

In the spotlight

The Independent Foreign Fiction Prize rewards both translator and author equally. Aletta Stevens reports from the longlist announcement in Bath



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As part of the Bath Literature Festival, members of the ITI Western Regional Group met at the Guildhall in Bath on 2 March to hear which book translations had made the longlist for The Independent Foreign Fiction Prize 2013.

Maureen Freely, translator of Turkish Nobel Prize-winner Orhan Pamuk and a previous judge for this prize, introduced the panel of three judges: Boyd Tonkin (literary editor of *The Independent* and architect of the prize started in 1990), Elif Shafak (Turkey's most widely read woman writer, previously shortlisted) and Frank Wynne (translator from French and Spanish, and winner of the 2005 prize). The prize, funded by Arts Council England, is awarded annually for a literary novel by a living author translated into English from any

language and published in the UK. The translator receives £5,000, as does the author.


100 books to consider

So what was the offering like this year? The judges looked at 100 books. The longlist of 16 featured 13 different languages. Certain themes emerged, such as love triangles and writers writing about writing, but there was also great diversity. There were many entries from Eastern Europe, but overall few female authors. Some countries, such as those in Scandinavia, have infrastructures in place to get their authors into other countries, eg state funding, part-translations sent to publishers, and readers' reports. The total number of books submitted this time was down by 10%, which was thought to be

due to the recession. For example, the National Book Centre in Athens, a state organisation which for years brought interesting Greek authors to the attention of the English-speaking world, has fallen victim to austerity measures. As regards the future, the judges would welcome more submissions from East Africa and the Indian subcontinent, instead of assuming that work from these parts is originally written in English.

Across the board, translation seems to be in a healthier state than fiction publishing in the UK. This even applies to small independent publishing houses, including those daringly concentrating on translation of a particular type of fiction, eg, *And Other Stories* specialises in short stories, and Peirene Press in novellas. Harvill Secker should be proud to have no less than four books on the longlist this year. For all these publishers it is important to have editors who understand translation. And they will be more inclined to publish a translated book if it has had success in the German market. American publishers tend to publish only if there is an English distributor based in the UK.

As translators we may wonder how the judges decide whether a translation is good. After all, the panel, however diverse, cannot be expected to know all the languages presented, and there is no time to check every translation. This is where other criteria come into play, eg, does it work as a novel in English? On the one hand, this could mean that the translator has rewritten the novel, something not normally in his or her remit. On the other hand, it has to read fluently in English, and only then does it have any chance of being published in the UK. Interestingly, Boyd Tonkin believes the standard of English in translated novels often to be higher than when one samples random English, because book translators are often writers themselves.

Finally, an interesting aspect of the prize is that it accepts translations of non-contemporary work, provided the author is still living. This means that there could be a time lapse of as much as 15 years (the record being 47 years), giving authors another chance of recognition in the English-speaking world. 

THE LONGLIST

SHORTLISTED TITLES IN BOLD

- **Gerbrand Bakker: *The Detour* (translated by David Colmer from the Dutch), Harvill Secker**
- **Chris Barnard: *Bundu* (Michiel Heyns; Afrikaans), Alma Books**
- Laurent Binet: *HHhH* (Sam Taylor; French), Harvill Secker
- **Daša Drndić: *Trieste* (Ellen Elias-Bursac; Croatian), MacLehose Press**
- Pawel Huelle: *Cold Sea Stories* (Antonia Lloyd-Jones; Polish), Comma Press
- Pia Juul: *The Murder of Halland* (Martin Aitken; Danish), Peirene Press
- **Ismail Kadare: *The Fall of the Stone City* (John Hodgson; Albanian), Canongate**
- Khaled Khalifa: *In Praise of Hatred* (Leri Price; Arabic), Doubleday
- Karl Ove Knausgaard: *A Death in the Family* (Don Bartlett; Norwegian), Harvill Secker
- László Krasznahorkai: *Satantango* (George Szirtes; Hungarian), Tuskar Rock
- Alain Mabanckou: *Black Bazaar* (Sarah Ardizzone; French), Serpent's Tail
- Diego Marani: *The Last of the Vostyachs* (Judith Landry; Italian), Dedalus
- **Andrés Neuman: *Traveller of the Century* (Nick Caistor and Lorenza Garcia; Spanish), Pushkin Press**
- Orhan Pamuk: *Silent House* (Robert Finn; Turkish), Faber
- Juan Gabriel Vásquez: *The Sound of Things Falling* (Anne McLean; Spanish), Bloomsbury
- **Enrique Vila-Matas: *Dublinesque* (Rosalind Harvey and Anne McLean; Spanish), Harvill Secker**