

# THE EMLIT PROJECT

## Introduction

“...we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained.”

Salman Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands”

THE EMLIT PROJECT presents a sample of European Minority Literatures in Translation—literary texts written in a number of European Union countries in minority languages of two types, those of ancient origin within Europe and those associated with more recent migration. They are given here with translations into the five most widely understood European languages—English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. The original literary works, in nineteen different minority languages, form the opening section of the book. The rest of the volume is divided into sections presenting translations of all these originals into the five mainstream languages, in the above order. EMLIT’s primary purpose is to support a range of writers, until now known principally to their own language community, and to bring them to a different readership—potentially a huge readership worldwide—but there is also another objective: to hold an unfamiliar mirror up to Europe. These literary texts are a compelling reminder of the cultural diversity which is typical of Europe especially today, and of how easily the different do



Not surprisingly, some of the works address the question of language itself, and the issues around translation, which, with their practical and philosophical dimensions, are a further subject of academic debate. The relationship between source language and target language is not simple, and there are many strategies of translation. Since secondary translation—or a translation of a translation—clearly raises particular difficulties and potential distortions, it is necessary to point out that this project could not happen without an openness to what might also be gained. We have used every opportunity to consult with the authors—who are often the primary translators—and the fine-tuning of the finished translations has in many cases been a collaborative enterprise.

The project's translations are not, generally, the kind of literary translation which makes free with the original. On the contrary, we have attempted to be as faithful as possible to the tone and form of the original works, while hoping that our translations have literary merit of their own. It has been a challenge to see whether in some of the target languages we could come closer to some of the formal properties of the original than perhaps proved possible in its first translation into a mainstream language. Even faced with an original text in a language whose script a translator does not understand, it is possible to “read” the repeated patterns indicating rhyme, for instance. The rhyme in the poems in Urdu, for example, in the opening section, is visible to the reader with no Urdu, through the repetition of line-end patterns—once it is understood that the Arabic script is written from right to left. Readers are invited not to pass over the book's first section—the originals in all their minority

about the language in which to write. Hopefully the EMLIT project may encourage some of the bilingual writers not to abandon their rarer language, by demonstrating that choosing to write in a minority language does not have to entail isolation. One of the project's unforeseen consequences has been to inspire a bilingual writer, who had stopped writing in her mother tongue, to resume.... It is a beginning.

Paula Burnett

London  
July 2003