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A Rug of a Thousand Colours: Poems Inspired by the Five Pillars of Islam by Two Contemporary Scottish Writers, Each Translating the Other. By Tessa Ransford and Iyad Hayatleh. Pp. 124. Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2012. Pb. £8.99.

My Voice: A Decade of Poems from the Poetry Translation Centre. Edited by Sarah Maguire. Pp. 384. Hexham: Bloodaxe, 2014. Pb. £12.

Both of these volumes exemplify distinct trends in contemporary translation practice. They join the ranks of anthologies such as *Tablet and Pen: Literary Landscapes from the Modern Middle East* (2012) and *Words without Borders: The Best of the First Ten Years* (2013) by embracing literary translation on a truly global scale, as the publishing industry and Translation Studies gradually open up to non-Western traditions. *A Rug of a Thousand Colours* is a collection of poems translated between English and Arabic by two poets. Scottish poet Tessa Ransford has a long-standing interest in literary translation and poetic inspiration from foreign traditions, as seen in her 2012 collection, *Don't Mention This to Anyone*, a semi-autobiographical exploration of Indian and British cultural identities. Palestinian poet Iyad Hayatleh has lived in Scotland since 2000, and his work, like much of Ransford's, is very much concerned with the idea of belonging to more than one place. He wrote his first collection, *Beyond All Measure* (2007), in English. *My Voice* contains English translations from a number of African, Asian, and South American languages, but the collection has been, as its editor

Sarah Maguire admits, 'very much affected by my personal interest in the poetry from the Islamic world'.

One fascinating feature that these collections share is their collaborative nature. Each translation in *A Rug of a Thousand Colours* has evolved through a process that might be termed mutual co-translation, where poets from different linguistic backgrounds come together to translate each other's works. This practice is becoming increasingly popular, as illustrated in *The Third Shore*, the bilingual Chinese and English volume edited by Yang Lian and W. N. Herbert (2013; reviewed in *T&L* Vol. 22, Part 1); and various pieces in the still more recent *Quaich: An Anthology of Translation in Scotland Today* (2014). Ransford describes the stages of the Arabic-to-English translation – first Hayatleh's rough English translation of his own poem, then the two of them polishing it together – so as to stress creative unity: 'we are happy to leave out'; 'we restructure'.

My Voice is a telling example of what communities, as opposed to individual translators, are capable of, since it grew out of collaborative poetry translation workshops held at the London-based Poetry Translation Centre. This means there is no single translator who 'owns' the translation, although there is still a name attached to each. As a result – and because, as with *A Rug of a Thousand Colours*, source and target texts are displayed *en face* – we get one step closer to resolving the conflicts that have dominated Translation Studies for centuries: 'original' versus 'translation', 'poet' versus 'translator'. This is true despite Maguire being clear in her introduction about the project's priorities: 'all the translations included in *My Voice* begin from the assumption that no one is as important as the poet being translated; and that our privileged task is to translate them with as much respect and attention to their original poems as we can muster'.

Another, less obvious connection between the volumes is that they both owe their existence to literary organizations involved in advocacy of free expression. These links are established, first of all, by the poet-editors themselves. Ransford is a former president of Scottish PEN, and first met Hayatleh through the translation workshops she co-organized as part of a 'Writers in Exile' programme. Maguire is the founder and director of the Poetry Translation Centre, which specializes in translating 'living African, Asian or Latin American poets who have already established a reputation in their own language'. Both translators have lived and worked in South Asia and the Middle East: Ransford in Pakistan in the 1960s, and Maguire in Palestine and Yemen in the late 1990s. These connections with not-for-profit organizations are important for two reasons. Firstly, they remind us that poetry in

translation is a highly vulnerable area in that it almost always requires financial support to survive. Secondly, they highlight the fact that translation – like all literature, but perhaps more so than most – is never neutral. It has a strong ethical dimension, which becomes even more pronounced when translation occurs between the West and any space that is habitually defined in opposition to it. 'It is striking – and shocking – how many of our poets have been forced into exile', Maguire observes, but continues immediately on a more positive note: 'equally striking is their courage in mining their dislocation in order to create transformative poetry'.

Creating cultural capital out of exile, homesickness, and suffering is something all of these authors engage in. But the poems, while symptomatic of urgent social realities, are ways of coping with them, too. Behind the individual poetic voices lie collective traumas that shape societies worldwide as well as communities of immigrants in the UK, and the poems are as much for them as about them. The references are sometimes explicit, as in Farzaneh Khojandi's 'Spring is Coming', translated from the Tajik by Jo Shapcott and Narguess Farzad: 'What does exile taste like, my darling, | what is it to know loneliness?' and 'O camel-driver, carrier of loneliness, O my brother, | what does separation taste like?' Karin Karakaşlı's Turkish poem 'History-Geography', rendered in English by Canan Marasligil and others, is more enigmatic, but the interrogation of communal identities persists: 'I stayed in my geography with my life, | to write my own history.' *My Voice* is full of narratives that are not restricted to the creative texts. The short biographies of the poets tell long stories: Iranian poet Masoud Ahmadi 'currently has four collections of poetry and a book of essays awaiting approval by the Iranian state censor'.

The front cover of *A Rug of a Thousand Colours* offers a notable visual translation metaphor. Not only do we see pillars – a reference to the five basic acts of Islam, centred on testimony, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and pilgrimage, respectively – but also arches with light shining through them from the other side: a mysterious light whose source we can only glimpse through translation. The volume is literally bilingual from cover to cover, and, because Arabic is written and read right to left, there is a perfect balance between the two languages: with the English text on the left-hand page and the Arabic on the right, both of them 'come first'. The collection consists of eleven poems, the first of which, Hayatleh's 'Fifty', can be construed as a thematic introduction. Two poems each about the five pillars of Islam follow. What we see here is translation in the literal sense – the same text in

Arabic and English – but also in a more abstract sense through the source texts themselves, which are two individuals' creative responses to religious concepts, and illustrate the ways in which notions travel across cultures. The source texts are therefore in dialogue not just with their respective translations but also with each other. Even to readers with no knowledge of Arabic, some of the challenges are obvious. For instance, Ransford's monolexemic alliterations in 'Testimony' – 'Blessing/Bliss/Beauty/Beatitude/Belief/Being/Becoming' – would send shivers down any translator's spine. Although the poems were inspired by one religion, a conversation takes place between at least two. But there is tension as well. Contemporary criticism likes to affirm translation as 'coming together', 'opening doors', 'bridging gaps', and so on. While it is important to search for common ground, shared experiences, and unity in translation, this does not have to mean a naive celebration of 'multiculturalism'. In *A Rug of a Thousand Colours*, conflict is never negated or played down. Questions remain unanswered, like Hayatleh's 'When shall I enter you, Jerusalem, as a free man? | When will destiny answer the voice of the people?' at the end of 'Hajj (Pilgrimage)'. Ransford's 'Progress does not describe my journey, | winding round and each ordeal repeated' in the corresponding English source text is equally brooding.

It is always a pleasure to see two versions of a text printed alongside one another, particularly where the two scripts themselves differ. This serves as a timely and powerful reminder that access to source texts does more than simply enable the reader to compare, contrast, and criticize. The texts also inform our reading through their relative foreignness, through their presence but ultimate inaccessibility, and through the sheer visual experience – at least for those of us who do not speak the source language. *My Voice* is remarkable in this respect, with twenty-three source languages represented through a smorgasbord of scripts, including varieties of Arabic, Chinese, Mkhedruli, Thai, and Cyrillic. Seeing without understanding foregrounds the shape and form of the comprehensible, too. The individual pieces are, naturally, exceedingly diverse, from Somali love poetry that looks reassuringly solid on the page – for example, 'Amazement' by Maxamed Ibraahin Warsame Hadraawi' – to strikingly economical and self-aware urban verse from South Korea, like Ch'oe Young-Mi's 'Survivors'. The poems are followed by a collection of essays by the translators reflecting on their experience, both of creating English language poems and preparing 'bridge versions' (literal translations for translators who do not understand the source language). These pieces primarily serve the function of inviting further contemplation on the poems, but the

boundaries between the creative and the critical are by no means clear. One translator, Nick Laird, likens translating Afghani poet Reza Mohammadi to 'opening your mouth and finding someone else's voice coming out'.

Apart from the aesthetic pleasure of reading and seeing, of which both collections offer plenty, these poems, whether vernacular or translated, challenge and expand definitions of English literature. They remind us that translated poetry is not just for those who seek escapist solace or exotic encounters with foreign cultures, but for those who strive to understand the beauty and complexity of their own English-dominated cultures. Gideon Toury, in *Descriptive Translation Studies – and beyond* (1995), claimed that translations were 'facts of a target culture'. *A Rug of a Thousand Colours* and *My Voice* illustrate this notion well, simultaneously exploring and enriching our literary history. The theme of exile, which runs through both collections without dominating them, is universal yet strikingly relevant to our historical moment. Ransford and Hayatleh's volume could be read alongside another recent anthology of contemporary Palestinian poetry in English translation, *A Bird is Not a Stone*, published in 2014 by Freight Books. Today, with renewed crises in the Middle East, Arabic poems about loss and longing in particular take on a renewed significance.

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