



**To cite this Article:**

LILIT ŽEKULIN THWAITES. "The Inaugural AALITRA Translation Prize", *The AALITRA Review* Volume 10, 2015, 32-42.

[aalitra.org.au](http://aalitra.org.au)

Australian Association for Literary Translation

## **The Inaugural AALITRA Translation Prize**

LILIT ŽEKULIN THWAITES

La Trobe University and Chair of the AALITRA Prize Sub-Committee, 2014

Early in 2014, the executive committee of AALITRA decided it was time for the organization to launch a literary translation prize which would hopefully give a higher profile to the art of literary translation, and give the Association an idea of who was out there (in Australia) “doing” literary translation from a range of “foreign” languages into English. It was finally decided to hold the event every two years, starting in 2014, and to focus on a different language each time. Spanish was selected as the first cab off the rank.

The organization of a new literary translation prize involves many tasks, some straightforward, others more complicated, time-consuming and/or difficult. Think sponsorships, timing, prize money, venue, selection of texts, website organization and monitoring, acceptable restrictions (e.g. who can participate), de-identification of entries to ensure impartial adjudication, (pro-bono) judges...

Selecting the texts to be translated was both straightforward and difficult, in part because of a very short time frame in which to reach a decision. It had been agreed that we would need one very short story and one short poem, and that it would be a plus if we could find texts from both a male and a female writer and that we would look at writers from Spain and from Latin America. Once the AALITRA executive committee had agreed on these broad parameters, the first port of call for me as Chair of the Prize sub-committee in the hunt for suitable texts was fellow AALITRA committee members and various colleagues and friends who were involved in the contemporary Hispanic literary field, and in poetry in particular, as the latter is not my own particular area of expertise. We eventually narrowed the field down to five poems and four short stories – there are surprisingly few short poems and very short stories that present a challenge to potential translators, have not already been translated into English, and for which permission to translate and publish are readily available within a short period of time.

It was then the sub-committee’s task to vote for their preferred poem and prose texts, and the final selections were the two texts presented in this issue – “Somos un poema” by José Luis Reina Palazón, and “Antes del almuerzo” by Ana María Moix. Permission to use and publish Reina Palazón’s poem proved straightforward and quick, thanks to personal contacts and collaborative ventures between the poet and various members of AALITRA. He indicated he would be delighted to lend his poem to such a venture. Ana María Moix proved more complicated, for a totally unexpected and tragic reason.

I have had considerable contact with Ana María Moix since the 1980s as she is one of the contemporary Spanish/Catalan women writers (poetry, prose, essays – and more recently, also a publisher and editor) whose work I have been researching and teaching throughout my academic career. I had sent her an email asking for her permission as soon as her short story was selected and, contrary to her usual practice, had received no reply. As I was shortly to be in Barcelona, I decided to contact her in person once I got there – but it was never to be. By some quirk of fate which she would no doubt have appreciated, the very day that I sent her my email, Ana María Moix died of cancer, much too young, and not long after her return to writing and publishing following a prolonged absence. I was certain that she would have given us her permission, in part as a way of supporting the aims of AALITRA and this Prize. Both her long-time partner and her publisher, no doubt in recognition of this fact, agreed that using Ana María’s story for the AALITRA Prize was a highly appropriate way of

remembering her and her work – and it is for this reason that the inaugural AALITRA Translation Prize, and this issue of *The AALITRA Review*, are dedicated to her.

It remains only for me to acknowledge the impressive number and quality of the entries we received (over thirty in total) and to thank the three other judges who helped to select the prize-winning translations that follow. My fellow judges Chris Andrews, Peter Boyle and Fiona Taler are all acknowledged literary translators with a wealth of experience, and gave freely of their time and expertise as we worked towards reaching final decisions in each of the two categories. I'm sure that once you have read the translations, which appear below along with their respective source texts, you will agree that, while still not sufficiently publicized and recognized, here in Australia literary translation from Spanish into English is in a healthy state indeed.

## Antes del almuerzo

ANA MARÍA MOIX  
(Spanish > English prose)

Me senté en la terraza del hotel y, en espera de la hora de la comida, abrí el libro y empecé a leer.

Así empezaba el libro que me dispuse a leer sentado en la terraza del hotel esperando la hora del almuerzo.

Apenas había leído unas diez páginas cuando el chico uniformado de gris me alargó un sobre que acababan de entregarle para mí. Fue entonces cuando, al levantar la vista del libro, me fijé en la rubia de verde que daba vueltas a mi alrededor. Traté de no fijarme demasiado en ella y abrí de nuevo el libro. Empecé la lectura justo en el momento que la rubia vestida de verde daba vueltas alrededor del sillón. La rubia se me acercó por detrás y, con poco disimulo, trató de leer en mi libro. No se impacientó —dijo al ver que iba a hablarle—, yo no salgo hasta la página veintiuno. Dése prisa, antes aún han de salir la sirvienta y el banquero. Atónito leí. Dése prisa —decía— debemos hablar. Debí dejar de leer mucho antes. Ya era demasiado tarde. La puerta giratoria empezó a dar vueltas y apareció el banquero. Ya había empezado. Era preciso terminar pronto, que saliera la sirvienta, el banquero y ver qué significaba la comedia de la mujer de verde. Tal vez después de terminar el libro...

Estaba leyendo estas líneas cuando sentí el roce de la mano del botones en el brazo alargándome un sobre.

Ante la rubia de verde, ante sus palabras, me sentí irreal, leído. Intenté decirle que me dejara en paz, que ya sabía que iba a salir en la página veintiuno. Por lo visto no me tocaba decirlo. Tuve que esperar que saliera el banquero y la sirvienta.

Estoy leyendo, sentado en la terraza del hotel, mientras espero la hora de la comida. Ya he empezado el libro. Es inútil intentar dejarlo. Por el espejo, ya veo al chico uniformado que se acerca con un sobre en la mano, una rubia vestida de verde sale del interior del hotel. Sólo falta esperar al banquero y a la sirvienta, y si el que lee no cierra el libro sabremos en qué termina todo esto.

Moix, Ana María. *El chico pelirrojo a quien veo cada día*. Barcelona: Femino Lumen, 1971 / 1995. 43-44.

## Before Lunch

Translated by KEVIN WINDLE  
Winner (prose), AALITRA Translation Prize 2014

I took a seat on the hotel terrace to pass the time until lunch, opened my book and began to read.

Thus began the book which I intended to read, sitting on the hotel terrace, passing the time until lunch.

I had read no more than ten pages when the grey-uniformed bell-boy handed me an envelope which he had just received with orders to pass it to me. That was when I raised my eyes from my book and noticed the blonde dressed in green close by, pacing to and fro. I tried not to take too much notice of her and opened my book again. I started reading just at the moment when the blonde dressed in green was walking round my chair. She approached from behind and tried to read over my shoulder, hardly pretending not to. “Be patient,” she said, on seeing that I was about to speak. “I don’t appear till page twenty-one. Hurry up! The maid and the banker have to appear first.” I read on, astonished. “Hurry up,” she said. “We have to talk.” I should have stopped reading much earlier. Now it was too late. The revolving door was beginning to turn, and the banker emerged. It had started. I had to get to the end quickly, to see the maid appear with the banker, and see what this comedy of the woman in green meant. Perhaps when I finished the book...

I was reading these lines when the bell-boy touched my arm and handed me an envelope.

Confronted by the blonde in green and what she had said, I had a feeling of unreality, of being read. I wanted to tell her to leave me alone, and say that I already knew she would appear on page twenty-one. Clearly it wasn’t the right thing to say. I had to wait until the banker and the maid appeared.

I read on, sitting on the hotel terrace, passing the time until lunch. I’ve already started the book. It’s no use trying to stop. In the mirror I can see the uniformed bell-boy approaching with an envelope in his hand, and a blonde dressed in green coming out of the hotel. I have only to wait for the banker and the maid, and if the reader doesn’t close the book we shall see how it all ends.

---

### ***Kevin Windle comments...***

“Antes del almuerzo” is an unusual and thought-provoking piece, marked by a striking circularity and mutually interpenetrating realities. Túa Blesa has described it as “una representación, y una reflexión, del acto de lectura, por tanto, una reflexión sobre el acto de la escritura” [a representation and a reflection of the act of reading, and therefore a reflection on the act of writing], in which the reader is confronted by an unending series of ever-diminishing mirror images (Blesa 323). The familiar idea of a story within a story is carried further: the “frame” story and the “framed” story flow seamlessly into each other, so that the narrator and reader alike are left querying which world they inhabit, and we the readers,

reading about the reader reading the framed story, wonder who is meant by “el que lee” [the reader, literally “the one who is reading”] in the last sentence.

The circularity of the story is aided by the device of repetition and near-repetition, in apparently plain and simple language, but with careful and precise vocabulary and phrasing. The repetition is clearly important and must be preserved in translation. The lexical simplicity means that a translation might easily have an unwelcome baldness about it, calling into question its literary merit.

Hence the need for careful choices in the target language, which is not to suggest a literal form of translation. Space permits only a single example: the repeated “esperar” with “almuerzo” or “comida” as its object. While “waiting for” is indisputably correct, the context invites consideration of other choices. The narrator gives no signs of desperate hunger, and is not seated at a restaurant table poised to attack his entrée as soon as it appears. On the contrary, “me dispuise a leer” makes clear that he is merely whiling away the time. The phrase which therefore suggests itself, and which will withstand the threefold repetition, is “passing the time”.

It is perhaps worth noting one feature of the original which an English translation cannot make explicit, and which the source language cannot conceal: gender agreement in the participles (“sentado”, “atónito”, “leído”) makes clear that the narrator is male. The translation offered gives no indication of the sex of the narrator. This is a recurrent problem in translation into English from Romance languages and many others. Fortunately, in this particular text it does not assume great importance.

My translation presupposes a reader who sees little virtue in the “foreignization” famously advocated by Lawrence Venuti, and prefers a version attuned as far as possible to the norms of the target language, i.e. a “domesticated” version, of the kind Venuti deplors (Venuti 28 and passim). This means that it eschews literalist prescriptions such as those of Vladimir Nabokov, who vigorously rejected “readability” as a criterion. Nor can one accept Nabokov’s dubious denial of translatorial responsibility: “Whether [a translation] reads smoothly or not depends on the model, not on the mimic” (Lermontov xiii). Prose which is as carefully crafted as Moix’s requires the “mimic” to attempt to relay it with both the precision Nabokov demanded and the fluency he scorned (Nabokov 115).

Blesa, Túa. “La puerta giratoria. Sobre un cuento de Ana María Moix.” *Teoría e interpretación del cuento: Estudios*. Ed. Peter Fröhlinger and Georges Güntert. Bern: Peter Lang, 1995. 322-332.

<http://ebooks.gutenberg.us/wordtheque/es/aaaskw.txt> (accessed 6 January 2015)

Lermontov, Mihail. *A Hero of our Time*. Trans. Vladimir Nabokov in collaboration with Dmitri Nabokov. New York: Doubleday, 1958.

Nabokov, Vladimir. “Onegin in English.” *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. New York: Routledge, 2010. 115-127.

Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator’s Invisibility*. London: Routledge, 2008.

## Before Lunch

Translated by ANTHONY CARTWRIGHT  
Runner-up (prose), AALITRA Translation Prize 2014

I sat down on the hotel terrace, and as I waited for lunchtime I opened the book and began to read.

That was the beginning of the book I was about to read while I sat on the hotel terrace waiting for lunchtime.

I had only read about ten pages when the young man in grey uniform handed me an envelope which he had just been given for me. It was then, when I looked up from my book, that I noticed the blonde dressed in green walking in circles around me. I tried not to look at her too obviously and opened the book again. I started reading just at the moment when the blonde dressed in green was walking in circles around the easy chair. The blonde approached me from behind and barely disguised her attempt to read my book. “Don’t get impatient”, she said, seeing that I was about to speak to her, “I don’t appear until page twenty-one. Hurry up, the maid and the banker have to appear first.” I read on, astonished. “Hurry up”, she said, “We ought to talk”. I should have stopped reading a long time before. Now it was too late. The revolving door started to turn and the banker appeared. It had already started. I had to finish quickly, let the maid appear, and the banker, and find out what the antics of the woman in green meant. Maybe after I finished the book...

I was reading these lines when I felt the light touch of the bellboy’s hand on my arm, handing me an envelope.

The blonde in green and her words made me feel unreal, read. I tried to tell her to leave me be, that I knew she was going to appear on page twenty-one. Apparently I was not meant to say it. I had to wait for the banker and the maid to appear.

I am sitting on the hotel terrace, reading as I wait for lunchtime. I have started the book. It is useless to try to put it down. In the mirror I see the young man in uniform approaching with an envelope in his hand; a blonde dressed in green comes out from inside the hotel. Now we just have to wait for the banker and the maid, and if the reader does not close the book we will see how all this ends up.

---

### *Anthony Cartwright comments...*

I enjoyed this piece by Ana Maria Moix. The author creates a sense of mystery in a few short paragraphs. “It had already started.” What had already started? The reader becomes the character waiting for lunch and for something to happen, and there is an odd feeling of predestination or *déjà vu* as the reader interacts with the other characters in the story. How will it conclude? Who is the blonde in green? We feel compelled to reach the end.

The language is crystal clear and events repeat but without using exactly the same words in Spanish. The translation should attempt to do the same using synonyms. Since I had the time, I went back to it now and again to try to polish it. I also ran it past my most literate friends, who offered helpful advice. I was particularly pleased with the “antics” of the woman in green. I knew when that word popped into my mind that I had found exactly the right translation.

When I came across this AALITRA competition, I never saw myself as a possible winner. However, I decided to enter as, like the reader of Moix's story, the challenge was there and I had no choice. As a long-time translator of Spanish to English, it was something I had to do. I was pleasantly surprised and pleased to be asked to come to Melbourne and join the AALITRA luminaries, meet the Spanish Consul and receive a prize. Anything which raises the profile of translators and translating in even a small way is most welcome, as ours is a peculiar job where the irony is that often, the better the translation the less it is noticed.



## ¿Somos un poema?

JOSÉ LUIS REINA PALAZÓN  
(Spanish>English poetry)

Nunca lo creería. ¿Qué son los versos, las penas,  
Alegrías siempre tan ideales que la letra garantiza?  
Decir que somos poesía es para morir de risa  
O para llorar, a ciegas por supuesto, en arenas

No lejanas del mar para que éste limpie el alma  
De aquellos que creen aún que la o su poesía  
Es algo trascendente y que aumenta día a día  
Su poder de infinito que al mundo da su calma.

Vamos, vamos, olvidaos del alma y por supuesto  
De su poesía, lo que de ambas queda no es tema  
Que salve a ningún cuerpo ni a ningún poema.  
Hoy el olvido de sí mismo es lo que salva del resto.

José Luis Reina Palazón. "¿Somos un poema?" *La Traductièrre* 31 (June 2013): 74.

## Are we poems?

Translated by DOMINIQUE HECQ  
Winner (poetry), AALITRA Translation Prize 2014

I'd never believe it. What are verses, sorrows,  
But joys so ideal that the letter holds?  
To say we are poetry is either to die laughing  
Or weeping, blinded, of course, by the sand

Close enough to the sea so it can cleanse the souls  
Of those who persist in thinking that poetry – theirs at least  
Is something transcendent growing bigger by the day  
Its infinite power to appease the world.

Come on, come on, forget the soul and, of course,  
Its poetry, what remains of both is nothing  
That would save a body or a poem.  
Today forgetting oneself is what saves us from the rest.

---

### *Dominique Hecq comments...*

Translating is a ghostly act. You sit alone with a text, and as you read you entertain, in your head, the ghost of the author. And as you write, you entertain yourself as a kind of future ghost, the one who will succeed in ghosting the voice of the author of the text. This ghosting entails elisions in consciousness and in these elisions are intuitions, affects and rhythmic patterns that, paradoxically, will eventuate in communication.

As I write these words, I can hear the ghost of José Luis Reina Palazón chuckle, for his poetry insists on *presence*: it is the presence of things that gives meaning to the world. This is tacitly expressed in the question mark of “Somos un poema?”.

Strangely, then, the question mark was the first difficulty I encountered in translating the poem. How to translate an elision one could call “sentiment”, one that in fact gestures towards a much broader understanding of poetics? How to translate, beyond words, the unsentimental approach to poetry that is Reina Palazón’s trademark?

In order to convey a persona removed from the cult of personality and the fascination with individuality, I imagined myself in conversation with Reina Palazón. To be more precise, calling upon distant memories, I imagined myself in *disagreement* with him. This ghosting gave me an understanding of the energy at the heart of “Somos un poema?” In turn, this set the tone, register and semantic field of “Are we poems?”.

The first draft of the translation is a literal transcription of the original poem. What strikes me now, apart from the fact that it is mainly composed of Anglo-Saxon words, is the up-beat rhythm. Subsequent drafts focused on attempting to convey the equivocality of Spanish words such as “la letra”. At times there were interferences from my native French,

which only compounded my rudimentary knowledge of Spanish, as when I looked into alternatives to translating “en arenas”. The last version of the translation focused on rhythm more than it did on meaning. As such, it is faithful to the original ghosting, which bears witness to the material realist inflection of the poem.

The greatest challenge in translating this poem, though, may have been the title. “Are we a poem?”, the most literal translation possible, was inconceivable. A certain tension may have been present, but not the energy, and certainly not the general sentiment spoken in the event of the poem with urgency and wry intent.

**are we a poem?**

Translated by JACQUELINE BUSWELL  
Runner-up (poetry), AALITRA Translation Prize 2014

No way. Why trouble with the line, the scan?  
For imagined joy from the world of letters?  
It's folly to say we are made of verse, better  
to laugh and cry on the dunes, blinded by sand.

May ocean waters cleanse the souls of all  
who still believe that poetry transcends,  
that its power of the infinite each day extends  
and gives its calmness to the world.

Let's see. Forget the soul and of course forget  
its poetry too. In all that's left there's no phrase  
that could save any body, any poem. Today,  
forgetting the self is what saves us from the rest.

---

***Jacqueline Buswell comments...***

What a task to set myself. The poem begins with questions, the first verb could have first or third person as subject, and the content addresses existential issues such as whether we are poetry. It seems to scorn the very form used to communicate, concluding that we should forget the soul and its poetry too. He must be joking. Is he perhaps talking about god/God? Something transcendent, something with power of the infinite?

The poet himself advises us to forget the poem and forget the self, so I started translating. Firstly I put down lines to transfer meaning, then I looked at structure. In spite of all my qualms about attempting to transfer a poetic rhyming scheme into a target language, I decided to try. Reina Palazón uses an ABBA pattern; at first I didn't try to match that. I enjoy the challenges of poetic form and of course, every change for rhyming purposes involved lots of play with words. Somewhat to my own surprise I ended up with the same ABBA pattern, generally with half-rhymes.

The first line of any text is key to how it flows: "Nunca lo creería. ¿Qué son los versos, las penas...?". The first literal translation of the first part of the line, "I would never believe it" eventually became an abrupt "No way.", which seemed a fair enough rendering of Reina's answer to the question "Are we a poem?".

I tried several versions of the next part of the line: "What are verses and sorrows", and "What's all this with rhyme and metre", but finally used the literal translation of "verso" as "line", transferred the pain of "penas" to the verb "trouble", and decided on "scan" for its rhyme with "sands": "Why trouble with the line, the scan?"

In the last verse, I had to deliberate on how to translate “Vamos, vamos”. I found it impossible to say “let’s go, let’s go”. I settled for “Let’s see”. The phrase seemed to serve as an equivalent linguistic crutch.

I worried I was hovering too close to the source text and kept telling myself to loosen up, to jump to the target language. I worried more when I missed something in translation. For instance, when I threw out the reference to “die laughing”. And when I couldn’t include an enjambment in the line patterns, as I thought this was an important poetic element to transfer.

Thankfully, as translator, I didn’t have to give my opinion on “it’s folly to say we are made of verse” or answer the question, “are we a poem?”. There’s room perhaps for a Cartesian argument about having poetry in our veins and being made of verse...

I was pleased to hear Ramón López Castellano at the awards ceremony readdress our old foe *tradurre tradire* and speak about *tradurre creare*. Indeed, *vamos*!