

Anglais

Notes du jury – Mme Diane Frishman, M. Bill Heckel

When we were asked to judge the English entries in this year's St. Jerome translation competition, we both thought that it would be "interesting" and maybe even "fun". It was certainly interesting, but fun it was not. It was incredibly difficult. There were so many excellent, inventive translations of what proved to be an extremely challenging French text. Obviously, every language presents translators with its own set of difficulties. One of the most frequent observations about French prose is that it tends to make far greater use of abstract concepts than does English. And this was immediately apparent in the title: *Le vintage: matière et mémoire* (a title that, with a total of 27 entries, was rendered in 16 different ways, including "Vintage: style and substance", "Vintage matter, vintage memories", "Vintage: matter and memory", "Vintage: memory matters", "Vintage: stuff and nostalgia", "Vintage: substance and remembrance", "The essence of *vintage*: substance and memory" and "Vintage goods: the stuff of memories"). So right from the outset we had a range of takes on how to render this: do we make it more specific ("vintage goods", "vintage aesthetics") or do we try to flesh out the implied concept ("the meaning of vintage", the essence of vintage)? All of these are acceptable approaches; as it turned out, however, our finalists chose, for the most part, a simple reiteration of the English word – "vintage".

In fact, as we went through the translations, one after another, trying to winnow down the entries to arrive at a short list, we found ourselves hoping that the next one would be a "clunker" that we could easily dismiss. We were invariably disappointed. While there was no translation that did not suffer, at one point or another, from some turn of phrase or rendering that didn't sound quite right or that missed the mark in some way, the translations were – almost without exception – inspired, creative and obviously done with a great deal of thought and care. Most of those that did not make the first short list (which was much longer than the second, which was, in turn, quite a bit longer than the third) nonetheless had some brilliant passages and solutions.

Take, for example, some of the ways that people translated *tombe de bois d'un cimetière marin*: "wooden tomb in a floating graveyard", "floating wooden sarcophagus", "wooden coffin in that watery cemetery", "wooden tomb of a sailors' graveyard", "wooden tomb in a cemetery at sea", "wooden casket of a watery grave" and "wooden casket of a seaborne cemetery" – among many others.

One of the trickiest sections of the text apparently concerned a reference to the use of the sepia mode in digital photography, a technique designed to make contemporary photos look “antique”. While nearly all entrants understood what was meant, rendering the idea clearly in English was quite challenging, particularly as the source text referred to a “*cliché stéréoscopique*”, which was most succinctly translated as “an old 3D image”.

Probably our “favourite” description of “vintage” in the original text was that it “*brade allègrement le vraisemblance, voire le spectaculaire, à l’étal de la vérité*” (how French!). You can find impressive translations of this phrase in both the winning texts and the honourable mentions. Other favourites of the judges included: “joyously peddles the believable, the spectacular even, wherever truth is sold” and “happily hawking likeness - and even spectacle - as the real thing”. It often seemed to us as if each translator had seen all the other entrants’ translations and had decided to render the phrase in a different way. This is not, actually, all that surprising: the human mind is endlessly inventive, and competitions such as this one show that, given the nearly infinite possibilities and twists and turns of language, translation cannot be reduced to some mechanical operation but is instead truly an art.