

Translation is the rendering of meaning from one language into another. Translation is conversion. It is movement. A translator is able to change a reader's understanding of the world, or, at the very least, supplement it. In the process of presenting experiences of one language group into another, the essential literary by-product of imagination is switched on, and — as so much research over the years has shown — imagination is the route to empathy, and empathy the route to social change. Translation is a political act.

The English-reading world is currently hungry for literary translation, for voices whose primary life experience is not in English. Many such works are receiving major prizes, and here the most obvious examples that spring to mind are *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang, translated from Korean, and *Flights* by Olga Tokarczuk, translated from Polish, both of which won Booker Prizes. There is a move away from language parochialism, and I suspect it is linked to a shift in political sensibilities, which in turn are either the reason for or the outcome of more and more marginalised voices being welcomed into publishing.

Bheki Ntuli, who has worked on a great number of translation projects into isiZulu, including Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*, Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* and Lewis Carol's *Alice in Wonderland*, told me he wished for more world classics or

works of exceptional merit to be translated because this cross-pollination served both the source and the target literatures, but also allowed readers to see the world through the cultures and practices of speakers of languages different from their own.

To extend the metaphor begun by the transgender man I interviewed, one might think of translation as the literary hormone that allows legibility and understanding. Prizes like these highlight the noblest ambition of translation: to humanise. I would like to thank the English Academy of Southern Africa most sincerely for awarding me and Leon this prize, and I would like to acknowledge the work of the editor of the English text, Lynda Gilfillan, and the project editor Francis Galloway, without whose knowledge and experience, generously shared, our final product would not have been the jewel it turned out to be.

I would like to thank publishers like Penguin Random House, and in this case particularly the editor Fourie Botha, who take on literary translations. I am confident that in the next few years some of the translators of the works I mentioned will be honoured for the work they are doing, because there are publishers willing to broaden their lists and embrace translations.

I am deeply grateful for the Sol Plaatje Translation Award, which is named for the energetic polyglot we might all strive to be one day.

Karin Schimke

TWO GOLD MEDALS AWARDED IN 2019

The Academy's Executive Committee received two nominations for its Gold Medal award and members felt that both nominees were equally deserving candidates of this prestigious award. The two Gold Medalists are Professor Chris Mann and Professor Rajendra Chetty.

The ceremony to award Professor Chris Zithulele Mann the English Academy of Southern Africa Gold Medal for Distinguished Service rendered in the promotion of English Studies took place on 14 March 2019 in the magnificent setting of the National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown. The English Academy was delighted by the selection of NELM as the venue for the award ceremony, as NELM is an institutional member of the Academy. The ceremony was attended by Professor Mann's friends and colleagues from the Institute for the Study of English in Africa, as well as members of the English Department at Rhodes University.

Professor Mbongeni Malaba presented the medal on behalf of the Academy and Professor Mann's wife, Professor Julia Skeen, arranged a slide show featuring some of her husband's work and the paintings she produced for their joint publication, *Lifelines*. Many of his other works were on display.

Professor Malaba thanked the Director of NELM, Ms Beverley Rycroft, for the gracious hospitality NELM provided, as well as Professor Sam Naidu for the assistance she rendered in preparing for the awards. He also thanked Professor Rosemary Gray for coordinating the arrangements.

The Gold Medal award to Professor Chetty took place on 4 May 2019 at Northwards in Johannesburg on the occasion of the presentation of the English Academy Percy Baneshik Lecture by Dr Sope Maithufi. Professor Chetty received the Gold Medal for his distinguished service to English over many years. Professor Malaba read the citation compiled by Professor Rosemary Gray and seconded by Dr Naomi Nkealah, after which he presented the medal to Professor Chetty.

In his acceptance speech, Professor Chetty humbly acknowledged the honour accorded him by the Academy, noting that his service to the Academy was done with great pleasure. He spoke of the importance of writing and its enduring nature. He ended his speech on a hilarious note, as is typical of him, by stating: "I have never received gold before, so I will take my gold and run." It was quite heartwarming for him to have his son, daughter-in-law, granddaughter and oth-

er family members present at this special occasion, together with EASA's patron, Pitika Ntuli.



Laurence Wright, Mbongeni Malaba, Chris Mann and Julia Skeen

Rajendra Chetty and Mbongeni Malaba

CITATION: GOLD MEDAL AWARD TO CHRIS MANN

Chris Mann is well known for the sustained quality of his poetic output over many years. His literary CV is extensive, and there is little need for me to rehearse it here in detail. However, some high points should be noted.

He has some 19 book-length poetry publications to his credit, many of them with mainstream publishers (i.e. not self-published), as well as 16 poetry productions, comprising plays in verse or live multimedia poetry productions.

His educational achievements include an MA in African Oral Literature from SOAS (London), an MA in English Language and Literature from Oxford, a BA in English and Philosophy from Wits, a qualification in financial management, also from Wits, and two courses in isiZulu from Unisa. His languages are, in descending order of proficiency, English, isiZulu, Afrikaans and Italian. All these contribute to his work.

Following his formal education, Chris spent the first fifteen years of his working life mainly as Operations Director of the Valley Trust in the Valley of a Thousand Hills, putting together projects in low-cost water-supply and sanitation, small-scale agriculture, pipeline construction and the development of secondary roads – training the populace to undertake this work themselves. The enterprise provided seasonal work for over 1000 people and was one of the inspirations behind today's national Public Works Programme. The combination of this work and his socially-energised poetic output, together with his role as singer-songwriter for the culture-crossing band Zabalaza (which performed in English and Zulu, reaching the finals of the SABC "Follow-that-

Star" programme) culminated in his being awarded an Honorary DLitt by the University of Durban-Westville, now part of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, at a remarkably young age.

His accolades and distinctions are too numerous to recapitulate in full. He won the Newdigate Prize for Poetry while a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, standing in a long line of distinguished poets and authors including, in the nineteenth century, John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold and Oscar Wilde, and in the twentieth, Jon Stallworthy, James Fenton and Andrew Motion. He came fourth in the 2010 election for the Oxford Professor of Poetry, a five-year appointment jealously competed for by poets from the international English-speaking world. He has won the Olive Schreiner Prize for South African Poetry in English, the Academy's Thomas Pringle Award for Poetry, the Eastern Cape Premier's Award for Literature, the South African Performing Arts Councils' Playwright Award, and a National Arts Festival Standard Bank Ovation Award for Drama, and several other awards.

Certain performances deserve separate mention. Imagine Chris standing atop a three-tier structure in the middle of King's Park Stadium in Durban reciting his poem "Till Love is Lord of the Land" to an audience of 200 000 as part of the celebrations to welcome Madiba to Durban after his release from prison. Or *Lifelines*, an eco-themed show (and book) about encounters with animals, which has been performed more than 80 times in South Africa and abroad, the performance sometimes featuring Janet Suzman. Or *Seeing the Cosmos in a Grain of Sand*, which was Chris's inaugural lecture as Professor of Poetry at Rhodes University. The lecture-in-verse explores the standard theory of cosmogenesis in relation to art and human consciousness, and has been

presented to audiences of scientists, as well as non-scientists in South Africa and abroad. His poetic range is impressive.

He is in demand internationally as a keynote speaker and guest writer, appearing and performing on several occasions at conferences and symposia in Singapore, the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, and throughout South Africa.

However, some points deserve stressing in relation to the Gold Medal. Chris Mann has always believed in poetry as both a private and a public good. This has led him to support initiatives which encourage the wide public availability of poetry, his own and others. Initiatives such as *Wordfest*, the literary component of the National Arts Festival; or *Word-beacons*, the provincial distribution of illuminated sculptural light-boxes as part of the Eastern Cape Wordfest, placing poetry at significant public venues in the official provincial languages; taking multi-modal performances of poetry, image and song to schools and universities around the country, over many years – these are sustained initiatives unmatched by any other South African poet. Each has been successful, though not to the extent that Chris Mann would have wanted.

Of crucial importance is Chris's willingness to take poetry into school halls and classrooms. His work is regularly prescribed at secondary and tertiary levels. How inspiring, then, for learners to be able to hear the poet in person read his poetry, guitar in hand, often with multimedia accompaniment created and delivered by his wife, the artist Julia Skeen, who has been a treasured partner and collaborator throughout his career. Poetry becomes a real presence, a remembered voice, an experience, and not a

text-bound intellectual abstraction.

So despite his Zulu name, Zithulele (the quiet one, the reticent one), Chris Mann has removed himself determinedly from the selfish, self-preoccupied Romantic stereotype of the poet, wrapped in dreams and unable to function effectively in the public arena, through his constant, practical concern for the spiritual and cultural welfare of others as seen in his track record in social welfare, poverty alleviation and development projects over many years; but more importantly, for our purposes, in his effort to nurture appreciation for language in general, and for the English language in particular, helping to forge its unique place in the multilingual linguistic ecology of South Africa.

I have no hesitation in proposing Chris Mann as a worthy recipient of the English Academy's Gold Medal for services to English.

Laurence Wright



Mbongeni Malaba and Chris Mann

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH: CHRIS MANN

It gives me great pleasure to thank the English Academy of Southern Africa for this generous award. I'm also delighted to acknowledge the creative, open-ended vision of the Academy which affirms the English language not as an ethno-nationalist bunker but a global interlocutor for use by all.

My vocation is to write books of poems and implement public benefit projects that have their genesis in poetic vision. I wish I could thank by name the many colleagues who have assisted me over the years. Shakespeare reminds us that our desires might be boundless but our acts are slaves to limit. Let me unfairly refer to just a few:

My high school English teacher, John Gardener, was an inspiration. Let me demonstrate how he used a poetic metaphor to alert my adolescent thought to realms beyond a Cape Town suburb.

“The English Teacher”

I'd have been horsing around in the back row
with Talbot, Robbie Le Roux and Snitcher,
an egg-mayonnaise sandwich on my desk,
when Mr Fogarty strode in, chalk in hand.

Tall, gangly. Grey suit, white shirt and tie.
That quizzical, admonitory look on his face.
The cough, repeated. To settle the theatre,
before the curtain went up. The pause.

And then – “Boys, what do you make of this?”
He spun on his heel, strode up to the board,
and hand held high, scribbled six words.
A silence. A murmur. Of perplexity, mostly.

And then the grumbles, the groans of revolt

he liked to get going at the start of a lesson.
Robbie, I guess, would have started swatting
the Chemistry notes tucked into his Hamlet,

And Mulligan, the *vox populi* of the class,
waving an arm from his desk in the front,
old Mullikins would have stood up and said,
“Please sir, what’s this got to do with exams?”

But that’s as may be, that’s all quite gone,
along with the Physics, the History dates,
the hours spent drowsing at deep fine-leg
and messing around on bikes after school.

What’s left is a kind of faded hologram,
archived, I imagine, yet alive in my brain,
where Mr Fogarty, that look on his face,
pitches up in the classroom, just as before,

and gawping at his words on the board,
a half-eaten sandwich still on my lap,
I sense a curtain opening in my mind
as he chalks just this on the blackboard:

Over the hills and far away.

I’d also like to acknowledge a few of the other literary colleagues who’ve helped me sustain that numinous sense of horizons present but not yet reached. I thank in particular the late Guy Butler, Malvern Van Wyk Smith, Lucy Newlyn, Molly Brown, Lynette Paterson, Rosemary Gray and Laurence Wright.

Most of my adult life has been spent in the hinterlands, in daily working contact with people who speak English, isiXhosa and isiZulu. The social anthropologist Monica Wilson, brought up on a mission, sought to understand and describe how rural people saw themselves within their own language. She opened another curtain in my understanding.

“Hogsback Oracle”

[in memoriam Monica Wilson]

Who can discern their clan,
its shibboleths and ghosts,
until they encounter another?

Hers was a pastoral people.
Living with them in youth
she looked, asked and wrote.

How did they value land?

Their children? Each other?
What had conquest done?

Trim, fastidious and spry
she had a scholar’s gravitas,
the spirited gaze of a nun.

Her Rome was Cambridge.
Widowed long she made
the Hogsback her Zion.

Her findings were her life:
the small-scale to flourish
needs to unfold in the large.

The next person I’d like to thank is a visual artist. For over thirty years my work has benefitted from the advice, ideas and imagery contributed by Julia Skeen, to whom I have the good fortune of being married.

Our first collaboration was an exhibition of painting-poems entitled *The Horn of Plenty*. Forty odd poems about fruits, vegetables and cereals were embedded in images and then made into a book. A similar series, describing forty odd encounters with animals from aardvark to zebra, were made into a book entitled *Lifelines*. Julia extended this Blakean tradition into the digital domain. For performances, the poems are projected onto a large-scale screen. For the internet, use is made of videos and backing sound. I would like to suggest that this award is a recognition of her creativity as well.

“Evensong in Grahamstown Cathedral”

I saw across the rows of pews last night
a woman’s face as lined and beautiful
as yours will be when we’re as grey and old.

I turned to look at yours. Below the eyes
I saw the first faint signs of time’s caress
and felt a tender ache I’d never known.

Was this love maturing? Or ruing time?
Could I who loved appearances too much
now grow to love the whole being of you?

In red and white, the choir lined the steps.
Whiskered or bald, fresh or lined and worn

their faces placed us in a Breughel crowd.

In slow, solemn plainchant they sang a psalm.
Line by line, the music became their breath,
their breath a music older than their bones.

I turned to you, but you were lost in time.
Strange new feelings struggled open in me.
Burstings. Meltings. A letting go. A peace.

Let me hear more of such music, I prayed,
for I would love you as we age and find
your face the more beautiful for being old.

My father was a Springbok cricketer. He died when I was four, from cancer that struck during a tour of England. I blame the war. He was captured at Tobruk, escaped from a prisoner-of-war camp and spent two years hiding in the countryside near Venice, endlessly smoking old newspapers and mealie leaves.

My family in Port Elizabeth was devastated. I was sent to live with my grandparents in Durban. Since they were working people, I was on my own during the day. I retain a memory of a companion, a man with a kindly voice and blue overalls who worked in the garden. His is a vague but consoling presence to this day. The cross-culture work of Monica Wilson taught me to interpret him as a shade, and that my inner life embodied a community of other people.

“The Parliament of the Shades”

We do not see deeply unless with love,
And deepest and clearest among our insights
Are those which steeped in love’s energy
Accumulate clarity in contemplative calm.

Such brooding serenity allows the self
To convene the shades alive in the soul,
To quieten the bombastic, hearten the shy
And the bid the elderly and neglected speak.

In turn, these partners and companions,
Mentors, opponents, and even enemies
Converse with each other and the self,
Which listens, responds, and negotiates.

This reconciliation, of shades and self,
Flows on and separates, and flows again
In sleep and dream, as well as in thought,
With balance and not perfection the goal.

Put simply, the shades are memories of people who influence our inner life. The shades through the poetry of Homer, Virgil and Dante, South African praise-poetry, the Christian concept of “the communion of the saints” and the oeuvre of Thomas Hardy. Jesus is a shade to me, as is Mandela, and also a talkative and diverse host of relatives and friends, deceased and alive, including mentors such as Monica Wilson and Abel Ndlovu who during ten years in our cross-over band patiently taught me *ngoma* and *mbaqanga* music. To deny this diversity is to impose a kind of inner and spiritual apartheid.

In contrast to tweet-speak discourse, ethno-nationalist prejudice and ideologies that other and scapegoat people who are different, good literature for me uncovers and affirms the complexity and interdependence of people. I am honoured to accept this English Academy award as an affirmation of that holistic, inclusive vision of life.

Democracy will always be shallow
Until it’s ensconced within our souls.
We cannot make peace with each other
Until we make peace with our shades.

ENGLISH ACADEMY OLIVE SCHREINER PRIZE FOR DRAMA TO NEIL COPPEN

An exciting programme unfolded at Ike’s Bookshop at Greyville, Durban, on 22 May 2019. This was the English Academy 2017 Olive Schreiner Prize for Drama awarded to theatre celebrity Neil Coppen for his play *Tin Bucket Drum*. Thayalan Reddy was programme director for the event owing to Professor Malaba not being able to attend. Professor Owen Seda of the Department of Drama and Film Studies at Tshwane University of Technology in Pretoria, representing the English Academy and the panel of judges, provided infor-

mation in respect of the criteria employed in the drama award and read the citation.

An engaging part of the proceedings was a dramatic performance by actress Mpume who gave an impressive rendition of an extract from *Tin Bucket Drum*. This certainly added lustre to the event. In his acceptance speech Neil Coppen gave insights into the socio-political realities in our country which inspired him to create the works which now enjoy internation-