th June at the *Man Booker International Prize 2005*, it is important to look at why Britain has become so culturally insular and how this trend can be reversed. *Outside In* has explored the reasons why literature in translation is so important, and why we must work towards encouraging more publishers to translate foreign literature.

While there are some positive signs, with more small publishers taking the lead, new ventures like WingedChariot Press – which is an exciting development in the UK publishing industry – and a few dedicated children's publishers continuing to add to their list of translated titles or reissuing classics, other publishers are conspicuous by their absence.

For those publishers that do undertake translation it is disappointing that they sometimes feel the need to 'anglicise' stories, names of places and characters for an UK audience. This somehow seems to suggest that UK children are unable to deal with the 'foreignness' contained in a book. Anglicisation of authors' names is even worse! This merely panders to the widespread belief of the stereotypical viewpoint that Aidan Chambers so eloquently articulated in his speech at the 2005 *Marsh Award for Children's Literature in Translation*. 'Publishers don't publish more translations, and especially not those books very different from our own, because they don't sell. They don't sell because there is an ingrained Anglo-American prejudice against translation'. ('An Indispensable Heritage', School Librarian, Spring 2005.)

There must be many books for children and adults in other languages that could easily become commercial successes if publishers were prepared to take the plunge. With marketing budgets reserved for the big-name authors in the UK it is difficult to see how this trend might change. Even if publishers have a translated author on their list, the book may disappear into oblivion if it is not actively promoted.

There are, of course, grants available to publishers for translation projects and these can go some way to assisting with the additional costs of production. However, there needs to be a much greater awareness of the variety of books that are out there waiting to be translated and which could be turned into a viable success. It is important for booksellers to be much more aware of the translated titles that are currently available in the UK and actively promote them. Events such as the Children's Bookshow, the work of IBBY, the Centre for British Translation, the *Marsh Award for Children's Literature in Translation* and many other organisations working on projects in this area, go some way towards highlighting the importance of translated children's literature. However, much more still needs to be done.

Now we come to the oft forgotten role of the translator. With a few exceptions the translator is generally invisible. This has been highlighted in the compilation of this publication by the limited translator biographies at the back of the guide. Sadly, we were unable to be as comprehensive as we would have liked due to the lack of information available from publishers. Some books do not acknowledge a translator at all; others are mentioned in the minute print in the bibliographical information. More enlightened publishers credit the translator on the title page along with the author, however, only a handful provide biographical details of the translator. This is really something that publishers must address. All books should carry details about the author, illustrator and translator, however brief. One of the really surprising things to find was that some books had no details about the author either! If we want children and young people to read translated authors from other countries, why do we assume that they won't want to know about the author who wrote the book?

The translator has to come up with an accurate version of the original work in a way that also captures the spirit. They are as important as the author and as Lene Kaaberbol has said 'At its best a translation is an independent creation that breathes and vibrates in its second language incarnation. What it is not is a perfect copy'. ('Only this time, in English', Carousel, Summer 2003)

Rosemary Goring rather bluntly suggested in an article for The Glasgow Herald, that a translator, 'in the world of literature, and of fiction in particular . . . is little more conspicuous than a roadsweeper, and not much better paid', She goes on to revise this view, comparing them to miners 'picking away, out of sight, at seams of gold' and suggests that they should be rightly acknowledged and 'met with a fanfare of trumpets and a wave of applause from' . . . 'It is the very least they deserve'. (Forget the cheesemakers, blessed are the Translators', 24/01/05)

With the exception of the dual-language titles there are only a handful of books outside Europe – Argentina, Brazil, French Canadian Quebec, India, Iraq, Israel, Japan and Turkey – that appear in this guide. This is because there are hardly any books translated from countries outside Europe. Even within Europe, the omissions are noticeable – only one book from both Greece and Italy, two picture books from Portugal, one poetry book from former Eastern Europe and nothing from Spain or the Baltic states. This is disappointing and there should be many, many more countries represented here. With an enlarged Europe now, we need to see more translations from all of these countries as well as the rest of the world.

There are a great many wonderful books out there waiting to be brought to an UK audience. We hope that this guide will go some way to encourage publishers to identify gaps in this area and to translate more children's literature.

**'For every reader some such shock of foreignness is salutary. For the nation, especially if that nation is English-speaking, the continued shock of the foreign is absolutely indispensable'.**

David Constantine, *A Living Language*, 'Translation is Good for You', Bloodaxe, 2004

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