

Introduction

THE EMLIT PROJECT for European Minority Literatures in Translation is published online here in its entirety, including this 130-page supplement of additional texts and translations not available in any other format. The project takes forward in a major way *EnterText*'s established concern to publish work in translation, and to counter the tendency for English to become, often by default, the language of destination of a great majority of translation events. *EnterText* 2.2 was devoted to the topic "Translation, Transcreation" and other issues, from number 1.2 onwards, have included creative work in translation, sometimes in multiple translation.

The main EMLIT PROJECT of over five hundred pages which forms the first part of this edition of *EnterText* is also published in book form with accompanying CD, and may be ordered direct from Brunel University Press, Uxbridge UB8 3PH, UK, by emailing suzanne.wills@brunel.ac.uk or phoning Brunel's English department on +44 (0) 1895 816316 (price £9.99 plus postage and packing £3.50 UK / £5 elsewhere). The main project is divided into six sections: the original fifty-eight literary texts in nineteen different languages, followed by five separate sections in which they are all translated into English, French, German, Italian and Spanish, in that order. Links from the Contents list to the head of each of the main sections are intended to enable readers to move readily to a set of translations in the language of their choice. Its introduction explains how this collaborative project between six European universities, in Liège, Regensburg, Palermo, Barcelona and Málaga, under the leadership of Brunel University, London, was conceived and implemented, thanks to financial support from the European Union's Culture 2000 programme. Like the texts themselves, the introduction is also available in the five languages, as are the biographical notes on the authors, and the short introductions to each of the original languages. An author index helps users to navigate the collection. Audiofiles of ten of the authors reading their work in the original languages are available to users with suitable technology. Each is accessed by a link from the relevant listing on the

Contents pages. Users are reminded that since some of these files are large, they may take a few minutes to download.

In addition to the main project, readers will find here a Supplement of additional work, only available online. This has its own Contents list, paginated to follow the main project. The material is arranged on a different principle from the main part of the project in that all the translations of a particular work are grouped below the original in one file. Links from the Contents pages open all the texts and translations related to a particular minority language. For reasons of scale some texts originally intended for inclusion had to be omitted from the main project—even so, the book is over five hundred pages long. However, we are pleased to publish the other works here in the Supplement with some translations. As well as including some further texts by some of the writers represented in the main project, one of them with a new recording, the Supplement also introduces a new writer and a new language.

The Ethiopian language Amharic brings the total of minority languages included in the project overall to twenty. The Amharic short story by Moulou Mek, who lives in Belgium, is translated into French and English. It tells a humorous moral fable which owes a good deal to the African oral tradition of story-telling, but its focus on the contrasts between urban and rural lifestyles, an urgent topic in a continent undergoing accelerating urban drift, will strike home to readers all over the world. This is followed by a range of texts from each of the participating countries (originals in Sorbian, Greek, Sicilian, Arabic, Gun, Catalan and Welsh, with translations), including a new voice, an audiofile of one of the writers in Arabic working in Spain, Mahmud Sobh. In addition, the notes and literal translation of his work into English which the Welsh poet Twm Morys provided to assist translators working on his poems are made available here. It is particularly illuminating for readers to be able to glimpse in this way the level of structural and conceptual difference which exists between two neighbouring yet very separate languages, Welsh and English, and to speculate about the differences between other languages in the project.

Certain practical dilemmas as to presentation arise in such a polyglossic project. It should perhaps be mentioned that rather than imposing a common practice throughout, styles of punctuation differ from section to section, in keeping with the conventions for each language. Also a few errors in the book have been corrected in the online version. Since the main project is republished here in the format chosen for

the book, it seemed more appropriate to make the Supplement conform to its layout style rather than to adhere to the normal *EnterText* style familiar from our other issues. However, the Supplement's headers and footers are in line with the journal's norms, in part to distinguish it from the main project but also principally because the Supplement is exclusive to the journal.

Publication of this Supplement completes the project, which has been prepared from scratch in the very short time of a year, as required by the terms of the EU support funding, without which it would not have happened. There is a lot of talk within Europe about the community's less widespread languages, *les langues moins répandues*, but this is a welcome instance of direct action backing up the rhetoric. It matters for a number of reasons.

It makes visible a key dimension of the literature of Europe which tends to be obscured and fragmented. The project brings some fine writings in little-known and often disregarded languages into the spotlight, enabling a new focus on what writers who have certain things in common, for all their differences, are saying about their worlds. These can lead readers to fresh insights as to what Europe today means. The internal internationalism of our communities is often obscured by the rhetoric of national identity. This project is a vivid reminder of the cultural diversity which is typical of EU states today, and some of its works are poignant markers of the degree of marginalisation, alienation and displacement which majority communities tend to deliver to their minorities, whether wilfully or by default. It is also a celebration of the human spirit, as it shows a creative response to contemporary experience in all its wit, pain, and obstinate positivity.

In addition it enables writers producing literature in some hard-pressed situations where there is commonly very little prospect of widespread recognition or a commercial return, either because of the smallness of the immediate community of fellow speakers or because of the indifference of the surrounding national community, to feel that their work is valued in a broad context, one that includes not only the political macro-community of the EU but also the community of readers online which is potentially global. While clearly not all of the minority languages in the project are in a beleaguered position, many are, and even those which have a highly developed cultural community with a secure future either within Europe (Catalan, for instance) or beyond (Hindi and Arabic are just two examples) commonly have bilingual writers negotiating choices about which language in which to write. They are under obvious

pressure to opt for the more international language at their disposal, for the international language usually comes with a greater likelihood of publication, funding, readers—in other words a livelihood, if not fame and fortune. There is also a natural tendency for younger generations to assimilate to the dominant culture, so that over two or three generations an ancestral language and all that it enshrined vanishes. In today's world of communication technology all kinds of contact are possible as never before, but we need to find a way of using the new technologies which does not result in the erasure of cultural diversity. At times it seems that what began as an insidious process of homogenisation is breaking into a gallop.

The problem of accessing readers is particularly acute for those who are poets, for while there is clearly an international readership for prose in translation (though much fine work does not get translated), relatively little poetry is translated—although it must be said that those working in the field are passionate advocates of its possibilities. It is not surprising, perhaps, that when looking for short literary works for a project such as this, a significant proportion of the works we have chosen have proved to be poetry. Poetry often seems the Cinderella of literature, so to give it a little international boost through this project seems appropriate. The task of translating poetry brings the task of literary translation in general into sharp focus, for obvious reasons. Each language has its own music, its own associative resonances, which poetry deploys more centrally than other kinds of literature. Each translation has to be, in a sense, a new work of art, deploying the music, the resonances, of the target language. However, it should be remembered that the transactions involved—the subtle art of negotiation, compromise, even of inspired innovation—are no less important in other kinds of literary translation, prose and drama as well as poetry. We deceive ourselves if we think otherwise. Also the negotiation has as urgent a meaning as political arbitration, and potentially as tangible an outcome if it is well done. The co-partners and collaborative translators who have produced THE EMLIT PROJECT hope that its bouquet of translations will provide material for discussion amongst those interested in translation both for practical and academic purposes. The essays engaging with translation theory which are included in *EnterText 2.2* may provide a further useful perspective.

In an ideal world it would have been good to translate not only between our minority language texts and the five most widespread European languages, but between minority languages. However, the impracticality of this is immediately

apparent. If eighty pages of originals produce a project of over five hundred pages, how impossibly gigantic it would have been if each source language was also a destination language. And it is not just the question of scale. There would also have been a very real difficulty in finding translators to cover all of the permutations. It would have been impossible, in fact, as well as impracticable. Regrettable, but true.

However, there have been some unforeseen outcomes which perhaps compensate for this. Contributing writers who are now able to see not only their own work in multiple translation, but the literature of writers in other languages translated into a language they can understand, are stimulated by what is now accessible to them. One writes that the project “serves a very important function in bringing together creative work from the different minorities in Europe. It should be an encouragement to minority language writers to see their work alongside others. It certainly is an encouragement to me and exciting to see the creative approaches of writers in other cultures and how they deal with the contemporary world in their work, e.g. traditional and modernist poetic forms.”

We are delighted to learn that during the course of the project’s preparation two of its writers have been honoured by special awards within their own communities: Nino De Vita in Sicily, and Twm Morys in Wales, who was elected Bard at the National Eisteddfod in August. The existence of such awards, of local presses, of local grassroots support and sometimes of local scholarship is all part of a network of social structures which help to keep writers writing in the languages of their first choice. There is also, however, an urgent need for these to be mirrored in international networks, as the EU’s policies seem to recognise. Major publishing houses will contemplate adding work in translation to their lists but only when it is by a well-known name. A main difficulty for writers using minority languages is how to crack that glass ceiling. Part of the idea for this project was to explore ways of harnessing the energy for cultural exchange—itsself a good thing—to strategies and actions which go in more than one direction. After all, the future for beleaguered languages and cultures is not in isolation, but in participation in the modern world, backed by the political (and financial) status that multilingualism and international demand can command. We hope that in its small way THE EMLIT PROJECT can make a contribution to that future.

Paula Burnett, Editor