

Literary Translation in Britain and Selective Xenophobia

Eric Dickens
Blaricum, The Netherlands

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Eric Dickens,

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Abstract: In his article "Literary Translation in Britain and Selective Xenophobia," Eric Dickens discusses the fact that fewer translations of works of contemporary prose, poetry, and essays appear in Great Britain than perhaps anywhere else in Europe. Dickens attributes this shortfall to various factors, including poor language teaching and an indifference to foreign languages in general, but also to a degree of smugness with regard to literature written in English being "the best in the world." In his study Dickens covers such areas as the availability of literary translations in bookshops, the attitudes of publishers, and the effect of prizes on the selection of authors translated. He also attempts to demonstrate that postcolonial studies has remained an exclusively English-language enterprise, rather than becoming a methodology for global liberation.

Eric DICKENS**Selective Xenophobia and Literary Translation in Britain**

Serious literature is hard to define. With the increase of, for instance, performance art and rap poetry, the borders between theatre and literature for reading purposes become ever cloudier. But I shall here be talking about novels, short-stories, poetry and essays, the last of which is a borderline genre, verging on the academic. The other three are, or should be, read for pleasure and enlightenment. They are still to be found, allowing for technological advances, between covers, slightly firmer than the pages on which the text itself is printed. For hundreds of years, works in the above genres have been translated regularly so that people can enjoy literary fruits originally published in another country and language. This situation strikes me as normal. If you want to know what is going on in the rest of the world, learning even only a few of the principal languages well would be an insuperable burden. We therefore resort to translations. And translations of literary works, as defined above, would seem part and parcel of this willingness to learn from beyond one's national borders.

Over the past decades, however, there seems to be an increasing tendency in the English-speaking world as a whole, and Great Britain in particular, to turn in on oneself. While there is no shortage of literary traffic *within* this monolingual world, bringing in texts from the outside (or from the language minorities within) has become ever harder. Britain, my country of origin, appears to be infected by such selective xenophobia. By selective xenophobia I mean that Britain appears indeed to be quite happy to take on board literature from all over the world -- as long as it has been written in English. Since this is baneful with regard to literary translation and any meaningful comparison of literatures, please allow me to outline my fears and hopes, even though my search for a remedy may prove Quixotic. The situation has gone on far too long for one individual to be able to make any significant inroads. But it does no harm, in a climate of democracy, to air one's views. Xenophobia as I apply the notion to the problem of translation here is, I feel, an accurate description of the complaint, since it is "fear," rather than "hatred," of things and individuals of foreign provenance which is the problem. It is a brand of fear caused by sheer ignorance. Recently, I published a short comment on literary translation and its status in Great Britain in a recent issue of the British Council publication *Literature Matters* (Dickens 2001). It is ironic that some of my best allies in my charges against the windmills of linguistic indifference are connected to the British Council, whose principal task it is to promote Britain abroad. But the British Council fosters an idealism based on Britons' actually having to rub shoulders on equal terms with foreigners in their own countries while some British Council workers, teachers, and quasi-diplomats are talented linguists and philanthropists and do their bit to smuggle shards of The World Out There under the portcullis of Blighty Castle.

I would love to trump abroad such optimistic cries as: "things can't go on like this!" But of course they can. Britain does not appear to need things that happen in foreign languages, politically, economically, or culturally. One reason is that foreign people are all too eager to practise their English on Britons (or Americans and Canadians). Britons then proceed to turn to their advantage their own helplessness in other languages by allowing the rest of the world to do all communications on their terms, i.e., on English-language terms, in both spoken and written form. It is, of course, vastly preferable to negotiate something subtle and complicated in one's mother-tongue, rather than being forced to express oneself inelegantly in someone else's language. But it is ultimately a question of courtesy and mutual respect. Britons allow foreigners to make the attempt and these poor foreigners, often well-educated academics or members of the business community, are then rewarded for their pains by guffaws of laughter, or snide sniggers, should they make the slightest slip of the tongue. I am sure that a Briton, when attempting to explain the workings of a currency or banking system, the narrative structure of a novel, or the metrics of a poem in, say, French or German, would also cause native-speakers of these languages to have to restrain themselves from exhibiting impolite hilarity. But the crafty Briton never exposes himself or herself to ridicule. I mortally insulted an Englishman once by suggesting that his accent -- when he had said

several words in Russian, was "lousy" -- as I so subtly put it. He left the pub forthwith in a considerable huff. A sadistic streak in me tells me that I am not displeased at the result....

But in all fairness, nor are many Europeans in fact the linguists they are cracked up to be. There is an awful lot of myth-making about the language knowledge of the inhabitants of the many countries that make up continental Europe including the Scandinavian countries. Nowadays, and under commercial pressure, many young people there seem to feel that learning English is quite enough. English is a handy Esperanto when it comes to selling someone a cup of coffee or a shirt. But that does not necessarily mean you can tackle complex subjects in that language. Yet these poor foreigners will rarely find a Briton willing to do things conversational on their, foreign, terms, let alone discuss difficult topics. That level playing-field, so familiar from depictions of the English gentleman and his arcane games of cricket and soccer, is sorely lacking here.

In many bookshops throughout Europe, even in smaller towns, one will find that a significant proportion of the books on display have been translated from other languages. If a comparison were made with British bookshops, especially ones outside the university cities, the difference would immediately become apparent. What I am objecting to, therefore, is not so much the fact that my compatriots are, on the whole, lamentably inadequate as linguists -- there are good historical reasons for this -- but to the fact that they are not open to prose, poetry, and essays which are being written now (i.e., not fifty years ago, and thus reified and deified into classics) in neighbouring countries, even in translation. This handicaps a Briton's understanding of the world at large. You can always read guide books and tomes of history, but literature, even in translation, brings you closer to the soul of any given country or ethnic group.

Publishers' lists and backlists reveal a similar story. While there are plenty of reprints or simultaneous issues involving the United States, Canada, Australia, and authors from other English-speaking countries, translations from European languages (here I again mean the continent, not the politico-economic construct) tend, for a large part, to be restricted to gardening books, travel guides, and other non-fiction. There is, sadly, little prose fiction or poetry translated in book form from European languages, especially from those languages with relatively few native-speakers, or those of what is termed "lesser currency," i.e., minority languages within sovereign states. British publishers, on the whole, also appear not to invest very much money or energy in finding out what kind of literature is being written now in French, German, Italian, and Spanish, let alone other languages. A glance at a few random publisher's catalogues from one or two European countries can lend support to my basic point. I have, on my shelves, copies of several such recent catalogues from the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Finland, thus from affluent, North European countries, somewhat akin to Britain. Each of these countries naturally gives prominence to authors writing in its respective language. But what comes next in these catalogues? Without wishing to go into a complex statistical analysis of data, I can with few means, arrive at some simple conclusions. To avoid interrupting the flow of my argument, I have listed some of the highlights from several publishers' catalogues at the end of this piece, before the Works Cited section. I think anyone examining the lists of authors' names and book titles cannot fail to notice the difference in attitude between the four north European countries on the one hand, and Great Britain on the other.

British publishers, usually themselves incapable of reading books in foreign languages, get around this serious cultural handicap by employing what are termed "publisher's readers." In theory, this means that the publisher consults a well-informed adviser to tell him or her what is being published in the world at large. But there are drawbacks. Firstly, there seems to be no clear process whereby a publisher's reader is chosen. This could be anyone from a family friend who did his year abroad in France to someone the publisher met at a cocktail party and swore blind she was an "expert" on, say, Ruritanian literature. The publisher has no way of checking their credentials and language knowledge and their choice of authors could be one-sided or even quirky. The publisher, having few insights into how Ruritania works, and into who is respected there as an author, relies totally on the publisher's reader. The publisher's only check is the occasional chat with one or two European publishers over drinks in the evenings at the Frankfurt Book Fair. Since these foreign publishers do speak English and are on occasions Anglophiles, the conversation, and ultimate

trading, tends to swing in the other direction, with the foreigner buying British or United States literature -- but almost never vice-versa.

As I already suggested above, in my experience within Britain itself, this somewhat patronising attitude towards foreigners and their cultural produce affects the professional field of literary translation by creating an over-concentration on a number of matters which do not themselves further an insight into what is being written in Europe right now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century. There is, I would suggest, an over-concentration on translation theory, on Bible translation, on dabbings in Greek and Roman classics, now that those languages have long since been scrapped from the average school curriculum. But translating a few slightly bawdy poems by Catullus is no substitute for the deeper linguistic and cultural insights which schoolchildren used to get into the workings of the Greek and Roman civilisations, insights which can be useful when trying to find a yardstick by which to measure our times. And whilst the translation of the Bible is a fascinating subject in itself, how many scholars actually possess a good enough knowledge of ancient Greek and Hebrew and Aramaic to be able to make meaningful comparisons and corrections? If they fail in this respect, the whole exercise becomes one of translating from, and analysing, translations, rather than examining original texts with a view to introducing improvements in the translations of these.

Translation in general hardly ever becomes "tainted" by those languages actually spoken now, throughout the continent of Europe, let alone further afield. It is quite true that languages tend to be taught rather half-heartedly in many British schools. And, for understandable reasons, these languages tend to be French, German, Spanish, Italian and, on occasions, Russian, leaving other languages out of the picture. Not until university can young people encounter smaller, rarer, languages and only the tiniest of fraction of young people in Great Britain learn these to any degree of competence. Even then, there is little motivation to study these as anything more than Minor Subjects. Translation is talked about a great deal, yet when it comes down to actually doing any, many of those theoretically inclined try to change the subject. The kind of theorising which I favour at this point in time when Britain has a great shortage of published texts to compare, is the kind which covers such areas as reception and other synchronic considerations. This, I feel is more important for general knowledge than a full-blown diachronic or evolutionary examination.

Important are literary orientation and present-day tastes, compared with the same in several other comparable European countries. The statistical groundwork for such comparisons is, alas, still at a basic stage. As are sociological comparisons across the continent of Europe, plus North America, to put British attitudes to translation in a meaningful and current context. Workshops are fine, but again, given the fact that Britons tend to translate from one hard-learned language only, those translating from something a little rarer never join up with those whose main language is French, Spanish, Italian, or German, and are left on the sidelines. And those studying Germanic languages tend to ignore Romance ones, and vice-versa, so workshops where texts from both, say, French and German are afforded close consideration by the same translators are few and far between.

There is a curious over-emphasis on poetry, as opposed to prose. Poetry, as anyone who has ever tried to translate it will know, is one of the most tricky things to salvage for another culture, given rhyme schemes, idiomatic usage and the sheer succinctness of thought involved. And Britons are treated every year to umpteen re-translations of poems by, for example, Rilke, Baudelaire, and Mandelstam, sometimes published in literary magazines, more seldom appearing as collections. There is nothing wrong with bringing more accurate and more up-to-date versions of these authors to a British audience, but one is inclined to wonder why that which is being written in European countries now is, the vast majority of cases, simply ignored. Prose, mostly on account of its sheer length, is worse off. Since many publishers claim that "short stories don't sell," these too do not appear in sufficient quantities in translation. Novels-in-translation do, on rare occasions, make a breakthrough. But I wonder how many novels such as Høeg's *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*, which was a great success in Britain as I have understood, are destined to be so lucky. Contemporary Scandinavian literature is almost unknown in Britain and one of the small presses which is

keen to promote it, i.e., the Norvik Press, is unfortunately not as visible in British bookshops and one would wish.

Nor indeed does Slovenian literature end with Slavoj Zizek, or that from Brazil with Paulo Coelho and Clarice Lispector. In Britain, a dangerous tokenism holds sway, where a whole national literature is written off after the publishers "do" a couple of its writers in translation -- in the same way that a tourist "does" a country city by city, then ticking it off a list, never more to return. Large prizes, e.g., the Nobel Prize for Literature, can also increase tokenism. Especially for such a monolingual culture as the British one, where such prizes increase the danger that the country and literary culture from where the winning author comes from remains peripheral. Britain's Booker Prize already restricts its entrants to those writing in English, but the dangers with the Nobel are, for the British reader, slightly different.

When the Nobel is, on occasions, won by someone writing in a small language, the individual concerned will immediately have some of his or her work translated (often in indecent haste!) into English, but what his/her compatriots are producing will hardly enjoy any more readers. Maybe there will be a token skim to make a ritual acknowledgement that the country in question possesses more writers, but by the year after, this will all be forgotten (although the laureates themselves tend to enjoy a measure of continued visibility). When Camilo José Cela (1989 Laureate) died in early 2002, this was mentioned in the press worldwide. But how often do the lives or deaths of Spanish-writing authors in general make the British press? (Incidentally, Harry Martinson and Eyvind Johnson, who were themselves members of the Swedish Nobel Committee and were joint laureates in 1974 are, as far as I know, not as well remembered.) How many Britons can name, off the cuff, a Polish writer except for Szymborska (1996 Laureate), Milosz (1980 Laureate), and Sienkiewicz (1905 Laureate) and, maybe, Reymont (1924 Laureate)? Is Gide so copiously translated into English because he won the Nobel, ditto Sartre? I fear that the million of whatever currency it is dazzles the British literary world to such an extent that the rest of the laureate's author-compatriots often remain quasi-invisible.

Near our shores, there are, for instance, over twenty million native-speakers of the Dutch language living in the Netherlands and Flanders, which are some of the first countries you come to when you cross the English Channel and the North Sea. This is, very roughly, about one third of the population of the British Isles. It should not surprise anyone that the culture of both the Netherlands, and that of the northern half of Belgium where they speak Dutch, also includes literary efforts. But apart from a handful of contemporary Dutch writers, mostly translated and published with heavy subsidies from their country of origin, there is hardly anything from the Dutch available in university bookshops, let alone ones in small provincial towns. Since no Dutch or Flemish writer has yet won the Nobel Prize, even that window of opportunity regarding visibility has been lacking hitherto (note: in current usage, there is no such thing as "the Flemish language." Both Dutch authors, i.e. from the Netherlands, and Flemish ones, i.e. from the northern half of Belgium, write in more or less standard Dutch, whatever dialect or patois they make speak at home and among friends). If you wander around a Dutch bookshop, even a small one with a rather poor selection, you will find umpteen translations of British, but mostly US, authors. The sheer might of "American English" means that British literature too can cash in on the popularity of the English language. But not all translation projects into Dutch meet with success. This may be caused with the opposite situation to that prevalent in the United Kingdom: a surfeit of translations. These translations remain in the bookshops for a year at the most, and are then remaindered. Accomplished British novelist Anthony Powell has had good luck and bad luck. The good luck is that he has had four of the twelve volumes of the duodecalogy *A Dance to the Music of Time* translated into Dutch. The bad luck is that this has now happened twice over. On each occasion, the publisher has given up after the fourth hurdle, so to speak. So now the late Anthony Powell is in the absurd situation that four of his novels have been translated twice into Dutch, while none of the other eight have been translated at all into that language.

Who, in the English-speaking world, remembers Simon Vestdijk and Louis Paul Boon? Both have a couple of novels which did appear in English translation, but these have now been out of print for a couple of decades. The former author, a Dutchman, wrote 52 novels (including, no

doubt, a dozen or more pot-boilers, but still). These include a suite of eight novels, termed the Anton Wachter novels (Vestdijk 1939, 1948, 1934, 1949, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960) -- the slightly unchronological order reflects the order within the suite -- in Proustian mode describing the childhood, teenage, and adulthood of a young man, Vestdijk's alter ego, growing up in the fictional town of Lahringen, based on the Frisian coastal town of Harlingen where the author grew up. Louis Paul Boon wrote two innovatory Flemish meta-novels in 1953 and 1956, respectively, which possess all the traits of intertextuality, social commitment, narrative unreliability, and uncertainty and so forth which, in English-speaking academic circles are all the rage. But these two gents had the misfortune to write in a "language of no great importance" from a British point of view, and thus only a very few of their works remain extant in Britain, and those on the shelves of a handful of university libraries. As can be seen from the bibliography, it took some while before the two Vestdijk novels and the one by Boon appeared in English. Why these particular works were chosen for translation and how the recommendation process went, remains a mystery, although these are indeed widely regarded as some of the best work by the two authors. In their time, both authors were tipped for the Nobel Prize. Would they now be household names in Britain if they had won it?

Some Britons would say, with all the naïveté that comes with ignorance in the matter, that the bold presence of English-language literature worldwide is proof of the innate invincibility of English as a medium for literary production. As one Englishman put it to me in an e-mail: "English is superior to all other languages in terms of literary expression since it has a larger vocabulary, more malleable grammar and a literary heritage second to none" (January 2002). Apart from expressing himself with a good dose of cultural nationalism, my questions is: would a scientist make himself not the laughing stock of the laboratory were he to claim that a particular process or product were "superior" to its rivals without ever having compared it to anything else? One ambassador accredited to a northern European country recently started a campaign to have translated into English a factual book about that tiny country's accession to the European Union, a book he himself had edited. He was the prime mover behind the project, but this was neither the British, nor the American, ambassador in the capital in question. It was the chap from the Quai d'Orsay, a man who writes e-mails in excellent English. The book has already appeared in French, and now the French Ambassador, recognising the power English has for the dissemination of knowledge, had taken it upon himself to have the book appear in English too.

English is, as I see it, a very fine *lingua franca* for world communication, as Latin once was. But what I miss amongst its native speakers is reciprocity and respect for those whose mother tongues are different. The fact that English is used as a convenient Esperanto does not mean that the whole of the world should adopt it as a language of home and office, or risk being regarded as out-of-date and marginal. Nor should it lead to a scramble to write only in that language, in order to be able to market one's book. As I suggested above, United States power and prestige prop up the English language internationally; and yet English is only the mother-tongue of a relatively modest number of people worldwide. Translation obviates the necessity of people having to write badly in English, when they can be writing well in their respective mother-tongues.

Every country likes to promote its literature abroad. Some do this as a matter of national pride, some as a way of boosting export sales by indirect means, such as by fostering goodwill and understanding. Most countries which have a budget for the promotion of national literature tend to adopt the "push" strategy -- pushing out information to others. This means they set up an office which then sends out glossy brochures and magazines free all over the world or, nowadays, they create a website, all informing those interested of what is being written. Instances of this approach are Norway, Sweden, Belgium (both communities), the Netherlands, Estonia, Finland. There are many others. Sometimes these bureaux are separate to the government national promotion office, sometimes part and parcel of it. But one thing is clear. In all these instances, the "push" approach dominates. What I feel should become much more developed, especially in such a country as Great Britain, which has little need to push its own literature, is the "pull" approach. By this approach, well-informed British translators who are intimately acquainted with particular countries and their literatures, "pull" this literature into, in this case, Britain. This approach would mean you have people who are already well-versed in the problems encountered in their home country, Brit-

ain in this case, and can act as negotiators between perhaps over-keen foreign bureaux -- who think all the literature their country produces is of world standard -- and the over-apathetic British publishers. These need to be prodded a little before they will embark upon the nightmarishly huge and insurmountable risks of having a book translated and then trying to sell it to a largely indifferent audience of British readers. Otherwise, only books written in English will come in from abroad.

To leave Europe and North America for a moment and to examine literature coming from distant parts, the Indian subcontinent provides a curious instance. There, where an élite does indeed write its novels in English, only about thirty thousand, out of a thousand or so million people, speak it as their mother-tongue (correct me if I am wrong). But because of the sheer mesmerism of English, a minority of Indian and Pakistani writers, writing in what is, in effect, a second language, are almost the only ones we hear about in Britain, in continental Europe, and in North America, despite the popularity of postcolonial studies. Those writing in, for instance, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Gujurati, Bengali, or Kannada have a much tougher time obtaining recognition and shelf-room in British bookshops. This is not only because translation involves extra costs; it is a manifestation of a deep-seated attitude that "if it's written in English, it must be good."

Whilst fighting an admirable battle against gender prejudice and racism, postcolonialists all over the world seem astoundingly blind to the fact that the English language -- introduced by the colonists -- plays so powerful a rôle in their subject. And so, the colonisation of many European and extra-European countries is vastly ignored. Nor is the subject particularly historical, extrapolations being made using experience with "the Brits and their follies" as the norm. In cultural and literary studies, little is said about (post)colonialism about, for instance, the Spanish conquest of much of Central and South America, about Russian and later Soviet colonialism in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, Swedish colonialism in northern Germany, Poland, and the Baltic States, about German colonialism in East and South-West Africa, Turkish colonialism in the Middle East and North Africa, etc. Source materials for research into such fields are, of course, mainly written in languages other than English and Britons are thus deprived of deeper insights into how colonialism worked in those parts of the colonised world which were not once marked in red on the map. For me, therefore, postcolonial studies is a curious mixture of a way of smuggling English literature in by the back door, coupled with a kind of British Empire-bashing. This bashing is masochistic on the part of Britons, often the descendants of the colonisers, and disingenuous on the part of those academics who enjoy status in the metropolitan countries, plus a good salary paid to them by the very nation they are criticising. Postcolonialism as a subject was cooked up in the corridors of English departments worldwide, including some in the United Kingdom, and if you look at most post-colonial reading lists for university use, you will find that the vast majority of books listed were written in English. In my reading, one happy example of a book about colonialism in literature which breaks the mould is Ewa Thompson's 2000 *Imperial Knowledge* whose subtitle is *Russian Literature and Colonialism*.

Thompson's book sets out to identify the blind spots in Russian literature, including a one-chapter examination of *War and Peace*, where Russian writers, otherwise dissident, and against the system and so forth, turn a blind eye when Caucasians or Balts try to assert their national identities and are suppressed by the centralised authority, first that of the Russian Czar, latterly by the Soviet Union. Nationalism in the emerging states of Africa and Asia is, on the whole, regarded as something positive, to be set against the atavistic tendencies of tribal affiliations. And yet this positive attitude to national identity has been thrown into doubt of late in Europe. When, for instance, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania exhibit similar aspirations, these are labelled "nationalist." What is good for one set of colonised peoples seems evil for another. This whole systemic distortion of what should be an examination of colonialism worldwide and its aftermath, becomes a cosy exercise in the examination of English literature written all over the world, at the expense of anything written in any other language.

Postcolonial studies run the risk of becoming, to paraphrase Malthus, "EngLit by other means." I am suspicious of pat solutions, ones which would claim that hundreds of translated works of literature could be on the British market by, say, 2004. But I have some ideas as to how people could be made more aware, how the situation could be improved:

More visible translations in periodicals: what I would like to see is several serious and visible periodicals with translated literature in bookshops such as Waterstone's, Ottokar's, and W.H. Smiths, so that Britons can slowly become convinced that there is literary life Out There Where the Foreigners Live. And literary life now, not that of anno 1925. Periodicals should regard translated literature as the norm, rather than something exotically amateur. And should be willing to take on board plenty of it.

The weekly reviews: I would also hope that the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *London Review of Books*, and similarly high-visibility publications could open up much more to foreign literature in translation. Their remit does not include the publication of large quantities of original work, but in the books they review they could encourage translators by including several reviews every week of literary works originally written in "foreign" and now appearing in English translation. Such is done by the Friday book supplement to *Le Monde*. As translation studies scholar Lawrence Venuti says in an interview with M. Asaduddin in the Translators' Association (London) quarterly *In Other Words*: "When I review for a periodical like *The New York Times*, I tend to have no more than a brief concluding paragraph to discuss the translation. But this can be enough. I try to pick a few striking examples that draw attention to the quality of the translator's choices" (41). It is such civil treatment of translations (not least, pointing out the fact the book is actually translated by someone) which I miss in British literary weekly and monthlies. In Britain, the reviewer, usually having no knowledge of the source language whatsoever, fights shy of having to say anything about the quality of the translation. Such an utterance would, in any case, be absurd, given the fact that he or she does not really know whether the translator has even conveyed the basic meaning of the original, let alone nuance, idiom, register and so forth. This accounts for the usual, and rather glib, "the translator has rendered the meaning of the text in fluent English" and similar patronizing platitudes.

The Book Publishers: I would also hope that more genuine and informed enthusiasm could be generated amongst British publishers and literary agents with regard to what is being written now in other countries, not least in Britain's neighbouring countries in Western and Central and Eastern Europe. But again, we run into the basic problems of willing, but ignorant, people in a rather to cosy, even stuffy, monolithic-monolingual culture. Those re-translations of French, German, and Russian poetry are all very well, but there are people writing now, and in many languages, and Britons are being deprived of the opportunity of reading such contemporaries, both from Europe and from further afield. The publishers should, on a regular basis, try to identify potential "publisher's readers" while these are still studying at undergraduate or postgraduate level at the various universities which teach a literary component alongside foreign languages.

It is no wonder there are so many Eurosceptics in Britain, people who fear the advent of the euro as an alien currency encroaching on their sovereignty. As I have pointed out above, much fear is generated by ignorance. Many Britons lack deeper insights into how people live in Europe and beyond, into their aspirations and fears and, most especially in this context, into their literature. What foreign people are writing and reading would provide valuable clues to "what makes them tick," apart from being a pleasurable activity in itself. Whatever specific problems European and other translators may suffer, I fear that the old joke about "fog in the Channel, the Continent cut off" applies just as much today with regard to literature in translation as it once did with regard to other matters. Ballet, music, mime, and fine art can be enjoyed without a knowledge of foreign languages; but literature has to be translated, preferably by people who enjoy a corresponding amount of respect as professionals. Translation means more work for publishers, and costs more, but is worth it in the long run. Knowing what, and how, your neighbours and others think helps mutual understanding, and diminishes the risk of serious conflict based on prejudice, rather than genuine grievance. Literary translators play an important part in this mechanism of reciprocity, and should, in the United Kingdom, be treated as professionals and paid at a decent rate, not reduced to becoming practitioners in a marginalised field where dilettantes hold sway.

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Appendix

Recent Publishers' Catalogues from Norway, Finland, Sweden, and The Netherlands

Online pages of some publisher's websites facilitate comparison. There are numerous English-language websites available to compare their range of books with. One word of warning: skimming for names of author's is the easy bit, but anyone wishing to do more thorough comparisons will need a reading knowledge of Norwegian, Finnish, Swedish, and Dutch.

Gyldendal <<http://www.gyldendal.no/gyldendal>> (Oslo) has the titles of around 200 literary and allied books in its specialised catalogue for the year 2001. Helpfully, they have a separate section in the catalogue entitled "Translated Novels and Short-Stories." Here one can find twenty-one contemporary books in Norwegian (Bokmål) translation (with translator and original language listed) plus a further seven classics. Authors include Isabel Allende (Spanish), Hugo Claus (Dutch), Aino Kallas (Finnish), Dai Sijie (French), plus nine books from the English, i.e., about one third of the titles. Out of a total of 200 (semi)literary titles, there are several more thrillers and paperbacks which are translations from English, including ones by Vikram Seth and Patricia Highsmith.

WSOY <<http://www.wsoy.fi>> (Helsinki) has about 500 books in their general 1 (2002) catalogue, including cassette books, dictionaries, and all manner of non-fiction. They also separate foreign literature from the rest and this category takes up about twelve pages in this large, 156-page catalogue. Recently translated and published authors here include eleven from English, including Hanif Kureishi, A.A. Milne, Jean M. Auel, and Judith Lennox, plus the Russian-Georgian cult writer, Boris Akunin, and books by Catherine Millet (French) and Willy Kyrklund (Swedish), and probably a dozen sci-fi and children's books translated from the English.

Otava <<http://www.otava.fi>> (Helsinki) has a catalogue (Spring 2002) to rival that of WSOY, as above, also a general one. Foreign plays and poetry include, for instance, a new translation of *Othello* and poems by Jaan Kaplinski (Estonia). In their translated fiction section we can find authors such as Herbjørg Wassmo (Norway), Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru), Anton H. Tammsaare (Estonia), Homer, Elke Schmitter (German), Aleksandra Marinina (Russia), Gao Xingjian (France/China), Liza Marklund (Sweden), plus, from English, Joanne Harris, Carol Shields, Jean Rhys, Herman Melville, Trezza Azzopardi, Armistead Maupin, Frances Fyfield, Shane Maloney, Donna Leon, Lisa Scottoline, Patricia Cornwell, Anne McCaffrey, Jennifer Belle, plus children's books by C.S. Lewis (the Narnia books, also being translated into Estonian), Brian Jacques, Jacqueline Wilson, Neil Morris, Francine Pascal. Also *Naipaul's Among the Believers* and non-fiction books from English by, for example, Kien Nguyen, Wayne W. Dyer, Tara Bennett-Goleman, and John Lazarus. Further, Tammsaare, Rhys, Melville, and Homer are authors included in a series which also has the works of other authors such as Foucault, Almqvist, Walton, Pessoa, Laclós, Böll, Defoe, and Kafka. Homer's *Odyssey* was translated by Pentti Saarikoski who also translated Joyce's *Ulysses* into Finnish.

Norstedts <<http://www.norstedts.se>> (Stockholm) has a much smaller catalogue for Spring 2002, but even here we can find a section for translated literature. The authors consist of Linn Ullmann (Norwegian; Bokmål) and Kjartan Fløgstad (Norwegian; Nynorsk), Imre Kertész (Hungarian), Orhan Pamuk (Turkish), plus, from the English, Hanif Kureishi, Helen Dewitt, Marian Keyes, Jody Shields, and Stephen Horn. There is also non-fiction by Simone de Beauvoir, Helen Langdon, Brian Greene, Claudine Monteil, and Sebastian Haffner translated from English, French, or German, respectively, plus a few paperbacks per month over the next year including works by Elizabeth George, Herbjørg Wassmo, and Nuala O'Faolain.

De Arbeiderspers <no website> (Amsterdam) has, amongst its translated literature into Dutch for Autumn 2001, the following: J.C. Ballard's *Super-Cannes*, Mark Kurlansky's *The White Man in the Tree*, Louis de Bernières' *Red Dog*, Isaac Bashevis Singer's *More Stories from My Father's Court*, Irvine Welsh's *Glue*, Ann Scott's *Superstars*, Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That*, and Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in reprint, plus one or two non-fiction works by Kapuciski, Ross, Bullock, and others. Also, from other languages (including reprints), works by, for instance, de Queiroz, Stavinoha, Coelho, Percec, Erika Mann, Paustovsky, Sand, and Jünger.

Author's Profile: An independent scholar, Eric Dickens resides in Blaricum and works as a literary translator from Estonian, Swedish, and Dutch into English. Apart from translating a number of translated works from the Swedish such as *Drottningholm: The Palace by the Lakeside* by Jan Mårtenson (1985), he has published several Estonian short stories in periodicals, mainly the work of Jaan Kross and a book bringing together six such

short-stories by Kroos entitled *The Conspiracy and Other Stories* (1995). He has also, in manuscript, a translation of an Estonian novel *Night of Souls* by Karl Ristikivi which, owing to the climate for translations as discussed at length in his article below, has never found a publisher, although a recent opinion poll in Estonia itself gave it as the third most popular novel in the country. E-mail: <eric.dickens@planet.nl>.